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PREFERENCES FOR FORM FOCUSED VS. MEANING FOCUSED ACTIVITIES IN A SELF ACCESS CENTER

TESIS PROFESIONAL PRESENTADA POR

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Thanks to my Mother and Grandmother

Resumen

One of the most debated topics in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been how language input should be presented to the second language learner in the classroom. For example, some SLA researchers claim an approach that includes a focus on the grammatical form of the second language (L2) is best. In contrast, others contest that there is no place for a focus on grammar in the SLA classroom and it is meaningful communication that should be emphasized. This debate has recently been discussed in terms of focus on form vs. focus on meaning. If it is determined which type or combination of focus most profoundly contributes to learning, teachers could select a method that helps their students. Without a clear idea of what type or combination of focus is best, language teachers cannot be confident that they are using the most beneficial approach. A recent trend in SLA has been the promotion of autonomous learning in self access centers (SACs). Autonomous learning puts more emphasis on the student to be responsible for his/her progress. SACs are language centers that provide learning resources and materials where students can be autonomous language learners. The SAC is a resource the learner can use independently to support classroom learning. In the SAC context it is possible students' preferences may help to identify which type of material in a SAC is most useful. A SAC may be equipped with a lot of language learning material, but if none of it appeals to a student's preferences it may be less effective. The student may become frustrated and less motivated to learn. As a result, the focus of the present Master's level thesis was to investigate students' preferences for form vs. meaning in a SAC. The study was exploratory in nature and sought to examine

what type of material was preferred by university students of English as a foreign language in a SAC. It was hoped that gaining data on their preferences would help to determine which type of material may be most appropriate in the SAC environment. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data. Students' choices of form or meaning-focused exercises in a SAC were recorded. Qualitative data, in the form of subjects' SAC journal entries, and responses to a post interview on the type of activities preferred, were gathered and analyzed to help explain trends in the quantitative data.

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Chapter 1

Overview

Focus on Form or Meaning?

One of the most debated topics in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been how language input should be presented to the second language learner in the classroom. For example, some SLA researchers claim an approach that includes a focus on the grammatical form of the second language (L2) is best (Schmidt, 1993; Sharwood Smith, 1993; Van Patten, 1989). In contrast, others contest that there is no place for a focus on grammar in the SLA classroom and it is meaningful communication that should be emphasized (Krashen 1982, 1985). This debate has recently been discussed in terms of focus on form vs. focus on meaning. A focus on the form (FonF) of the language consists of drawing the learner's attention to the linguistic features of the language. A focus on meaning, on the other hand, excludes attention to the formal elements of the language (Doughty and Williams, 1999). Thus, a focus on form approach would allow for the L2 learner to concentrate on the grammatical rules and constructs of the language. A focus on meaning approach, on the other hand, would be concerned with getting the L2 learner to concentrate solely on understanding the message being conveyed. If, for example, a student were given a text in the L2, he or she would be focusing on form if they were asked to analyze the text in terms of how it represents the rules of the language. The same text could be looked at but with a focus on meaning if the learner was told to concern him/herself only with understanding the text's message. In both cases the text is the same but what the student is being asked to focus on is different. The question that arises is which type of focus is most beneficial for second language learners. Is one or the other best or perhaps a combination? After over twenty years of research in the SLA field, this issue continues to be debated and divides both theory and research. Although research has been done in the classroom and the laboratory in search of a resolution, the question remains unanswered (Leeman; Arteagoitia; Fridman & Doughty, 1995, p.217).

The focus on form vs. meaning question is important to consider for both language learners and teachers. The answer would help to formulate part of a comprehensive account of how second languages should be taught. Over the years, theories have fallen in and out of favor. Teaching methods have in turn swayed from one end of the pendulum (grammar translation, consciousness raising) to the other (suggestapedia, natural approach, communicative method). A theory based solution to the problem would rescue teachers and students from the confusion and uncertainty these trends create. If it is determined which type or combination of focus most profoundly contributes to learning, teachers could select a method that helps their students. Without a clear idea of what type or combination of focus is best, language teachers cannot be confident that they are using the most beneficial approach.

The Self Access Center Context

The form vs. meaning debate raises important questions for SLA contexts outside the classroom as well. This would include the Self Access Center (SAC). A recent trend in SLA has been the promotion of autonomous learning in self access centers. Autonomous learning puts more emphasis on the student to be responsible for his/her progress (Dickinson, 1993). SACs are language centers that provide learning resources and materials where students can be autonomous language learners. The SAC is a resource the learner can use independently to support classroom learning (Littlejohn, 1985). The responsibility to ensure language learning occurs is shifted somewhat away from the teacher to the learner.

Self access centers are being discussed more and numerous books on the subject have been published in recent years (Benson & Voller, 1997; Gardner & Miller, 1999; Pemberton, 1996). Self access language learning centers have recently grown in popularity and number. For example, in central Mexico where the present study took place, SACs for second language learning have been actively promoted since 1994

(Dominguez, 2000). SACs encompass a wide context as can be seen by research and discussion that has been published on SACs in several different countries (Kell & Newton, 1997; Littlejohn, 1985; Yoke & Brown, 1994). Apart from the theoretical motivations, many universities have set up SACs for economic reasons. It is considerably cheaper to supply and staff a SAC than a faculty of qualified second language teachers (Yoke & Brown, 1994).

One very important aspect of the SAC is the material and resources placed in it. The autonomous nature of the SAC inevitably puts more emphasis on a learner's interaction with the language learning materials. Although there is discussion of mode (i.e. audio, video, textual, etc.), classification (according to level of difficulty for example), and organization (how materials should be stored and accessed) in these centers, the specific design of the material that should be in a SAC has not been addressed (Gremmo & Riley, 1995).

There is a tendency to equip SACs with a variety of different kinds of materials without paying close attention to which materials actually work best for students (O'Dell, 1992). This practice assumes that a variety of materials in a SAC provides the necessary exposure for students to improve. However, research in SLA has indicated that mere exposure to the L2 is not enough to fully promote acquisition (Harley & Swain, 1984; Schachter 1984; White, 1985). Therefore, it may be important to ensure sufficient materials that focus on the formal aspects of the L2 exist in the SAC. It is here that the form vs. meaning debate becomes relevant to the SAC context. Should a SAC have material that primarily focuses on meaning or form? Should there only be one type or the other? If both, what ratio would be of most benefit? Why have certain types of material in a SAC if it is not beneficial? These are questions that can be asked in relation to SACs that to date remain unanswered. Given the trend towards promoting SACs in language teaching, it is necessary that we investigate the factors which best contribute to students' success in these SACs just as thoroughly as the factors contributing to their success in the

classroom. Rather than arbitrarily equipping an SAC with resources, it is important to determine which materials are most beneficial (Gremmo & Riley, 1995).

One way to gain insight on this issue is to examine the preferences students have in SACs. Littlejohn (1985) points out that adults learn better when they are given a chance to determine the pace, sequence, mode of instruction, and the content of their studies. Kumaravadivulu (1991) noticed that teachers do not accurately predict what students prefer and claims that " the narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation, the greater are the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes " (p.98). Thus, it may be beneficial to consider students' language learning preferences more closely. In a SAC context it is possible students' preferences may help to identify which type of material in a SAC is most useful. A SAC may be equipped with a lot of language learning material, but if none of it appeals to a student's preferences it may be less effective. The student may become frustrated and less motivated to learn (Littlejohn, 1985). In an autonomous environment such as a SAC it may be important that language learners have access to their preferred type of instructional material.

As a result, the focus of the present study was to investigate students' preferences for form vs. meaning in a SAC. The study was exploratory in nature and sought to examine what type of material was preferred by university students of English as a foreign language in a SAC. It was hoped that gaining data on their preferences would help to determine which type of material may be most appropriate in the SAC environment. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data. Students' choices of form or meaning-focused exercises in a SAC were recorded. Qualitative data, in the form of subjects' SAC journal entries, and responses to a post interview on the type of activities preferred, were gathered and analyzed to help explain trends in the quantitative data.

Review of Literature

It was necessary to consider research from several distinct, yet relevant areas. These will be discussed in the following order: 1) focus on form and focus on meaning; 2) students' preferences; 3) related contexts; 4) research in the SAC context.

Defining Focus on Form, Focus on Forms and Focus on Meaning

Firstly, it is necessary to define as clearly as possible exactly what these terms mean. Long and Robinson (1999) define focus on form as " an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by the teacher and/or one or more students triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (p.23). Long (1991) asserts that focus on form is when the instructor intentionally draws attention to linguistic elements of the L2 but maintains an overriding focus on meaning and communication. Long and Crookes (1992) emphasize that focus on form "draws students' attention to aspects of the target language code" (p.43) while Doughty and Varela (1999) provide three specific criteria for a focus on form approach:

1. The target of the focus on form should arise incidentally in the otherwise content-based lesson.

2. The primary focus should remain on meaning or communication.

3. The teacher should draw students' attention to form rather than leaving it to chance that students will notice linguistic features without any pedagogical assistance. Focus on form has a dual requirement to focus on a linguistic feature without interrupting significantly a primarily communicative task.

It is evident that a focus on form has two main features. Firstly, focus on rules is less important than meaning. That is, the emphasis on the meaning of the language is primary and a shift towards a focus on formal aspects occurs only when meaning is not accurately conveyed or when the instructor suspects the shift is necessary for comprehension. Secondly, this shift entails attention being directed towards the

grammatical features of the language. Nevertheless, it appears that what constitutes a focus on form approach is relative. Harley's (1999) study for example, had her learners focus on code based aspects of the language which included metalinguistic terms. Although Harley asserts she was using focus on form, Doughty & Williams (1999) claim that the activities used by Harley in her study could be considered not focus on form but what is known as focus on forms. Focus on forms involves more traditional approaches to grammar that consist of isolating individual linguistic constructs out of context (Doughty and Williams, 1999). Long and Crookes (1992) define focus on forms as "the use of some kind of synthetic syllabus and/or a linguistically isolating teaching "method", such as audiolingualism, the Silent Way, or Total Physical Response" (p.43). Long and Crookes (1993) go on to point out that a focus on forms involves "treatment of language as object, as the content of the syllabus and primary focus of instruction" whereas focus on form involves "treatment of language as object in context as an incidental feature of task accomplishment" (p.731). Long (1991) provides a more practical explanation of the difference between the two approaches:

> Whereas the content of lessons with a focus on forms is the forms themselves, a syllabus with a focus on form teaches something else-biology, mathematics, workshop practice, automobile repair, the geography of a country where the foreign language is spoken, the cultures of its speakers, and so on-and overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication. (pp. 45-46).

Although Doughty and Williams (1999) comment that an approach like Harley's could be considered focus on forms and not focus on form, they do concede that focus on form can be defined on a sliding scale. They point out that "Long is at the most implicit end of the focus on form continuum, with the narrowest interpretation of the term, whereas both Dekeyser and Lightbrown, for instance, see at least some role for what

Long would probably call focus on forms" (p.5). So, it would be possible to label a study such as Harley (1999) as focus on form research and point out that defining it is not entirely fixed.

What then is a focus on meaning? Doughty and Williams (1999) succinctly summarize the basic difference between focus on form, focus on forms, and focus on meaning. They say that "Focus on form entails a focus on formal elements of language, whereas focus on forms is limited to such a focus, and focus on meaning excludes it" (p.4). Thus, it would appear that focus on meaning does not allow for any attention whatsoever to the linguistic code of the L2. The focus on meaning approach stems from what is known as the 'noninterventionist' position. This position claims that an L2 is learned best by allowing students to experience the L2 through communication and not through rigorous study. This would include methods such as Krashen's Natural Approach (1983) as well as content based ESL and immersion programs (Long & Robinson, 1999).

In the present study what constituted a focus on form fell more towards a focus on forms. Thus, the type of focus on form that subjects were required to participate in involved them paying attention to an individual linguistic structure that stemmed from a predetermined syllabus, rather than briefly focusing on a troublesome structure that arose out of a meaningful activity. The relative nature of the idea of focus on form motivated the researcher to formulate the following operational definitions for the study:

> Focus on form = requires the student to focus on the grammatical correctness or incorrectness of the L2.

> Focus on meaning = requires the student to focus on the message being conveyed by the L2.

In the following section research that contrasted focus on forms with focus on meaning will be discussed. Focus on forms not focus on form is reviewed because the present study was more closely related to a focus on forms approach (i.e. the grammar

points were dictated by a predetermined syllabus). It should also be pointed out that the use of the term "focus" in this study does not refer to the subjects' cognitive processes. The fact that it is difficult to know what subjects actually focus on is acknowledged by Sharwood Smith (1991, 1993) who cautions that one cannot assume that manipulation of input will actually increase the learner's attention to form. Sharwood Smith prefers the term "input enhancement" rather than "consciousness raising" since it is difficult to actually know what subjects focus on (Leeman; Arteagoitia; Fridman; Doughty, 1995, p.219). For the purposes of this study the term focus is used only to refer to the design of the SAC exercises which attempted to "enhance" the input towards an emphasis on form or meaning. It is not used to refer to what subjects were actually focusing on while doing the exercises.

Focus on Forms vs. Focus on Meaning Research

This line of investigation exists because researchers discovered that many language programs such as immersion, which focused primarily on meaning, left learners with some L2 structures underdeveloped (Harley, 1992; Harley & Swain, 1984). This fact lead researchers to believe that focusing on the linguistic principles of the L2 could be beneficial for learners (Doughty & Williams, 1999). For example, a study by Alanen (1995) made use of a semi artificial language based on Finnish. ESL learners were randomly assigned to four different groups. The experiment took place in a classroom setting. All four groups were asked to read a text for meaning and answer comprehension questions. The rules of the grammar point were explained to the two forms-focused groups. The difference between these two groups was that one received an explanation of the rules and had the linguistic structure in question highlighted in the text while the other only received the explanation but no highlighting. The meaning-focused group received a highlighted text and the control group an unmodified text. Subjects in the

forms-focused groups outperformed the subjects in the meaning-focused groups on a post experiment sentence completion task which disfavored a meaning only focus and lended support to the effectiveness of a focus on forms. A study performed by Doughty (1991), however, found different results. Doughty used a pretest-posttest design with adult ESL learners in three randomly assigned conditions of exposure. The grammatical structure that was being tested was relative clauses (" I found the book that John was talking about" or "The girl who I gave the present to was absent"). As in Alanen's (1995) study, the groups were asked to read a text in order to answer comprehension questions. These texts contained relative clauses. The control group simply read the texts. The meaning oriented group had the relative clauses highlighted in the text. The focus on forms group read the texts and received rules to explain relative clauses. The results favored the focus on meaning group because this group not only comprehended better the message of the text but also was as good as the focus on forms group in relative clause knowledge.

Another experiment performed by Hulstijn (1989) in a laboratory setting directly compared the effectiveness of a focus on forms condition with a focus on meaning condition. Hulstijn wanted to know if the focus on meaning group would learn formal aspects of subordinate clauses incidentally and if this group would perform better than the focus on forms group in both rule based knowledge and content knowledge. The study had a pretest-posttest design. The pretest aimed at testing subjects' previous knowledge to the target structure and consisted of having subjects rapidly copy sentences with subordinate clauses after having been exposed to them briefly. Hulstijn's subjects were adults learning Dutch. The focus on forms group was asked to do an exercise that required them to match eight sentence fragments with an order given on a computer screen. The meaning group only read the sentences on the computer screen and commented if they agreed or disagreed with the sentence's message. Hulstijn also had a forms plus meaning group. Groups were then asked to recall all the sentences that they had been exposed to and Hulstijn evaluated accuracy in terms of grammar and

comprehension. The results showed that the focus on forms groups performed better than the meaning only group with the forms plus meaning group performing best of all.

This conflicts with VanPatten (1990) who claims there is an inevitable trade off that must occur when focus on meaning and form are concentrated on at the same time. That is, that when one is focused on, the learner's capacity in the other suffers. This claim was based on the fact that recall was most negatively affected when he had subjects listen to identify the occurrence of a form and comprehend meaning at the same time.

Evidence gathered from a classroom based study sheds light on other aspects of the focus on forms vs. focus on meaning question. Harley (1989) carried out a study with English speaking children aged 7-8 in a French immersion program with the aim of determining if instructional activities that focused on forms would help her students to recognize gender cues to determine gender assignment. Harley found some different yet equally as interesting results. She found that the students who received focus on forms activities in class were better at gender assignment only for the words that they had been exposed to and practiced in class. It also seemed that the relevance of the activities to the entire curriculum was important since teachers consciously or unconsciously rejected them if they did not fit in with what they were doing in class.

It seems that a focus on forms approach is worthwhile, yet there are some conflicting results from these comparative type studies that leave the question open to debate and motivates further research. In place of a comparative type approach perhaps one possible way to help resolve the issue is to examine what type of focus students prefer. Some researchers believe preference is a significant factor in promoting L2 acquisition. They assert that if students learn in an environment that takes their preferences into account it is possible students will benefit. Perhaps knowing the type of focus students prefer could help to determine which type of focus is most appropriate. The following section discusses briefly why students' preferences might be important and outlines some of the research.

Language Learners' Preferences

Some researchers assert that students' preferences are a significant factor for L2 learners. For example, Nunan (1996) advocates a learner-centered approach to activities and curriculum design. He claims learners should express their opinions of their needs for learning the language, their preferred learning styles, their beliefs about language learning or their preferred activity types. Their expressed preferences can then be taken into consideration by the teachers and administrators to make learning more effective. Thus, it is important for teachers and students to be aware of what their preferences are in order to help decide how and what they will learn. This certainly would apply in the SAC environment as well since students have a responsibility to decide what and how they will study, and teachers have a responsibility to help guide them in their use of the SAC. Perhaps knowing which type of focus students prefer could help to determine how or if a focus on meaning or form should be integrated into the SAC. Research has not been done in an SAC to determine if students prefer a focus on meaning or focus on form specifically. Nevertheless, there are relevant studies in other contexts that have looked at traditional vs. non-traditional, communicative vs. non communicative, and inductive vs. deductive activities which could be considered as either form or meaning-focused type activities. Studies of preferred activities have focused on: 1) learner opinions on their activity preferences; 2) teachers' preferred activities and; 3) comparisons of learners' and teachers' activity preferences. Since this study was concerned primarily with students' preferences, research from number one is most relevant and will be summarized in the following section.

A study by Alcorso and Kalantzis (1985) showed that adult immigrant learners of English in Australia at the intermediate level favored traditional activities over communicative activities. Yorio (1986) reported that learners preferred four traditional teaching methods. These were grammatical explanations, using the language library, memorizing vocabulary lists and translation exercises. This study did not consider

communicative activities, however. Barkhuisen (1998) used a survey to obtain learners'
perceptions of 15 classroom activities. He found that learners did not like communicative
type activities and preferred more traditional classroom work. However, a study by
Green (1993) investigated how much learners' enjoyment of communicative and non
communicative activities determined if they thought the activities were useful or not. It
found effectiveness and enjoyment to be highly correlated. The results showed that
learners tended to enjoy communicative activities more than non communicative ones (as
cited in Spratt, 1999, p.142).   .

Studies that compared teachers' preferences to students' preferences also have
provided some data on type of activity preferred**.** Brindley (1984) interviewed teachers
and 115 adult migrant learners of ESL at an advanced level about language learning and
discovered that teachers preferred use focused activities, while learners preferred usage
focused activities more highly. Nunan (1988) also reports a discrepancy between
teachers' and learners' preferences. In his study one out of ten activities were given the
same rating by the two groups. Peacock (1997) also found disagreement between teachers
and students preferred type of activities (as cited in Spratts, 1999, p. 142).

Studies comparing learners' preferences with teachers' preferences generally
indicate that teachers prefer communicative activities more than learners do. Spratts'
(1999) study, for example, surveyed 997 tertiary level learners and 50 teachers in a
university context in Hong Kong about 48 classroom activities. His study showed a
considerable disagreement between learners' preferences and teachers' perceptions of
them. It seems that students tend to prefer more "traditional" type of activities and that
there is a discrepancy between the students' preferences and what teachers believe
students' preferences to be. It is not difficult to infer that narrowing this gap between
student and teacher could help students learn more effectively. All these studies
mentioned were performed in the classroom. None of them were realized in a SAC
context**.** Thus, teachers' lack of understanding of what students' preferences are is even

greater in this context. It would seem that a study such as the present one is valuable, therefore, to help narrow this gap between teacher and student when making use of the SAC context. If teachers are more fully aware of students' preferences in the SAC they can use that knowledge to help them make more effective use of the SAC environment. Although research has not been done in the SAC context, there has been some investigation in related autonomous contexts. This research will be the subject of the following section.

Related Contexts

Nagata (1997) compared inductive and deductive feedback in a computer assisted learning task (CAL) of relatively complex grammatical structures. Nagata used thirty first semester students of Japanese at the University of San Francisco. He paired subjects on the basis of mid term exams into deductive and inductive groups. The target structures were the Japanese particles *ga, o, wa, ni, and de*. Nagata entered 68 sentence production exercises into a computer program called Banzai. When subjects answered the exercises the Banzai gave them either inductive or deductive feedback. The following is an example of the deductive and inductive feedback that subjects received:

Deductive

A particle is missing for NIHONGO. It should be marked with the particle DE to indicate the role INSTRUMENT (the one by means of which the action occurs).

Inductive

A particle is missing for NIHONGO. It should be marked with the particle DE. The following examples show how the particle DE is used:

1) Waapuro de kakimashita. "(I) wrote (it) with a word processor." (p.525).

Subjects were exposed to inductive or deductive input for six sessions of 45 minutes over 15 days. At the end of the treatment Nagata had subjects fill out a questionnaire to investigate students' preference for the two different computer programs. The results of the questionnaire showed no significant difference between the two groups in preference. The deductive group, however, did prefer the feedback messages more than the inductive group.

A study by Fortune (1992) also examined learners' preferences towards inductive or deductive. His study used self study grammar exercises. Fortune had fifty adult learners of English for General Purposes studying in college part-time. Subjects were given three weeks to do a battery of 14 grammar exercises. Seven exercises were deductive grammar practice and seven were inductive. To avoid boredom, each exercise dealt with a different grammar construct. When subjects had finished the 14 exercises, Fortune applied a questionnaire and performed informal interviews to determine which grammar materials students preferred. Results from the questionnaire indicated that 58% preferred the deductive exercises.

Although these studies were not performed in a SAC, the autonomous nature of their context provides some insight into what students may or may not prefer in the SAC environment. Studies like these should be performed to gather data on students' learning preferences in the SAC context as well. This data would help to determine what constitutes "appropriate" instructional material for the student in a SAC. This and many other issues have not been studied in the SAC environment. Nevertheless, the following section outlines relevant topics which have been examined in the SAC context.

The Self Access Center Context

Holec (1985) identifies three of the most important requirements for a self access center as: 1) an infrastructure of appropriate materials and resources; 2) teachers trained in providing support; 3) effective means of informing potential users about the system. In

Holec's opinion, as can be seen by his first requirement, appropriate material is one of the most important aspects to consider in a SAC. Nevertheless, research has not been conducted to determine the specific linguistic nature (such as emphasis on form or meaning for example) of the instructional material and teacher support that is most beneficial. Appropriate materials in the SAC would include those that take students' preferences into account. Given the possibility that individual student preferences may be important in L2 acquisition and that teachers should be aware of what they are, it is worthwhile to investigate these preferences and how they relate to the language learning process in this context.

It should first be pointed out that there exist many different types of SACs. Miller and Rogerson-Revell (1993) define four different types that vary in terms of organization and function: 1) menu driven: a dedicated self-access system specifically for language learning. All materials are classified, and the information is stored either electronically or on hard copy; 2) supermarket: offers the learner the opportunity to look around and choose what to study; 3) open access: is usually part of a library. The self-access material is open for use by students studying the L2 and to other library users; 4) controlled access: learners are directed to a specific set of materials. This study took place in the context of a controlled access SAC. Miller & Rogerson-Revell describe in detail the characteristics of this type of SAC:

> A system where learners are directed to a specific set of materials in a self access centre by their tutors can be called a 'controlled access' system. Usually, the materials held in the centre are closely related to work covered in class and classified in a similar way. Learners using this type of system would have little or no control over what they choose to study and the classification of materials is usually very simple, e.g. 'Worksheet 1', 'Worksheet 2', etc. (p. 229).

Discussion and investigation into materials in SACs has been mostly limited to the general nature of the material and how it is organized and accessed in a SAC. Aston

(1993), for example, performed an experiment in which upper intermediate level second language learners of English investigated and produced new materials for a SAC in their university as a project to get them involved in the integration of materials into the center. The study had students evaluate and produce materials focusing only on preferences for video, computers, or magazines. Littlejohn (1985) performed a questionnaire on users of a SAC at the University College of Bahrain and concluded that further research needs to devise tasks and materials that develop the ability of learners to choose. Yoke & Brown (1994) discuss the need to produce "in house" materials due to the cultural bias of materials from western countries and the sometimes limited resources of Asian or African countries. The construction of these materials took into consideration skill (grammar, speaking, writing), level (advanced, intermediate, elementary), and type of activity (multiple choice, matching, etc.).

Other researchers discuss "pathways" to materials which involves the organization of material in the SAC in such a way that users are directed to a specific sequence of materials. The set of materials that learners are guided towards are connected by topic and focus on grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, video, or computer work (Kell & Newton, 1997).

The present study focused on instructional material that dealt with grammar because of the crucial role grammar plays in the SLA field. Ellis (1994) points out the importance of grammar for teaching and research in the second language field:

> This reflects both the importance which has been traditionally attached to grammar teaching in language pedagogy, and also the centrality of grammar in SLA research. The focus on grammar has had both a practical and a theoretical motivation. It has helped teachers to understand the factors that determine whether instruction is successful, and it has helped researchers to explore a number of issues of importance for theory building (p.611).

Although work has been published on how the SAC should be organized and operated, it appears the trend is ahead of the research. The specific linguistic nature of

materials that should be present in a SAC has not been sufficiently investigated. Little empirical research has been done to investigate what actually goes on in a SAC. If SACs are to promote the acquisition of languages research must also consider issues such as how L2 input should be presented to students in this context.

Methodological Precedents

Data for the present study were gathered using journals, questionnaires, and interviews. Journals and diaries have been used in previous work to gather data on students' language learning preferences. Brown (1985) used diaries to investigate the kind of input preferred by L2 learners of English. She analyzed the entries of subjects that made any reference to amount of input given, type of input, and complexity or meaningfulness of input. Schmidt & Frota (1986) used diary entries to investigate what a L2 learner noticed most in the input received (cited in Ellis, 1994, p.245). Questionnaires have also been used extensively to discover what type of input students prefer (Burkhuisen, 1998; Littlejohn, 1985; Nagata, 1997; Fortune, 1992; Spratt 1999). Brindley (1984) used interviews to determine learners' and teachers' preferences for use or usage activities. The present study asked subjects to complete a battery of exercises that were either form or meaning focused. Further data were then gathered to using journal questions and an informal post interview. Fortune (1992) used this same procedure to investigate students' preferences for inductive and deductive grammar activities.

Research Strategy

Research Question

The lack of investigation on the linguistic design and learner preferences of materials in the SAC context motivated the following research question:

In terms of form-focused or meaning-focused materials in a SAC, what are the preferences of advanced adult second language learners of English?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were forwarded for the study:

Adult second language learners of English will prefer meaning-focused materials over form-focused materials in a SAC.

Adult second language learners of English will prefer form-focused materials over meaning-focused materials in a SAC (alternate).

Adult second language learners will show no preference for meaning-focused or form-focused materials in a SAC (null).

Assumptions

Since subjects will have freedom to choose in the SAC, it will be assumed that their choices are their actual preferences.

The responses in journals, questionnaires, and interviews that subjects give will be assumed to be honest and truthful.

Chapter 2

Context

Data for the study were collected in the self access center at the Universidad de las Americas-Puebla (UDLA-P). The university is a prestigious private university in Mexico. The student population is made up of upper to middle class Mexicans. However, forty percent are on scholarship, and foreign exchange students make up 4% of the university population. The university also offers opportunities for Mexican students to study abroad in English speaking countries.

The university introduced the SAC in 1995 to respond to an interest in autonomous learning by some language teachers at the university and a general trend towards self access language learning in Mexico. Initially the SAC had limited space and resources but in the summer of 2000 a proposal was made and accepted by the university to renovate the space and purchase more equipment and resources. During the present study the general philosophy of the SAC was to foster autonomy, have a place for authentic language interaction, and provide counseling in language and autonomy. The SAC offers a variety of resources for students to choose from:

* A small library containing grammar texts, reading texts, composition texts, and
  dictionaries.
* A computer lab where students can access information and language exercises on line.
* A library of listening comprehension cassettes, videos, and CD-roms.
* A variety of magazines and newspapers.
* Video and audio equipment.
* A small conference room.
* Teachers from the university as tutors.
* Front desk staff.

Resources are catalogued by number and organized on lists that students can access manually. Texts in the library, newspapers and magazines, and the computer lab can be directly accessed by the student. Video, audio, and CD rom materials must be signed out at the front desk by a staff member. Upon leaving the SAC students register

the date, their name, course number, and instructor on a computer to provide a database of student attendance. Many instructors also incorporate materials related to their course into the SAC by providing students with a menu that they are either obligated or encouraged to use.

Occasionally controversy has emerged amongst teachers and coordinators over the use and operation of the SAC. A lack of understanding and training in autonomous learning has resulted in some resistance from teachers. The teacher-centered nature of education in Mexico has also contributed to a certain degree of resistance from teachers and students.

Subjects that participated in this study were enrolled in an advanced English course meeting two days a week for 1 hour and 15 minutes. The overall objective of the course is to develop integrated language skills. Students were expected to leave the course with a score of 500 on the TOEFL exam. Each chapter in the course text focuses on a particular topic of interest. Students are required to read, write, synthesize, and analyze information about the topic. Vocabulary is presented in context and grammar is explicitly explained and practiced with exercises in the course text. Subjects were required to spend a minimum of one hour per week in the SAC. The course instructor assigned both obligatory and "free" SAC activities. One week students were required to complete a specific activity assigned by the instructor and hand it in the following week. Students were then free to do an activity of their choice the next week. Students were obligated to answer journal questions about these activities which required them to think about the goal, process, and result of the SAC activity. The course grade was calculated on the basis of a midterm exam (15%), a final exam (25%), and homework/class activities/presentations/quizzes/SAC activities (60%).

The instructor for the course was a bilingual English/Spanish speaker and had a Master's degree in Comparative American Studies with no formal training as a second language teacher. At the time of the study, in total she had been teaching ESL for 8 years

and the course for 1 year. During a pre-experiment interview she revealed that she preferred to concentrate on having students write about and discuss issues and events that could be found in the class text or in resources such as newspapers and magazine articles. It was also apparent from her comments in the interview that she was somewhat resistant to the obligatory nature of the SAC for students in the course.

Subjects

The initial pool of subjects for the study were 52 Mexican native Spanish speaking advanced students of English ranging between the ages of 18 and 22 coming from three intact groups taught by the same instructor. This group was chosen partly because motivation is an important factor in an autonomous context like that of an SAC. Attendance records of students at this level from the previous semester indicated that these groups were most consistent in their SAC participation. Eight students were placed in the course according to their score on the university's English placement exam. Eighteen students were in the course because they had passed the previous level with a score of 9.0 or higher out a possible 10. These students had been placed previously in a lower level because their placement scores were not high enough to enter directly into the advanced level.

Complete data were obtained from 26 of 52 students in the initial pool. Therefore, the data from the remaining 26 subjects were used in the study. To obtain further information on subjects' L2 experience, background, and attitudes towards language learning the subjects filled out a language history questionnaire (Appendix A) prior to their participation in the study. The results for the group as a whole are summarized in the results section to provide a more detailed account of their characteristics.

Instruments

The study utilized several instruments to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to identify and understand students' choices in the SAC. These instruments were: 1) a language history questionnaire; 2) SAC activities; 3) SAC student journals 4) teacher journal; 5) post-experiment interviews with students. All instruments were in English and adapted by the researcher from instruments used by other researchers, or based on the course curriculum. Only during the application of the language history questionnaire were students told their responses would be used in a research. Students were told all other instruments were part of the course curriculum. The following section offers a description of each instrument and how it was developed and administered.

Language History Questionnaire

The language history questionnaire (Appendix A) was administered for three reasons. Firstly, it was necessary to have an idea of the subjects' language history in order to provide a more detailed description of the subjects in the study. Secondly, factors such as how, when, and why a person has learned a second language in the past could possibly have an affect on how they prefer to learn it in the present. Students' attitudes may also be a factor in determining language learning preferences. For this reason the questionnaire also included items that sought to discover subjects' attitudes towards language learning and the SAC environment.

One way to find out what students' preferences are for learning a second language is to ask them. Questionnaires are useful tools to gain insight into what students prefer to do in order to learn the L2. The questionnaire was adapted from Hall (1997) and Fortune (1992). The researcher designed the questionnaire to capture both qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire can be divided into two main parts. The first part (questions 1 to 15) seeks to obtain information on the subjects' language learning history. The second part (questions 16 to 22) was designed to gather data on subjects' attitudes

and preferences for language learning. The last question (22) was included to gain some insight into the students' attitude towards learning in the SAC.

In order to obtain a more reliable instrument the questionnaire was piloted with students enrolled at the same level as subjects in the study. The researcher had several instructors who teach the course make changes and suggestions in the language and content of the questions. The final question was a direct result of a suggestion by the course instructor that negative past SAC experiences may have an effect on what students do in the SAC. Once changes in language and content were made the questionnaire was given in class to a small group of eight students enrolled in the same course as the subjects that participated in the study. On the pilot version of the questionnaire students were asked a final question in which they were asked to note anything they found confusing or difficult about the questionnaire. On the basis of responses to the pilot questionnaire and comments made by the course instructors, revisions were made in language, structure, and content.

SAC Activities

The study utilized a battery of eight activities (Appendices B, C, D, and E) that were integrated into the SAC over a four week period. Each week students were required to choose between two activities that had been placed in the SAC by the researcher. The primary difference between the two activities each week was that one was designed to focus students' attention on the form of the language, while the other was designed to try and get students to focus on the meaning of the language. Recording students' choices between these activities provided quantitative data on their preferences in the SAC. This method was adopted because it may be possible that what students say they prefer to do to learn the L2 may not be what they actually do to learn the L2. Methods such as interviews and questionnaires which ask students what they prefer to do to learn the L2 are limited by this discrepancy between what is said and what is actually done. Thus,

recording students' actual choices in the SAC was adopted in an attempt to address this limitation of the interview and questionnaire methods.

The activities were on adjective clauses. This construct was part of the course curriculum and the exercises were adapted by the researcher from the course textbook. The exercises that focused on the meaning of the language asked students to recognize between identifying and non-identifying adjective clauses. For example, an identifying adjective clause like "Sensors are people *who are practical and notice what is going on around them*" is essential information for the sentence to make sense. However, a non-identifying adjective clause like "Jack and Barbara, *who have been married for years*, are good examples of these types" can be left out and the sentence can still make sense. The exercises that focused on the form of the language asked students to recognize which adjective clauses were correct and incorrect. For example, the sentence "The trees *where are in the park* give the people shade" should have an adjective clause that uses "that" or "which" not "where". To control for potential intervening variables several steps were taken in developing the exercises. They were designed to reduce the possibility that students would make a choice based on a factor other than a focus on form or meaning. Factors that were taken into consideration were time, ease, appearance, topic, content and length**.** These intervening variables were controlled by manipulating the design of the exercises and piloting them on a similar population before using them in the study.

Piloting Of SAC Activities

The exercises were piloted on students enrolled in the same course but from a different group with a different teacher. The course instructor agreed to offer students bonus points in order to motivate them to participate in the piloting. Students were aware that they would be working with the researcher but were not informed of the nature of the research. The researcher scheduled a time to meet in the SAC that was convenient for the students who agreed to participate. Before they completed the exercises they were told

that they would be asked to choose between two activities. To complete the exercises, they were free to choose other resources in the SAC. Once students had examined the two exercises together and made their choice for meaning or form, they returned the exercise that they did not choose. The researcher then recorded the time they began on their chosen exercise. When they had finished the exercise the researcher recorded their finishing time. The student was then asked to complete the exercise that they had not chosen and their start and finish time was once again recorded. This helped the researcher to determine if one type of exercise took longer to do or was more difficult. The researcher was able to gain more useful feedback from students by sitting down individually with each of them to ask a set of questions aimed at determining the motive for their choice. This feedback was useful to establish if any intervening variables had motivated their choice and if they were confused by certain aspects of the exercises. The piloting process with students, along with feedback solicited from various instructors teaching the course, helped the researcher to make the activities more valid and reliable instruments.

Student Journals

Journals (Appendix F) were used to obtain data on why students had chosen a particular activity. Nevertheless, it can be difficult to get rich data from subjects if journal questions are not carefully constructed. For this reason, journal questions were also piloted previous to the study. The researcher adapted the journal questions from SAC journal questions already in use by the teacher and students. Using journal questions that students were already familiar with helped to ensure that they would not be too difficult or confusing for them. The journal questions were piloted at the same time as the SAC activities and with the same population. On the basis of student responses to the piloted journal questions, changes were made in wording and structure in order to facilitate more in depth responses from subjects participating in the study.

Interview of Subjects

Journal responses can be problematic if subjects do not respond fully or in enough detail to provide usable data. With this methodological limitation in mind a semi-structured type of interview was adopted. This type of interview was chosen because it allows subjects the freedom to discuss what is important to them yet still allows the researcher to cover important topics for the study (Bell, 1999). It was necessary to have subjects free to explain to the researcher the motives for their choices. At the same time it was important that the researcher ask subjects questions about certain topics that were theoretically significant and trends that arose out of the data gathered from the teacher journal, student journals, and SAC activities. Thus, the researcher constructed a set of interview questions (Appendix G) based on the data gathered in an attempt to explain it more fully.

Teacher Journal

The course instructor was asked to keep a journal throughout the data collection process. It was possible that what occurred in the classroom could have had a profound impact on what students did in the SAC environment. For this reason, it was necessary that the researcher gather data on what was going on in the classroom while students were participating in the study. Teacher journals can be used as a way to monitor what goes on in the classroom. Journal responses from the instructor helped the researcher to speculate if student choices were being made based on the nature of the SAC activities or some other factor in the classroom. Providing specific topics or questions for the journal writer to respond to can help the researcher obtain more robust responses. With this is mind, the researcher developed a set of journal questions for the instructor to respond to (Appendix H).

Procedure

This section describes the steps taken to apply the previously mentioned instruments. Procedures included the application of the instruments, experimental controls, and how the data were collected and analyzed. Subjects in the study were identified by their university student number. When the four-week data collection process was completed, it was determined which subjects had provided complete data. Only those who provided complete data on all instruments were included in the data analysis. This group consisted of a total of 26 subjects out of the 52 originally involved. This was a considerable amount of attrition over a short four week period. There may have been a couple of reasons for this. Firstly, perhaps it is a reflection of a lack of motivation on the subjects' part since some assignments simply were not turned in. Secondly, it is possible the present study utilized too many instruments making it very difficult to obtain complete data from all subjects involved.

Interview of the Instructor

The researcher conducted an interview with the course instructor prior to the data collection process. The purpose of this was to: 1) obtain information on the teacher's professional background and philosophy; 2) be aware of the dynamics of the course prior to the data collection period. Step number two was necessary because data were collected one month after the course had begun. Before interviewing the instructor, verbal consent to use her statements was obtained and a consent form (Appendix I) was later signed. The researcher developed a set of questions organized under general topics. The researcher asked the instructor the questions and recorded her responses on audio cassette. The instructor was free to respond to the questions as she wished.

Language History Questionnaire

Prior to the introduction of the SAC activities, the language history questionnaire was applied. The researcher entered each class and told subjects that the purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information on them so that both researchers and teachers could learn how to help them learn more effectively. Instructions were given in English and clarifications were made in Spanish as necessary. It was also pointed out that their instructor would not have any access to their responses. In this way the language history questionnaire was disassociated from the course and the course instructor. These two factors helped to control subjects from responding to the questionnaire with their grade for the course in mind. The questionnaire provided primarily quantifiable data. These data were analyzed into averages and percentages for the 26 participants.

SAC Activities and Student Journal Questions

Two days following the application of the language history questionnaire the SAC activities and the student journal questions were introduced. The researcher met with the instructor and gave specific written instructions (Appendix J) for the introduction of the exercises and questions in class. The activities were presented in a folder with one form focused and one meaning focused exercise glued inside on opposing sides. Each week students were shown the folder in class and assigned the different set of SAC exercises. Journal questions remained the same throughout the four weeks. In a week's time students were required to turn in to the instructor the exercises they had chosen in the SAC and were assigned the following week's exercises. In the following class the instructor returned the exercises to the student with a check mark for completion, and the answers were briefly discussed as a group. The instructor then collected the exercises and the researcher collected them from the instructor. This procedure was followed because it was necessary that students believed the activities were a part of the curriculum as an extrinsic motivation to participate, and to maintain as natural an environment as possible.

The same folder and exercises that the instructor introduced each week in class were placed in the university's SAC. Instructions were typed on the front of the folder to remind students of the steps necessary to complete the exercise (Appendix K). Subjects answered journal questions on the back of each activity. It was important to ensure that they examined each exercise carefully and chose only one of the exercises. This was controlled by having students request the folder from the SAC staff. Once they had looked at the two exercises in the folder and made their decision, they were required to return the folder and ask SAC staff for one or the other exercise. Since the exercises were very similar in nature this control also avoided them from using one exercise to help them complete the other. To help ensure that subjects completed the exercise in the SAC they were required to turn in their credential before receiving their chosen exercise. The researcher also met with SAC staff informally during the experiment and provided them with specific written instructions (Appendix L) for the management of the activities in the SAC.

After the four-week period of SAC data collection the researcher recorded students' preferences for the form or meaning-focused activities. Their preferences were also recorded weekly. Their overall preference and their preferences from week-to-week were calculated as percentages. Trends in the data made it possible to group subjects into the following categories: 1) chose meaning all four weeks (M4x); 2) chose form three out of the four weeks (F3x); 3) chose meaning three out of the four weeks (M3x); 4) chose form only in the last week (F Last); 5) chose meaning twice and form twice (MIX).

Teacher Journal

The researcher asked the instructor to maintain a journal on each of the three groups. The journal questions were pasted into the journal for her to make reference to when needed. The instructor wrote in the journal immediately after each class and the teacher journal was collected weekly. At the end of the data collection process the researcher analyzed the journal in search of significant trends and factors in the classroom that may have affected students' choices in the SAC.

Interview of Students

The post-interview was performed a week after the SAC data collection process had been completed. Subjects in the M3x category were excluded in the interview because the M4x category demonstrated a clearer tendency. The mixed category was excluded because no preference was apparent. In one of the three classes there was a mixture of M4x, F3x, and F Last subjects. This group of eight students was chosen for the post interview as a sample of the subject population. Two of the eight subjects were M4x, three were F3x, and three were F Last. The researcher pulled these eight students out of the classroom to interview them in a small group. The interview was not recorded so that their responses would not be affected. Rather, notes were taken on their comments. The entire interview was performed in Spanish and subjects were not told it was for the purposes of the present study. They were told that the researcher was assisting the course instructor to learn more about how they use the SAC. They were also assured that their responses would be anonymous. These controls were utilized to help facilitate more complete and honest comments from subjects. Notes from the post interview were immediately summarized by the researcher and analyzed to help shed further light on what motivated subjects' preferences.

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

Category	# of Subjects
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

Week	Meaning	Form
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	Section 1		Section 2		Section 3	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
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

	Section 1		Section 2		Section 3	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
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

Preference Category	Chose Meaning on Item 19	Chose Form on Item 19
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 give 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 grammatical" while another said, "Los de identifying y non-identifying no fijaron en la grammatica 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 "circulos de conversacion" as a worthwhile activity in the SAC.

Chapter 4

Discussion of Results

       The choices the group made in the SAC indicated they preferred the meaning-focused activities to the form-focused overall. When these choices were examined on a weekly basis a gradual movement away from preference for meaning and towards preference for form appeared. Only in the final week did the group prefer form over meaning. Individual subjects did show a marked preference for one type or the other, but there was an even distribution of preference categories within the group. Also, there was variance in preference between the three different classroom sections. Data from the student journals, teacher journal and post interview implied that there were reasons other than a preference for form or meaning that motivated their choices. This chapter presents some possible explanations for why these particular results were generated.

       Probably the most significant factor that determined the group's preference was perceived level of difficulty. A high percentage of subjects indicated that this was the motive behind their choices. The researcher had attempted to eliminate intervening variables such as appearance and ease by piloting and constructing the exercises in such a manner as to neutralize variables. Nevertheless, there was overwhelming response by subjects in their journals that they had chosen one or the other on the basis of ease. Was it the case that the meaning-focused exercises actually were easier?

       An illustrative example is presented to help address this question. In the meaning- focused activities students were asked to decide if a sentence contained an identifying or non-identifying adjective clause. For example, in the sentence "The executive *who wants to climb the corporate ladder* will have to go the extra mile and work long hours" subjects had to determine if the adjective clause (italicized) was simply extra information being provided (non-identifying) or information that distinguished the person or thing from another (identifying). In the form-focused activities the exact same sentence appeared but students were asked to determine if the adjective clause was

grammatically correct or not. It would seem that what subjects were asked to do in the meaning-focused activities was not easier but in fact more difficult than in the form-focused. This is because determining identifying or non-identifying required the students to understand the meaning of the entire sentence and judge whether or not the information provided in the adjective clause was extra or essential. The form-focused exercise, however, only required the students to be able to apply a simple rule for relative pronouns ("who" is used for people) to the corresponding head noun (The executive). As a result, it was not necessary for subjects to analyze the entire sentence when doing the form-focused activity but only find the head noun and apply the simple rule.

There are other reasons to believe the form-focused exercises may have been easier. Evidence for this comes from the gradual week-to-week movement by subjects away from the meaning-focused activities towards the form-focused. Perhaps students were slowly coming to the conclusion that the form-focused exercises and not the meaning-focused were easier. The longer the students were exposed to the two types of exercises the closer they came to the realization that the form-focused were easier. If the study had been performed over a longer period of time it is possible that we would have seen a complete preference for the form-focused exercises. The trend may have continued to grow and move towards the extreme.

An alternative explanation for this trend is boredom. Perhaps students were getting bored of doing the meaning-focused activities. There is some evidence to support this from the teacher's journal. The instructor indicated that students were not having much difficulty with adjective clauses, "This group did not have any specific doubts about the four grammar points that will come on the exam. They all seemed quite comfortable at the end." She also mentioned that "they seem to be getting tired of doing the same type of exercise".

If the form-focused activities were in fact easier and subjects were concerned with doing the easiest exercise, why is it that they preferred the meaning-focused exercises

overall? A possible answer is that even though the meaning-focused activities were not easier, students had the perception that they were. Perhaps they were acting upon a belief that they were easier. Why did they believe this to be the case? A likely cause was their interaction with the instructor and material in class.

This was apparent in data from the students' journal entries. One subject, for example, wrote that he had chosen the meaning-focused activity "because I wanted to review the I and NI adjective clauses". There is an assumption in this statement that the form-focused did not have anything to do with the identifying and non-identifying clauses they were seeing in class. This is just one example of many already documented in the results section that make this assumption. During the course of the study subjects had been working with the terms "indentifying" and "non-identifying" clauses in class. It may be that the meaning-focused activities were chosen partly because of the simple fact that the exercises had the words "identifying" and "non-identifying" on them and the form-focused did not. This could be considered a small but significant flaw in the design of the SAC activities on the researcher's part. This difference could have led subjects to believe that the meaning-focused activities were more closely related to what they were studying in the course. The fact that some subjects claimed the meaning-focused activities were easier because they had the course text to help them complete the exercise also supports the conclusion that relation to what was going on in class had a lot to do with preference in the SAC.

These factors would imply that what students did in the classroom had a role to play in determining preference. This is not surprising if we take into consideration data from item 17 on the language history questionnaire that asked subjects how they preferred to study grammar. Many indicated that they preferred to do so in class 83.4% N= (22/26) because they have the support of the teacher. Perhaps students were not independent enough or terribly confident about doing grammar exercises alone. As a result, it would be less likely for them to choose exercises such as the form-focused ones

which seemed less related to class material that they had already gone over with the course instructor.

What the teacher said and did in class likely influenced student choice of materials. This is most clearly evident if we look at the group's preference during the last week of the study. Just previous to the final week the instructor had mentioned to the students in class that it was probably true that the form-focused activities were easier. Only during the final week did the group choose the form-focused exercises more than the meaning-focused. All three previous weeks the meaning-focused activities were preferred.

It would seem that subjects were motivated primarily by a preference to do the easiest activity and the instructor and course material influenced which they felt was easier. Nevertheless, there were subjects that indicated a reason other than ease for their choices. Some wrote that they had chosen one or the other exercise for variety or because they wanted to do the difficult exercise to challenge themselves. There were a number of subjects that indicated in their journal that they had made a completely random choice. An entry such as "I don't know, I just chose one and that's all" suggests a complete lack of thought or decision making process. The fact that subjects made completely random choices and did the easiest exercise has something to say about their level of motivation and autonomy. It is possible the students were neither motivated nor autonomous enough to choose the exercise that would help them the most. As a result, they just ended up choosing the easiest exercise. Item 22 in the language history questionnaire showed that subjects felt the SAC was not very useful. Further evidence that motivation was a factor comes from comments in the post interview. One subject stated that she really did not feel the SAC was necessary, "No me hace necesario el CAL porque podemos hacerlo en cualquier lado." The fact that subjects stated they preferred to do exercises with the support of the teacher and chose exercises most closely related to class work also indicates they were not terribly independent students. It would seem that it is possible the

students were not motivated or prepared to take serious advantage of their SAC experience and as a result just made easy, random choices.

Each classroom section appeared to demonstrate a different trend over the four week period. Section one, for example was the least consistent. One of the most obvious exceptions in the results comes from section one in week two where meaning was chosen 100%. Section three, on the other hand, maintained a preference for meaning all four weeks. Finally, section two demonstrated a gradual movement away from meaning towards form with a marked preference for form the final week. The question that arises is what was it that caused the sections to vary in such a manner? It is unlikely that it had anything to do with language background or attitudes since the classroom sections came out relatively similar in background on the language history questionnaire. One of the only significant results from the language history questionnaire was that there was a difference in exposure to a third language between groups. However, considering the small number of subjects in total (26) and each group (7, 10 and 9) this result has not much validity. The other possibility is that what went on in class for each section varied and this was reflected by each section in the SAC. However, the journal that the teacher kept illustrated that what went on during class was fairly consistent between classroom sections. Nevertheless, since the classes were not observed and it is possible the teacher may have failed to note in her journal important events that occurred during class, it is still a possibility that class interaction had a role to play. Furthermore, what subjects did while in the SAC was not observed. Without this data it is impossible to know if students were interacting amongst themselves while in the SAC to complete the activities. If so, this also could have tainted the results and caused the variance between the groups.

It should be pointed out that there were so few subjects in each classroom section that the trends demonstrated by each section perhaps are not valid and reliable. As a result only tentative speculation is warranted. However, it does not appear to be the case that subjects made choices in the SAC on the basis of a preference for meaning or form.

Evidence from the post interview suggested subjects were able to identify the fundamental difference intended between the two. Even though it seems some subjects were able to identify the intended variable between the two exercises, none of them indicated that they had chosen an exercise because of what it attempted to get them to focus on. This conclusion coupled with the fact that subjects clearly chose one exercise or the other for several different reasons makes it difficult to answer the study's original research question. The data the study generated were not sufficient to determine if students preferred a focus on form or meaning in the SAC environment. There were too many different reasons why subjects made the choices they did and none of the subjects indicated that they had chosen an activity because it appeared to focus on meaning or form. However, there were data useful enough to address some alternative issues. For example, one of the tentative conclusions that can be drawn from the study is that a linguistic factor such as focus on form or meaning is not at all important, or is one of students' lesser concerns, when making choices in the SAC environment. Another possibility is that motivation and autonomous ability could have been significant factors in determining choice. It seemed that a certain level of motivation and autonomy would have helped students to make choices on the basis of what would benefit them the most as opposed to choosing what would inconvenience them the least.

Theoretical Implications

Originally the purpose of the study was to help determine which type of focus is most likely to benefit students learning an L2. Previous comparative research has attempted to investigate which type of focus works best but the conflicting results of these studies had left the question unanswered. Some researchers assert that preferences are an important factor to consider in the L2 learning process (Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Nunan, 1996). As a result, the present study sought to discover students' preferences in the recently emerging context of an SAC environment. It was hoped that obtaining this kind of data could contribute to answering the question of which type of focus is most beneficial in the SAC environment since students may learn better when their language learning preferences are accommodated. However, in the present study subjects did not chose on the basis of a preference for form or meaning but for other reasons. As a result, the study could not answer the question of which type of focus students prefer and in turn cannot infer which type of focus might be most beneficial. Consequently, the results of the study have minimal relevance to research and theory on the form vs. meaning issue. Nevertheless, there are some potentially relevant findings.

Several researchers found that students tend to prefer "traditional" type of activities that focus more on usage and less on communication or use (Alcorso & Kalantzis, 1985; Barkhuisen, 1998; Spratt, 1998; Yorio, 1986). Also, subjects in studies by Fortune (1992) and Nagata (1997) preferred deductive to inductive type work. Fortune points out that second language learners have historically been exposed to primarily a deductive approach. (p.160). It would seem that students like to do what they are most familiar with. The present study perhaps relates to these studies and supports

this idea since subjects tended to choose the activities that were most closely related to class and therefore more familiar to them. Also, the tendency in the present study for subjects to prefer the "easiest" exercise perhaps relates to Fortune's and Nagata's findings in another way. Both found that subjects preferred the deductive exercises. However, neither Nagata nor Fortune addresses the variable of level of difficulty. Perhaps a deductive type of exercise is much easier for subjects to do than an inductive one. If this is the case, it is possible that both Fortune's and Nagata's subjects also just chose the activity they thought was the easiest for them. Spratt (1998) concluded that there exists a gap between what teachers prefer and what students prefer. In the present study it appeared that the instructor had an influence on the decisions subjects made in the SAC. This possibility that the instructor has an affect on what students will subsequently do in the SAC makes it even more important that this gap found by Spratt between what the teacher thinks students prefer and what students actually prefer be bridged.

One of the unexpected results in the present study was that subjects made choices based on what was closely related to class and comments made by the instructor. Little (1995) defines autonomy as "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action" (as cited in Rubin, 1998, p.5). By choosing the easiest, most familiar exercises and being swayed by comments made by the course instructor subjects did not display any of these abilities. The implication is that they were not at a high level of autonomy. Many researchers emphasize the need to train teachers and students how to be autonomous and use the SAC correctly (Gremmo & Riley 1995, p.157). Nunan (1996) asserts that learners should be "systematically educated in the skills and knowledge they will need in order to make informed choices about what they

want to learn and how they want to learn it" (p.15). Thus, an SAC is not just a room full of materials but system of skills and abilities to make informed decisions about their language learning. The fact that students just ended up choosing the easiest exercise or the one that they thought was most closely related to class supports this idea that it does no good to have an SAC if students and teachers are not trained on how to use it. If this is the case, the SAC just becomes a room for students to work in rather than a system that fosters autonomous language learning.

Contributions of the Study

Even though the study failed to provide an answer to the research question posed, there were some practical contributions to the field. For example, it helped gain a better understanding of the close relationship between the SAC and what the teacher and students do and say in class. This realization could cause teachers to consider more carefully the relationship between what they do in class and how it will determine their effective use of the SAC. This in turn could result in better planning for and use of the SAC. Secondly, the study illustrated the importance of autonomous training for students that use an SAC. This will help administrators to take more seriously the need to train their teachers about how to teach their students to be autonomous. The study supports the idea that an SAC is a system of skills and strategies and not just a room filled with materials. If it is, the SAC may be much less effective. This could help schools to avoid jumping on the SAC bandwagon and consider their decision to invest in setting up an SAC more carefully and avoid ending up with an expensive "homework room".

The study also confirmed that motivation is a factor in the SAC environment. The SAC in this particular study was a fairly controlled, obligatory situation and students did not have much freedom to choose. This seemed to affect the students' level of motivation and in turn their effective use of the SAC. Knowing this is an important relationship could help teachers to give their students more freedom in the SAC and seek out ways to help motivate them more. Finally, although the original research question was not answered, the exploratory nature of study successfully brought to light issues that could be addressed individually in future studies. Some of these will be mentioned in a subsequent section.

Limitations of the Study

Although this research did result in some worthwhile data the conclusions are at best tentative. The fact that there were many possibilities for why subjects made the choices they did and many intervening variables affecting their choices means it can only make inferences and point out possible explanations for the results. The study could not draw concrete conclusions on the form vs. meaning question. Furthermore, the limited duration of the study and the small number of subjects that provided complete data meant that comparison between classroom sections and within subjects was not possible due to validity concerns.

As mentioned previously, the SAC situation that was setup for this study was a controlled type of SAC. Thus, perhaps it would be difficult to generalize the results of the study to other types of SAC environments where students have more freedom to choose. Furthermore, the study was designed within a focus on forms situation (i.e. the grammar points of adjective clauses were taught as part of a set syllabus). A focus on

form approach, however, teaches certain grammar points only as it becomes apparent there is a need to clear up uncertainty for students. This would make it difficult to relate the present study to the broader focus on form issue.

Suggestions for Further Research

Several steps could be taken to make the present study better if it were to be continued in the future. The first and most obvious improvement would be to refine the SAC exercises so that they had an equal degree of difficulty. Doing this would help to stop students from choosing on the basis of ease and in turn it would be more feasible to answer the question of which type of focus is preferred in the SAC. Secondly, a more in-depth record of what was going on in the classroom during the study would help to accurately determine how profound an effect class material and the instructor has on SAC preferences. This could be done by recording the class, or the researcher could sit in during the class as an observer. Nevertheless, such procedures would have to take into account the possibility that the presence of the researcher, a camera or tape recorder in class could cause the instructor or students to behave differently than they normally would.

Another benefit would be to conduct the study over a longer period of time with more subjects. This would create a more accurate picture of actual preferences and lend validity to the results. As mentioned earlier in the discussion, there was a possibility that subjects were getting bored with the study's activities. If the study were conducted over a longer period of time this factor would be even more of a concern and the researcher would have to take measures such as varying the content and type of the exercises placed in the SAC.

This study demonstrated subjects' lack of autonomy may have had a role to play in how they made choices in the SAC. Nevertheless, it did not offer a specific measure of their autonomous ability. In the future the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

(SILL) (Oxford, 1990) could be applied and used to provide an accurate rating of subjects' autonomous ability. The SILL is a questionnaire that asks a battery of questions aimed at determining what, or if, students use certain language learning strategies. This data would make it easier to conclude if low or high autonomous ability directly determined type of choice made in the SAC.

Another possibility would be to allow for more freedom in the SAC. In this study subjects' freedom was limited in order to control for intervening variables. This, however, made it less of an autonomous situation. Perhaps giving up some control and letting subjects choose more freely in the SAC would make for a more natural autonomous SAC environment. The researcher could observe and record students' interaction with the SAC. He/she could then utilize a coding system that categorizes the choices as focus on meaning or focus on form. The difficulty with this approach, however, would be logistical since it would be difficult to record everything subjects did in the SAC and even more difficult if there were a larger population. Thus, perhaps it is the case that single researcher studies can't effectively study the SAC environment and it may be necessary to utilize research teams.

The study also shed light on potentially worthwhile topics for future research that are not related to the form vs. meaning question. In the present study it was evident that the instructor had an influence on students' SAC choices. How much influence do the instructor and the course material have on what students do in the SAC? This relationship could be investigated in more detail. Perhaps a discourse analysis of the class could be compared with subsequent behavior in the SAC. Another worthwhile project would be to examine the relationship between freedom in the SAC and motivation. Subjects in the present study indicated that the restrictive and compulsory nature the SAC did not make sense to them. This in turn affected their level of enjoyment in the SAC. A study could be performed that exposes subjects to different degrees of freedom in the SAC and their subsequent attitudes towards the SAC could be

gathered. The benefits of autonomy training should also be researched more. How much of a difference would autonomous training of students help to promote their effective use of the SAC?

Finally, it seemed that the linguistic element of focus on form vs. focus on meaning was not a priority in the SAC for the students. A question that arises out of this is what are students' priorities in a SAC? If given complete freedom in the SAC what is most important to them? This is an important question to address if we accept the idea that students should have a say in what and how they use the SAC. Nunan (1996) asserts that it is important students help to design the curriculum and teachers should strive to bridge the gap between what they think is beneficial and what students think is beneficial. A study that investigated students' preferences more generally would serve well to help bridge this gap and in turn create a more useful and enjoyable SAC experience.

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Appendices

<u>Appendix A</u>

LANGUAGE LEARNING QUESTIONAIRE

Date: _____   **Age: _____**

Name: _____   **Student #: _____**

1. How old were you when you first began to know English?

___ 0-4   ___ 5-12   ___ 13-18   ___ 19 or older

Please explain:

_____

_____

2. What are your preferred language learning activities in the CAL ? Please explain why.

_____

_____

_____

3. What languages do your parents speak? Check ( ) **all that apply**.

Mother	**Father**
___ Spanish/ English bilingual	___ Spanish/ English bilingual
___ first language is Spanish, second language is English	___ first language is Spanish, second language is English
___ first language is English, second language is Spanish	___ first language is English, second language is Spanish
___ Spanish only	___ Spanish only
___ English only	___ English only
___ Other (s) _____	___ Other (s)
_____	

4. In total how much time have you spent in an **English-speaking** country?

___ 0-6 months   ___ 6 months-1 year   ___ 1-5 years   ___ 5 years +

5. How much do you use English on a <u>daily basis</u> ? **Circle a number** to estimate your language use on the scale below. A rating of 1 indicates that you use Spanish all the time. A rating of 9 indicates that you use English all the time. A rating of 5 indicates that you use Spanish and English with equal frequency.

1.......2.......3.......4.......5.......6.......7.......8.......9

6. How did you learn English ? Circle a number to estimate how you learned on the scale below. A rating of 1 indicates that you learned English by focusing only on the rules of the language. A rating of 9 indicates that you learned by focusing only on the meaning of the language. A rating of 5 indicates that you learned by focusing on the meaning and the rules with equal frequency.

1.......2.......3.......4.......5.......6.......7.......8.......9

7. In which areas do you **use** English most often ? Rank **all of the areas** below using the following scale:

(a) = always (b) = usually (c) = a lot   (d) = a little   (e) = not at all

Choose one letter for each area

_____   school
_____   work
_____   with friends/socially
_____   with family
_____   for travel purposes
_____   other (please specify:_____)

8. In which areas did you **learn** your English? Rank all of the areas below using the following scale:

(a) = entirely (b) = mostly   (c) = a lot   (d) = a little   (e) = not at all

Choose one letter for each area
_____   school
_____   work
_____   with friends/socially
_____   with family
_____   traveling
_____   other (please specify: _____)

9. Have you taken the TOEFL exam (Test of English as a Foreign Language)? If yes, please complete this section.

     Test (written or computer version): _____
     Month/Year of test: _____
     Score (s):   _____

10. If you did not take the TOEFL, what diagnostic test (s) have you taken to measure your level of English?

Test (s) :   _____
Month/Year :   _____
Score (s) :   _____

11. Circle a number to rate your ability to use English in these four skill areas. A rating of 5 indicates native speaker proficiency.

        SPEAKING   1.......2.......3.......4.......5
        LISTENING   1.......2.......3.......4.......5
        READING   1.......2.......3.......4.......5
        WRITING   1.......2.......3.......4.......5

12. Circle a number to rate your knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar. A rating of 5 indicates native speaker proficiency.

        VOCABULARY   1.......2.......3.......4.......5
        GRAMMAR   1.......2.......3.......4.......5

13. Circle a number to rate your overall level of English. A rating of 5 indicates native speaker proficiency.

        OVERALL LEVEL   1.......2.......3.......4.......5

IF YOU KNOW A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AND SPANISH, PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS 13-14 FOR EACH LANGUAGE YOU KNOW.

     Language A _____

     Language B _____

     Language C _____

14. How old were you when you began to know this language?

       Language A   ___ 0-4   ___ 5-12   ___ 13-18   ___ 19 or older

       Language B   ___ 0-4   ___ 5-14   ___ 13-18   ___ 19 or older

       Language C   ___ 0-4   ___ 5-14   ___ 13-18   ___ 19 or older

15. Circle a number to rate your proficiency in using this language. A rating of 0 indicates no knowledge, a rating of 5 indicates native speaker proficiency.

       Language A   1.......2.......3.......4.......5

       Language B   1.......2.......3.......4.......5

       Language C   1.......2.......3.......4.......5

16. How useful have grammar practice exercises been to help you learn English?
      Please write a check for ( ) the appropriate response.

      very useful   ____
      useful   ____
      useful, but not very much   ____
      not useful   ____

17. Please write a check for the appropriate response.

      I prefer to do grammar exercises

                 in class   ____
                 on my own   ____
                 in the CAL   ____
                 other   ____ (please specify:_____)

Please give a reason for your choice:

_____

_____

_____

18. Please write a check for the appropriate response.

Doing grammar exercises on my own is

rather boring	____
boring	____
of some interest, but not a lot	____
interesting	____
very interesting	____

19. Write (a) or (b) in the space: ____

To learn English grammar, I prefer to
a. concentrate on the rules of the language.
b. concentrate on the meaning of the language.

20. To learn grammar, which of the following do you do?

Check ( ) the statement (s) that apply to you.

a. Refer regularly to a grammar book ____

b. Discuss grammar with your friends
   or classmates.   ____

c. Ask native speakers questions
   about grammar   ____

d. Do grammar exercises in your
   free time.   ____

e. Ask native speakers to correct you ____

f. Choose a grammar topic to
   learn every week/month   ____

g. Other   ____ (please specify: _____

_____)

21. To learn English grammar, do you think it is necessary to know grammatical terms
    (e.g. past progressive, passive, countable noun)?

    Write a check beside your answer   Yes _____   No _____

22. How useful has the CAL been for you to learn English?

    very useful   _____
    useful   _____
    useful, but not very much   _____
    not useful   _____

<u>Appendix B</u>

CAL EXERCISE 1

LE 201
ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

Approximate time to complete: 15 minutes

NAME:_____   STUDENT #_____   DATE:_____

Sort the eight sentences into two groups. One group should have grammatically correct adjective clauses and the other group should have grammatically incorrect adjective clauses (commas have been intentionally omitted).

Example.   1. Sensors are people which are practical and notice what is going on around them.
2. Jack and Barbara who have been married for years are good examples of these types.

INCORRECT	CORRECT
1. Sensors are people which are practical and notice what is going on around them.	2. Jack and Barbara who have been married for years are good examples of these types.

1.People who lack the courage to fail also lack what it takes to achieve big successes.
2.Attitudes that they help you feel positive about yourself are the key to success.
3.Dennis O'Grady that is quoted in this unit is a popular writer on motivational thinking.
4.A company which executives are highly motivated will usually succeed.
5.A college speaker whose exact name I've now forgotten helped us to understand the power of positive thinking.
6.A modern idea which I do not share at all is that success can only be measured in financial terms.
7.The research director patiently pursued theories which others had discovered and developed.
8.The executive who wants to climb the corporate ladder will have to "go the extra mile" and work long hours.

INCORRECT	CORRECT

CAL EXERCISE 2

LE 201
ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

Approximate time to complete: 15 minutes

NAME:_____ STUDENT #_____ DATE:_____

Sort the eight sentences into two groups. One group should have identifying adjective clauses and the other group should have non-identifying adjective clauses (commas are intentionally omitted).

Example. 1. Sensors are people who are practical and notice what is going on around them.
2. Jack and Barbara who have been married for years are good examples of these types.

IDENTIFYING	NON-IDENTIFYING
1. Sensors are people who are practical and notice what is going on around them.	2. Jack and Barbara who have been married for years are good examples of these types.

1. People who lack the courage to fail also lack what it takes to achieve big successes.
2. Attitudes that help you feel positive about yourself are the key to success.
3. Dennis O'Grady who is quoted in this unit is a popular writer on motivational thinking.
4. A company whose executives are highly motivated will usually succeed.
5. A college speaker whose exact name I've now forgotten helped us to understand the power of positive thinking.
6. A modern idea which I do not share at all is that success can only be measured in financial terms.
7. The research director patiently pursued theories which others had discovered and developed.
8. The executive who wants to climb the corporate ladder will have to "go the extra mile" and work long hours.

IDENTIFYING   NON-IDENTIFYING

Appendix C   **CAL EXERCISE 1**

LE 201
ADJECTIVE PHRASES

Approximate time to complete: 15 minutes

NAME:_____   STUDENT #_____   DATE:_____

Write a C next to the sentences that are grammatically correct and an I next to the
sentences that are grammatically incorrect.
Example.   _____   The trees where are in the park give the people shade.

                    _____   The people who are in the park are enjoying the day.

_____   The dog that is black seems to be looking for something to eat.

_____   Most of the people which are in the park are wearing hats.

_____   A gentleman whose sitting down is holding a cane in his left hand.

_____   The man who is lying on his back is smoking a pipe.

_____   The people in the picture probably lived during a period of time where the parks
             weren't polluted.
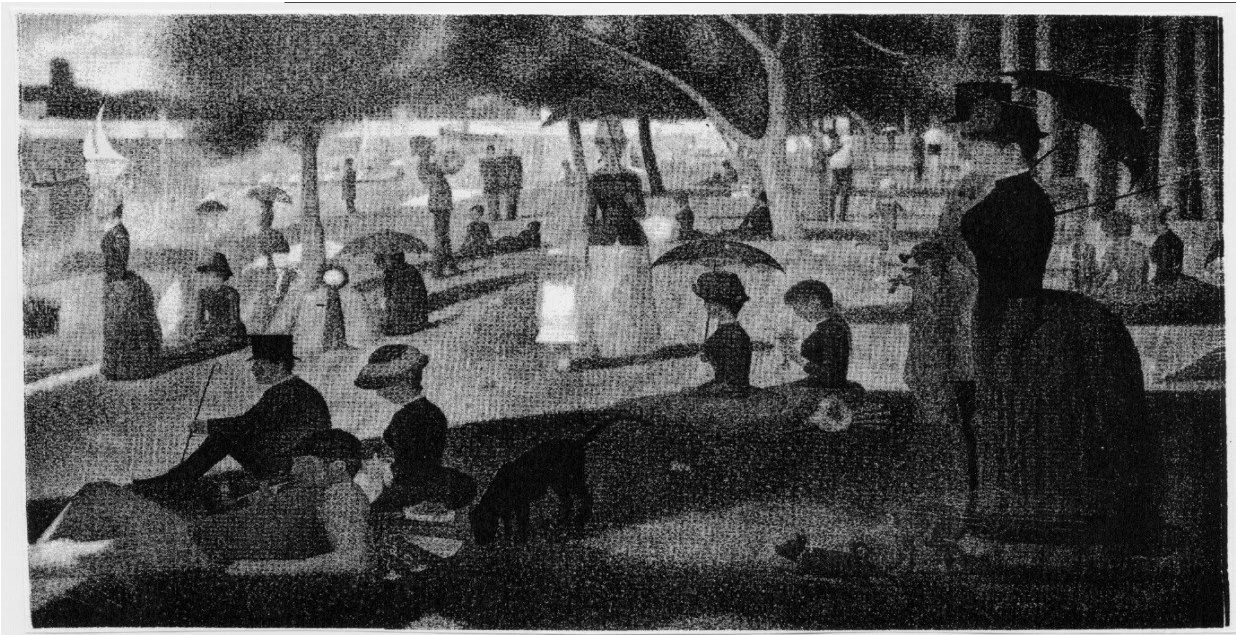
CAL EXERCISE 2

LE 201
ADJECTIVE PHRASES

Approximate time to complete: 15 minutes

NAME:_____   STUDENT #_____   DATE:_____

Write a T next to the sentences that are true and an F next to the sentences that are false.
Example.   ____   The boats that are in the lake are sinking.

                 ____   The women who have umbrellas use them to block the sun.

____   The dog that is black is sitting quietly with his owner.

____   Most of the people who are in the park are wearing hats.

____   A gentleman that is sitting down is holding a cane in his left hand.

____   The man who is lying on his back is wearing a shirt and tie.

____   The people in the picture probably lived during a period of time when the parks
                 weren't polluted.

CAL EXERCISE 1

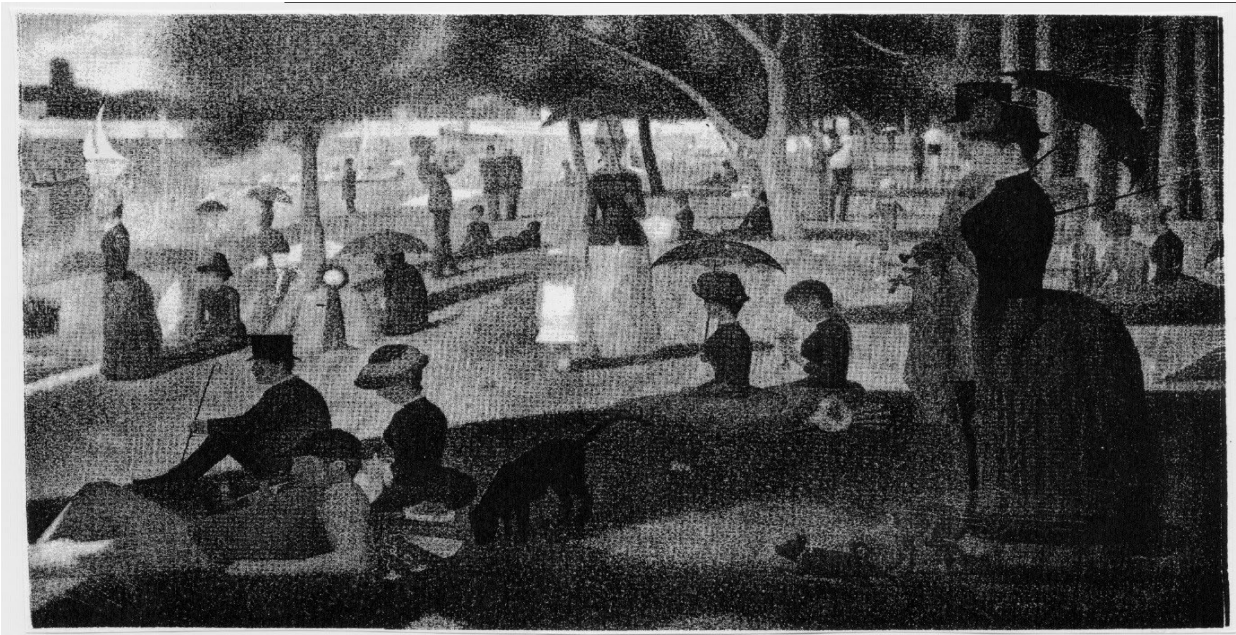**LE 201**
ADJECTIVE CLAUSES
Approximate time to complete: 10 minutes

NAME:_____   STUDENT #_____   DATE:_____

Read the letter from a college student to his parents. The letter has five grammatically incorrect adjective clauses. Write the five incorrect adjective clauses in the space provided.

Dear Mom and Dad,   September 28

      Well, the first week of college has been hectic, but it's turned out OK. My advisor is a lady who is also from Winnipeg, so we had something who we could talk about. Since I haven't decided on a major, she had me take one of those tests show you what you're most interested in. She also had me do one of those personality inventories that they tell you what kind of person you are. According to these tests, I'm a person who is an extrovert. I also found out that I'm most interested in things that involve being on the stage and performing in some way, who doesn't surprise me a bit. I always liked being in school plays, remember ? I signed up for two drama courses. Classes start on Wednesday, and I'm getting to know the other guys which live in my dormitory. It's pretty exciting being here. Not much else. I'll call in a week or so.

                           Love,

INCORRECT ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

CAL EXERCISE 2

LE 201
ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

Approximate time to complete: 10 minutes

NAME:_____   STUDENT #_____   DATE:_____

Read the letter from a college student to his parents. The letter has three identifying and two non identifying adjective clauses (commas are intentionally omitted). Write the identifying and non identifying adjective clauses in the space provided.

Dear Mom and Dad,   September 28

      Well, the first week of college has been hectic, but it's turned out OK. My advisor who is also from Winnipeg had many subjects that we were able to talk about. Since I haven't decided on a major she had me take an exam to indicate my favorite things. She also had me do one of those personality questionnaires where you are told what kind of person you are. According to these tests, I'm an extroverted person. I also found out I'm most interested in things that require being on the stage and performing in some manner which isn't unbelievable to me. I always liked being in school plays, remember? I signed up for two drama courses. Classes start on Wednesday and I'm getting to know the other guys in my dormitory. It's pretty exciting being here. Not much else. I'll call in a week or so.

                         Love,

IDENTIFYING ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

1.

2.

3.

NON IDENTIFYING ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

4.

5.

CAL EXERCISE 2

LE 201
ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

Approximate time to complete: 10 minutes

NAME:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿   STUDENT #＿＿＿＿＿＿   DATE:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

Look at the following sentences and in each case rewrite the sentence according to the suggestion in parentheses and indicate whether the sentence contains a correct or incorrect adjective clause.

Example.   She's the kind of person **whom** others consider shy. (that)

She's the kind of person that others consider shy - correct

1. Are you the kind of person **who** resembles a sunflower open to the world most of the time? (that)

2. This may sound like just a fun activity something **which** is suitable only for get-togethers or for amusing yourself. (who)

3. In the decades since this test has been refined many times and has been validated by the millions of people **who** have taken it. (that)

4. He finds the conversation interesting enough but is just as likely to be imagining a time **when** he was hiking alone in the mountains. (where)

5. Sensors are people **who** are practical and notice what is going on around them. (whom)

CAL EXERCISE 1
LE 201
ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

Approximate time to complete: 10 minutes

NAME:_____   STUDENT #_____   DATE:_____

Look at the following sentences and in each case rewrite the sentence according to the suggestion in parentheses and indicate whether the sentence contains an identifying or non identifying adjective clause.

Example.   She's the kind of person **whom** others consider shy. (that)

She's the kind of person that others consider shy - identifying

1. Are you the kind of person **who** resembles a sunflower open to the world most of the time? (that)

2. This may sound like just a fun activity something **that** is suitable only for get-togethers or for amusing yourself. (which)

3. In the decades since this test has been refined many times and has been validated by the millions of people **who** have taken it. (that)

4. He finds the conversation interesting enough but is just as likely to be imagining a time **that** he was hiking alone in the mountains. (when)

5. Sensors are people **who** are practical and notice what is going on around them. (that)

Appendix F

Journal Questions

1. Explain why you chose this exercise and not the other ?

2. Is this exercise relevant for your personal language learning goals ? Why or why not ?

3. Did you work with any materials (class notes, assessor, names/titles of texts, websites, software, cassettes, people, etc.) to help you complete this exercise?

4. What steps did you take to try to complete the exercise ? What skill did you practice with this exercise ?

5. In what way did this activity help you (or not) to improve your English language ?

6. Was this exercise easy or difficult ? What made it easy or difficult ?

7. Would you recommend this activity to another student ? Why or why not ?

Post Interview Questions

1. What was the difference between the two types of exercises ?

2. Why did you chose the exercises you did ? What affected your choices ?

3. What do you mean when you say one exercise was "easier" ?

4. What are your preferred activities in the CAL ? Why ?

5. Do you prefer to learn English concentrating on meaning or the rules of the language ? Why ?

Appendix H

Teacher Journal Questions

GROUP: DATE:

1. What was the objective (s) of your lesson ?

2. Briefly describe the content and type of activities you and your class did (i.e. lecture on combining sentences, reading for general ideas, oral presentation, textbook exercise, grammar quiz on past tense, etc.)

3. Did you assign any home work or activities for the CAL ? Briefly describe.

4. Did you or any of your students comment on the grammar exercises placed in the CAL ? If you can't remember exact words please summarize.

5. In general how focused on form or meaning was your instruction ? Please estimate on the scale below. A rating of 1 indicates your instruction was entirely meaning-focused. A rating of 9 indicates your instruction was entirely form-focused. A rating of 5 indicates your instruction was equally focused on meaning and form.

Focus on form instruction= requires the student to focus on the form of the language.
Focus on meaning instruction= requires the student to focus on the meaning of the language.

1.......2.......3.......4.......5.......6.......7.......8.......9

General Comments ?

Appendix I

<div align="center">

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT FORM
Researcher: Aaron Emmanuel Ferrante
Master's Candidate
Department of Applied Linguistics
Universidad de las Americas-Puebla
Puebla, México

</div>

<div align="center">

Preferences for Form Focused vs. Meaning Focused Activities
</div>

The complete contents of this form are to be read by, or explained orally in English or Spanish, to all persons interviewed for the purposes of this project. Signing this form will indicate that the person whose signature appears below has been informed of the nature of this project and has given her/his consent to participate as outlined below.

Purpose: You are being invited to voluntarily participate in this study. The purpose of the project is to document and identify the types of preferences students have for learning English grammar in the "CAL" at the Universidad de las Americas.

Procedure: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview which will be audio taped if you give your permission. You may also be asked to check a transcript of the interview for accuracy. Your participation is strictly voluntary.

Final Products: This study is being conducted for the researcher's master's degree at the University de las Americas-Puebla, expected completion date May 2001.

The researcher will transcribe segments of the audio taped interview. Upon request, participants will receive a transcribed copy of the segments of their interview.

Confidentiality: Your name and the name of all participants will be omitted, unless you specify that you wish your name to be used. Similarly, the names of any people mentioned in your interview will be omitted in the thesis.

<div align="center">

Agreement by the Person Interviewed:
</div>

I have read and had explained to me the above information. My signature below indicates
that I understand the above information, agree to participate in this research, and release any audiotapes from my interview (s) to the researcher for use in this project.

_____   _____
Name (please print)   (Date)

_____
Signature

Appendix J

INTRODUCING CAL EXERCISES:

1. It's important that students think the exercises are part of the course and not part of a study (If they know they're part of a study it won't be a natural situation and their choices may be tainted).

2. Tell students they will have different exercises to do each week on adjective clauses in the CAL (please remind them each week).

3. The exercises will be in a yellow folder labeled LE 201 in the CAL. They must ask for the folder from CAL staff with their credential to decide which exercise they would like to do.

4. Tell them that the exercises look the same but actually are different because they ask them to practice adjective clauses in different ways.

5. They must look at both exercises and decide which they would like to do. They should not do both exercises (if they ask if they can do both tell them there will only be enough copies for them to do one or the other)

6. They should not write on the exercises in the folder. Also, they can't make copies of the exercises in the folder (this is so they do it in the CAL environment and the folder doesn't go missing).

7. They give the folder back to the CAL staff and tell CAL staff which exercise they would like to do. CAL staff will give them the exercise.

8. They complete the exercise and the journal questions on the back (the journal questions are identical for both exercises).

9. You will collect the exercises from them each week (please check to make sure their student number, name, and date is on it) and give them credit for having done it. I will collect the exercises from you each week after you have recorded their credit. Each week I will put the previous week's exercise in the CAL with a key so students can check their answers.

Appendix K

LE 201

INSTRUCTIONS

OJO !

DO NOT DO BOTH EXERCISES !
DO NOT WRITE ON THE EXERCISES IN THE FOLDER !

1. THERE ARE TWO EXERCISES IN THE FOLDER

2. THE EXERCISES ARE NOT THE SAME

3. EXAMINE BOTH EXERCISES CAREFULLY

4. DECIDE TO DO EITHER EXERCISE 1 OR 2

5. GIVE THE FOLDER BACK TO THE CAL STAFF

6. ASK THE CAL STAFF TO GIVE YOU EXERCISE 1 OR 2

7. COMPLETE THE EXERCISE AND JOURNAL QUESTIONS

Appendix L

INSTRUCCIONES DEL FOLDER AMARILLO DEL CAL

1. Los alumnos de Isabel Villario del curso LE 201 pueden ver el folder entregando su credencial.

2. No les digan que es parte de un estudio mío. Ellos no lo saben y piensan que es parte de su curso con Isabel.

2. No pueden llevar el fólder para hacer copias.

3. No deben escribir en los ejercicios en el fólder.

4. Después de ver los ejercicios en el fólder decidirán cual ejercicio quieren hacer.

5. Entregaran el fólder y te pedirán por uno de los dos ejercicios. NO DEBES DARLES LOS DOS. DEBEN RECIBIR UNO O EL OTRO.

6. Cuando reciben un ejercicio no pueden cambiar lo por otro después.

7. Va a ver una llave para los ejercicios que pueden sacar la semana siguiente con su credencial. Por favor anota su número de estudiante con la fecha en la HOJA DE OBSERVACIONES cuando vienen a sacar la llave.

8. Si preguntan porque existen estas restricciones di les que son de la Profesora del curso.

9. Por favor anotan en la hoja de observaciones con tus iniciales cosas que confunden los alumnos, cosas engañosas que traten de hacer, comentarios de ellos sobre los ejercicios, cosas que te llaman la atención. Vendré yo cada día para recoger la hoja de observaciones y dejar otra.