

Teaching grammar through different types of input activities

What this study was about and why it was important

This study investigated to what extent two types of input activity, namely focusing on form spotting or form-meaning, are useful for the learning the accusative definite article (*den*) in German. The findings demonstrate that short bursts of listening and reading practice, which focus attention on the meaning of grammatical forms, can help grammar learning.

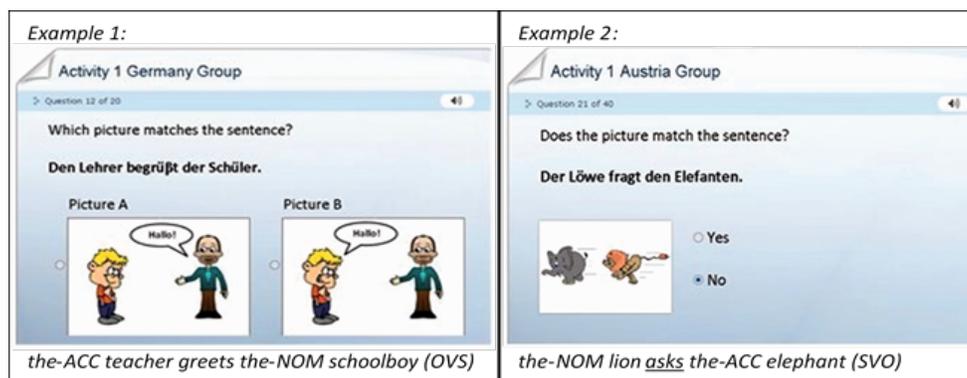
What the researchers did

138 9 to 11-year-old English learners of German as a foreign language, none of whom had learnt about the accusative article *den* in class, were divided into three groups: Two groups were told about the articles *der* (subject) and *den* (object) and then did either [Form-meaning mapping](#) or [Form spotting](#) activities and the third group was a control group.

In the *Form-meaning mapping* (FM) activities, learners had to **connect *den* to the meaning of ‘object’** (and *der* to ‘subject’). (see Example 1)

In the *Form spotting* (FS) activities, learners read or heard exactly the same sentences as in the FM activities, but had to (1) focus on the nouns and verbs in the sentence, for example decide if the sentence matched the picture, and then (2) **‘spot’, for example click on or circle, the articles in the sentence.** (see Example 2)

There were 5 activity sessions, each lasting 50 minutes. All participants completed six tests 1 week before, 1 week after and 9 weeks after the activities, including sentence-level (1) [reading](#), (2) [listening](#), (3) [written gap-fill](#), (4) [speaking](#), (5) [sentence repetition](#), and (6) [sentence reconstruction](#).



What the researchers found

- Both the *FM* and *FS* activities resulted in learning of the grammar rule.
- Both groups **showed progress in after the activity sessions** and maintained the gains **after all tests**.
- On test (6), learners were less able to talk about the grammar rule 9 weeks after the practice sessions.
- The FM group learned the grammar rule better from focussing the learners’ attention on the article meaning.
- The FS group showed similar learning to the FM group as a result of asking the learners to ‘spot’ the articles which drew their attention to their meaning.
- **The findings demonstrate that short bursts of listening and reading practice, which focus attention on the meaning of grammatical forms, can help grammar learning.**

Things to consider

Both the FM and FS groups received the same [grammar explanation](#) at the start, which may be part of the reason why the two types of activity were equally effective. The results may not be generalizable to other ages, language combinations, grammar features, or amounts of practice.

Materials available on <https://iris-database.org>

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