

Teaching grammar through different types of input activities

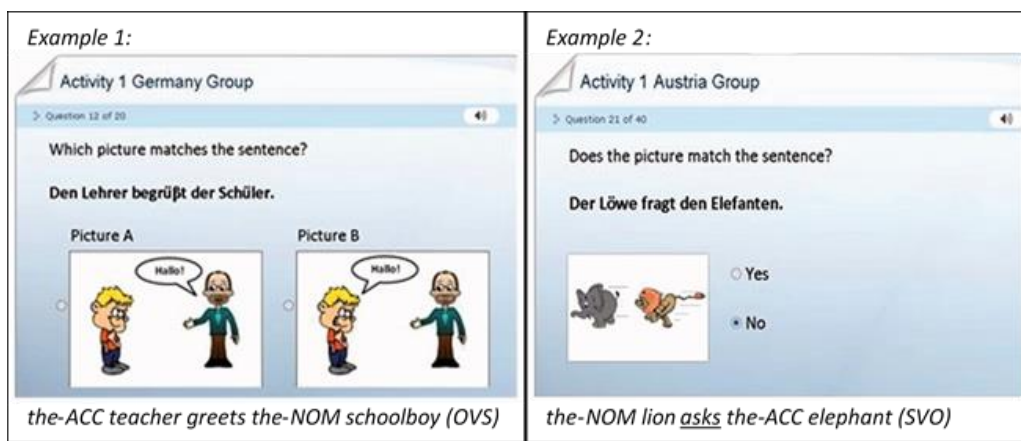
What this study was about

Whether two types of input activity are useful for the learning of the accusative definite article (*den*) in German.

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'). They read or heard a sentence and had to work out who was the subject, and who was the object in the sentence. Half of the sentences were in the order 'subject-verb-object', while the other half were 'object-verb-subject'. This meant that the participants had to pay attention to *den* (and *der*) to work out who was doing what in the sentence. Correct/incorrect feedback was given. (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](#) (listen to the sentence, watch the action, reproduce the sentence), and (6) [sentence reconstruction](#) (arrange the words into a sentence to match the picture, and explain why you put the words in that order).

What they found

Both the **FM** and **FS** activities resulted in learning of the grammar rule. Both groups **outperformed the control group and showed progress in all tests 1 week after the last practice sessions and maintained the gains in tests (1) to (5) 9 weeks later.** On test (6), learners were less able to talk about the grammar rule 9 weeks after the practice sessions.

For the FM group, focussing the learners' attention on the meaning of the articles helped the learning of the grammar rule. For the FS group, asking the learners to 'spot' the articles (after they had first completed a task with the nouns/verbs in the sentence) drew their attention to their meaning, even though it wasn't required to complete the tasks, resulting in learning similar to the FM group. **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 bear in mind

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.

Summarised by Kasprovicz, R.E., September 2017. All materials available from www.iris-database.org/