The Role of Form-focused Instruction
in Second Language Learning

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I. Introduction

1. Grammar Instruction in CLT

Since it is now widely recognized by many teachers that the goal of teaching a foreign or second language is to help the learners acquire communicative ability in the target language, older methods which focused narrowly on teaching the structure of the language has being gradually replaced by communicative language teaching (CLT). However, it has not been clearly identified or explained what CLT consists of, and many theoretical as well as practical questions concerning CLT have been raised: What kind of input should the teacher give to the students? What kind of syllabus should the teacher employ? Should the teacher correct the students performance whenever they make mistakes in the classroom? Should the teacher teach various learning and communication strategies that seem to be effective in developing proficiency in the target language? Should the teacher use only the target language in the classroom? This paper is particularly concerned with what is perhaps one of the most controversial questions regarding CLT, that

is, how to teach grammar.

There are some researchers who claim that explicit grammar teaching should not be incorporated into CLT. Krashen (1981), for example, argues that 'comprehensible input' alone will provide the conditions for learners to acquire grammar of the target language, thus explicit grammar teaching is not necessary. On the other hand, there are many researchers who believe that formal teaching of grammar still plays an important role in CLT (Doughty, 1991, Long, 1983, Pica, 1983.) The report on the studies in Canadian immersion programs (Harley & Swain, 1984) has clearly illustrated the critical problem caused by the lack of grammar instruction in CLT and this caught many researchers' attention. The students in the immersion programs received a great amount of comprehensible input and had many opportunities to communicate about interesting material in a comfortable environment. They were also given ample time and the opportunity to formulate and test their hypotheses in a CLT setting without receiving any formal instruction in grammar. As a result, however, it was observed that the students continued to make numerous errors, especially in the areas of morphology and syntax, including rather basic items. Although it seems only recent that many researchers (e.g. Ellis, 1993) started to make particular reference to the 'comeback' of grammar in CLT, teachers have never discarded the teaching of grammar completely in the class (see Hopkins & Nettle, 1994). I believe it is time to discuss not whether or not grammar should be taught, because the answer seems quite obvious, but it is time to discuss how grammar instruction can be provided effectively in CLT.

It should be noted that the term, pedagogical grammar, connotes a different notion from the traditional one in CLT where language learning is viewed as cognitive processing. Traditionally, there seems to be no clear difference in content between pedagogical grammar and scholarly, linguistic or reference grammar (see Corder, 1973). In fact, the pedagogical grammar was merely a

simplified form of linguistic grammar, and the object of learning a foreign language was to learn linguistic descriptions of the particular grammar. However, pedagogical grammar in CLT is viewed differently from a reference grammar both in scope and presentation. Rea Dickins and Woods (1988) claim that "grammar is the resource available to indicate a number of elements crucial to the appropriate and accurate interpretation of utterances", and they list the examples of those elements as follows: (a) the relationship between the participants in an interaction, (b) the topic being discussed, (c) the time of the event, (d) the mood of the utterance(s),(e) the attitude taken by the speaker. Thus, the pedagogical grammar in CLT has broader scope than traditional grammar because it is related not only to the knowledge about linguistic forms, but also to the knowledge about organizing messages in any communicative act. Moreover, in CLT, the pedagogical grammar changed its status from the object of learning to the aid or means to learning, that is, learning how to communicate in the target language.

2. Input Enhancement as Grammar Instruction

Various attempts have been made in transforming grammar instruction from the object of learning to the aid of learning. Since the conversion from input to intake is considered to be crucial in the learning process[1], Sharwood Smith (1993) emphasizes the importance of 'attention-drawing' in the learners' input, claiming that it can enhance more intake. Various "consciousness-raising" or "input enhancement" techniques have been created and their effects have been empirically tested by many researchers; corrective feedback (Lightbown & Spada, 1990) in which the instructor corrected learners' errors, text manipulation through highlighting and boldfacing the target grammar structures (Doughty, 1991), and a grammar consciousness-raising task in which the learners worked on solving

grammar problems through meaning-focused interaction (Fotos, 1994). Schmidt (1990) argues that simply attending to or perceiving input is not sufficient and he presents the noticing hypothesis that the subjective experience of "noticing" is the necessary and sufficient condition for the conversion of input to intake. Thus, he stresses that noticing plays a crucial role in the conversion from input to intake. Currently, there is a consensus among many applied linguists that increased noticing of some kind is beneficial to the learner (Leeman, Arteagoita, Fridman and Doughty, 1995). The instruction which is specifically designed to increase the learners' noticing of input through consciousness-raising or input enhancement activities or tasks is generally called form-focused instruction. Overall, the previous research on form-focused instruction suggests that the class with focus on form can enhance the learners' acquisition of target grammar structures more effectively than the class with a purely communicative focus with no grammar instruction (Lightbown and Spada, 1990, Fotos, 1993, Leeman, Arteagoitia, Fridman, and Doughty, 1995). However, many questions have been raised regarding this form-focused instruction (see Williams, 1995). This paper presents a study which specifically examined two different types of form-focused instruction and makes some suggestions on the question of how the teacher should select appropriate form-focused instruction for a particular target grammar structure.

II. The Study

1. Subjects

The experiment was conducted in two English classes in the fall of 1995 at a Japanese university. All the participants were sophomores, majoring in economics. This researcher was the instructor of the students. Since the research

was conducted during the 90-minute weekly class over a three-month period, learner absences were unavoidable. Consequently, the learners who attended more than two thirds of the classes and took both the pre and post tests were counted as subjects. There were 49 students (19 in the comparison, 30 in the experimental group) who received the instruction in the first target grammar "subjunctive mood (S. M.)", and there were 54 students (28 in the comparison, 26 in the experimental group) who received the instruction on "passive voice (P. V.)". The students in one class received input enhancement techniques of explicit grammar rule presentation and rule manipulation exercises. This class is called form-focused instruction group A (FFA), and was assigned to be the comparison group. The students in the other class received input enhancement techniques of text manipulation and an enhancement technique designed to draw learners' attention directly to form-meaning relationship using different contexts. This class is called form-focused instruction group B (FFB), and was assigned to be the experimental group. All the subjects took a standardized English test[2], and the results of a T-test comparing the mean scores in the two classes did not show any statistically significant difference (df=26, p= 0 .642). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the students in the two classes could serve as appropriate subjects in the study.

2. Research Hypotheses and Rationales

Research Hypotheses and their rationales are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. The FFB is more effective than the FFA in helping students acquire the target grammar items at level 1 of grammar acquisition, that is, the level of structure.

Hypothesis 2. The FFB is more effective than the FFA in helping students acquire the target grammar items at level 2 of grammar acquisition, that is, the level of

meaning.

Rationales for Hypothesis 1 and 2. The target grammar items in this study are meaning-bearing, complex rules. The findings in the two separate studies conducted by Yan-Ping (1992) and DeKeyser (1995) both show that explicit grammar instruction was effective in teaching straightforward rules rather than more abstract rules. The straightforward rules are the ones that work in a more mechanical way such as the mapping of agent and patient to noun phrases slots, and the morphological properties of the passive construction (see Yan-Ping, 1992). Since the grammar targets in the present study involve hard, complex rules, it is predicted that the learners in FFA will show less improvement than the learners in FFB, in the grammar acquisition at both structure and meaning levels.

Hypothesis 3. The FFB does not demonstrate significant effectiveness over the FFA in helping students acquire the target grammar items at level 3 of grammar acquisition, that is, the level of use in context.

Rationale for Hypothesis 3. Acquiring a target grammar at level 3 requires the knowledge which can identify how to use a target grammar structure appropriately in a certain situation. Therefore, this level involves discourse and social factors. Since the input enhancement techniques used in this experiment are not specifically designed to help learners notice specific "use" of target grammar structure in certain situations, there will not be any significant difference between the subjects in FFA and FFB in the effect on their target grammar acquisition at level 3.

2. Target Grammar Structures and Procedure

The target grammar structures in the study are the subjunctive mood and passive voice constructions. They are considered as difficult or what some researchers call "hard" rules. According to Green & Hecht (1992), "easy" rules include "those that (1) referred to easily recognized categories; (2) could be

applied mechanically; (3) were not dependent on large contexts: for example the morphological dichotomies like a/an, who/which, straightforward cases of some/any, and simple word order" (p. 179). Hard rules, on the other hand, "(1) involve aspect, such as the use of the continuous form or the perfect tense... (2) are semantic distinctions that express a speaker's perspective on a situation... (3) do not allow simple exhaustive descriptions and they are not always governed by features of the immediate linguistic context" (p. 180). According to these definitions, it can be said both target structures in the present study meet all the criteria for hard rules.

There are three reasons why hard rules were chosen as target structures. First, those structures are appropriate for intermediate EFL learners as targets because it was assumed that they have not thoroughly mastered these structures. This assumption was confirmed by the results of pretest on the target structures (see section III). Second, the instructional effects on acquisition of hard rules are the focus of investigation. There seems to be few studies in the past which have attempted to identify the types of input enhancement techniques that are particularly effective in teaching complex grammar rules. Thus, the aim of this research is to investigate whether different types of form-focused instruction facilitate the acquisition of "complex meaning-bearing" grammar structures differently, and if so, how. Finally, the passive voice and the subjunctive mood construction in the Japanese language are very different from those in English. According to Kellerman (1979, 1983), there are two major factors that interact in the determination of transferable elements from first language (L 1) to second language (L 2). One is the learner's perception of the L 1 -L 2 distance, and the second is the degree of markedness of a L 1 structure. Thus, he claims that if two languages are very different, learners will find little available in the way of correspondence, and that the greater they perceive L 1 -L 2 distance, the lesser likelihood of transfer to occur. Since Kellerman's assumption suggests that it is

unlikely that the subjects in this study would use a transferring strategy in order to facilitate their acquisition of grammatical features such as the subjunctive mood and the passive construction, they are considered to be the appropriate grammar targets for evaluating the effects of input enhancement techniques.

Two different types of form-focused instruction were employed in the study. FFA received input enhancement techniques that consisted of explicit explanation of the target grammar structure and sentence formation exercises using the target structures. Ten to 15 minutes were spent explaining the structures of the target grammar on the blackboard. The students wrote down the formation rules in their notebooks. Then, another 10 to 15 minutes were spent involving the students in grammar exercises. The students were then asked to convert some Japanese sentences into English, which required the use of the target grammar. The instructor gave various kinds of sentences which contained different tenses or different subjects so that all the sentence patterns which appeared in the pretest could be covered during the instruction period. In this form-focused instruction, the students' attention was drawn to target grammar items by understanding their formation rules and producing correctly formulated sentences. There was no emphasis on the application of the target grammar items in different contexts.

The other group, FFB, received input enhancement techniques which involved text manipulation by highlighting target grammar items in the stories in texts, and worksheets were provided aiming to enhance students' knowledge of target items particularly at the structure and meaning levels. Three worksheets were provided for each grammar point. On worksheet 1, the simple form of the target grammar rule was presented, and a situational context was provided in which students were asked to produce an appropriate English sentence. About seven or eight different kinds of situational contexts were given in total for each target structure. They were arranged in a step-like fashion so that the learners' knowledge about form-meaning relationship of the target grammar item can be built

Figure 1 A worksheet used for the instruction of subjunctive mood in the experiment

Worksheet　1　　　　　　　　　　　　　　I.D.

Step 1: 用途：（　　　　）にあったことについて（　　　　）に述べる。
形　：助動詞（　　　　）＋（　　　　）＋過去分詞（　　　）
Example: You should have come to the party with me!
（　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　）

Context A: Your friend was supposed to visit you at noon, but he was late.
You began to worry about him. Around 1 o'clock, someone
knocked on the door. It was him! He said "Sorry, I was late!"
What would you say to him? Use "call" in the sentence.
You: "　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　"

Context B: You are very grateful to your father because he financially
supported you throughout your school life. You are graduating
from your university today. What would you say to him? Use
"make it" in the sentence.
You: "Without you,　　　　　　　　　　　　　".

↓　↓　↓

Step 2: 助動詞はshould 以外に（　　　）、（　　　）、（　　　）
など、文の（　　　　）に応じて使うことができる。

Step 3: 上記 (context B) の文では、（　　　　）が、仮定的条件を
表しており、仮定法を用いるべきであることを内容的に促す。

Context C: Your little brother told you that he didn't have any money left
because he had bought the most expensive computer. What would
you say to him?
You: "In your place,　　　　　　　　　　　　".

↓　↓　↓

Step 4: 上記 (context C)の文では、（　　　　）が仮定的条件を表して
いる。

問い："A wise student would not have done such a stupid thing." はどのようなcontext
で使われるでしょうか。簡単なシナリオをつくってみよう。

up through a rational ordering of tasks. One of the worksheets used for teaching the subjunctive mood construction is presented in the previous page.

As can be seen in the worksheet, in the FFB class, the instructor particularly intended to enhance learners' awareness of target grammar items both at structure and meaning levels in the process of communicating in the target language in the provided contexts. Through the worksheets, the learners were able to increase their knowledge about the target structures, starting with simple contexts and moving towards more difficult contexts. Information about the target grammar formation rules was explicitly stated on the worksheets although it did not play the major role in the enhancement techniques in FFB.

3 . Analysis Procedure

In order to examine the previously presented hypotheses, three kinds of tests were designed and administered. They are called grammaticality judgment test, form-meaning judgment test, and appropriateness judgement test, and each test was designed to examine the learners' grammar acquisition at level 1 , level 2 , and level 3 respectively. Several attempts were made in order to make the grammaticality judgment tests used in this study more reliable and suitable: Firstly, the subjects were given instructions before the test, in which they were told to concentrate on the target of the investigation, thus, decreasing the possibility of their being distracted by other irrelevant factors. Secondly, when the subjects encountered any words or phrases whose meanings they did not understand, they were allowed to ask the instructor (of course, questions concerning the grammar target being tested were not accepted). Thirdly, all the question items were examined by conducting item discrimination analysis. Based on this analysis, the items in the pretests that seemed to be problematic were eliminated from the results. The shortened version of grammaticality judgment

tests were administered after the instruction as posttests and the mean scores of pretest and posttest were compared on the two grammar targets.

III. Results and Discussion

1. The Grammaticality Judgment Test

The mean scores of pretests and posttests on each grammar target are presented in the following tables.

Table 1 Mean scores of the pre- and posttests on the subjunctive mood

	Comparison (FFA)	Experiment (FFB)
Pretest	9.316	8.767
Posttest	9.789	10.333

Table 2 Mean scores of the pre- and posttests on the passive voice

	Comparison (FFA)	Experiment (FFB)
Pretest	10.679	10.308
Posttest	10.643	11.845

A T-test of the differences in the scores of the pretest and the posttest in both the comparison (FFA) and the experimental (FFB) groups was run. The results show that although there is no statistically significant difference between the scores in the comparison group ($p=0.370$, $P=0.962$), a statistically significant difference was observed between the scores in the experimental group at the 0.05 level

(p=0.000, p=0.014). The results support hypothesis 2, that is, the FFB is more effective than the FFA in helping students acquire the target grammar items at level 1 of grammar acquisition, that is, the level of structure.

The findings indicate that the input enhancement techniques used in the FFB instruction are superior to those in the FFA instruction in facilitating the acquisition of complex, meaning-bearing grammar items at their structural level. Although the input enhancement techniques used in FFA was designed to draw the learners' attention precisely to the target grammar structures, they were less effective than the techniques used in FFB. This suggests that mastering complex formation rules or structures can be facilitated by drawing the learners' attention to the relationships or interaction between the complex structures and their meaning. Since the input enhancement techniques used in FFA simply required students to get involved in mechanical rule manipulation activities and did not draw their attention to how meaning is reflected in the rules, the students did not seem to have internalized the rules effectively. It can be said that mere mechanical rule manipulation is not sufficient in mastering complex formation rules, but that the learners can be helped more effectively to acquire the rules themselves when the complex meaning-form relationships involved in the rules are specifically emphasized.

2. The Form-meaning Judgment Test

A form-meaning judgment test was administered after the learners received the instruction on the subjunctive mood construction. The test consisted of 15 items. The subjects were asked to read 15 Japanese sentences, and to decide whether they should use the target structure when they translated the sentence into English by circling "yes" or "no" according to their judgment. Correct judgments were marked one (1) and incorrect judgments were marked zero (0) on the subjects' total scores. The purpose of this test was not to test whether they could

correctly formulate an English sentence using the formation rules as was the case in the grammaticality judgment test, but rather it was to test whether they could appropriately match the target structure and its meaning in a certain situation and context. The following are examples of the items that appeared on the test. The English sentences were added to the original test for the purpose of this presentation.

Item 1. もし明日雨が降ったら、わたしは出かけないだろう。
(If it rains tomorrow, I will not go.)
仮定法を　　　　　　使う　　使わない
(Do you use　　　　　　Yes　　No
subjunctive mood)

Item 2. 昨日のパーティーに来ればよかったのに。とっても楽しかったよ。
(You should have come to the party yesterday. It was a lot of fun.)
仮定法を　　　　　　使う　　使わない

The three items which all the students in FFA and FFB answered correctly were eliminated from the results. The mean scores of the form-meaning judgment test are presented in the following table.

Table 3 Mean scores of a form-meaning judgment test on subjunctive mood

	Comparison (FFA) (Total Possible 15)	Experiment (FFB)
Mean Scores	9.5	10.62
SD	1.46	1.372

The following table shows how the subjects in the two groups performed in each question item in the test (Ex=experimental, Co=comparison).

Table 4 The number of people who answered correctly and incorrectly in the form-meaning judgment test

		The number of students who answered correctly	The number of students who answered incorrectly
Q1	Ex	27 (79.4%)	7 (20.6%)
	Co	13 (40.6%)	19 (59.6%)
Q2	Ex	25 (73.5%)	9 (26.5%)
	Co	22 (68.8%)	10 (31.2%)
Q5	Ex	31 (91.2%)	3 (8.8%)
	Co	29 (90.6%)	3 (9.4%)
Q6	Ex	34 (100%)	0
	Co	27 (84.4%)	5 (15.6%)
Q7	Ex	32 (94.1%)	2 (5.9%)
	Co	32 (100%)	0
Q9	Ex	33 (97.1%)	1 (2.9%)
	Co	32 (100%)	0
Q10	Ex	33 (97.1%)	1 (2.9%)
	Co	31 (96.9%)	1 (3.1%)
Q11	Ex	32 (94.1%)	2 (5.9%)
	Co	29 (90.6%)	3 (9.4%)
Q12	Ex	34 (100%)	0
	Co	31 (96.9%)	1 (3.1%)
Q13	Ex	28 (82.4%)	6 (17.6%)
	Co	19 (59.4%)	13 (40.6%)
Q14	Ex	34 (100%)	0
	Co	29 (90.6%)	3 (9.4%)
Q15	Ex	18 (52.9%)	16 (47.1%)
	Co	7 (21.9%)	25 (78.1%)

A T-test analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups at the 0.05 level (df=64, p=0.001). A Chi-square test was conducted item by item, and the items which showed a significant difference between the scores of each group were only item 1, and item 15. They were significant at 0.005, and 0.01 level (X^2=10.387, X^2=6.761, df= 1) respectively.

Since there was a statistically significant difference between the overall scores of the tests in the two groups (df=64, = 0.001), it might be said that the results support hypothesis 3, that is, the FFB is more effective than the FFA in helping students acquire the target grammar items at the level of meaning. However, most items were easy for the students, there were only two items (item 1, and item15) that showed statistically significant difference. It should be noted though that these items had been predicted to be the more problematic items for Japanese learners (see the next paragraph for the explanation) than the other items. Therefore, if FFB instruction group scored significantly higher than the FFA group on the most difficult question items, it seems that we can suggest that the input enhancement techniques used in FFB are more effective than the input enhancement techniques used in FFA. Now, let me explain why item 1 and 15 had been considered to be the most difficult question items.

The Japanese sentences in the two items are as follows:

Item 1. もし明日雨が降ったら、わたしは出かけないだろう。
Item15. 田中さんは会議であんな愚かなことを言うべきじゃなかったよ。

The English translation for the two items are as follows:

Item 1. If it rains tomorrow, I will not go out.
Item15. Mr. Tanaka should not have said such a foolish thing in the meeting.

Thus, the target structure, the subjunctive mood, should not be used in item 1, but it should be used in item 5.

In most of English textbooks written for Japanese students (e. g. The Crown II, 1995, New Horizon II, 1992, Main Stream, I, II, 1995), when subjunctive mood is introduced as a target grammar structure for the first time, example sentences which contain a conditional if-clause seem to be presented earlier than those which do not contain an if-clause. Therefore, it is likely that some learners might consider a conditional clause such as an if-clause as a marker or the prototypical feature for using subjunctive mood, which is, of course, not always the case. According to Rosch's prototype theory, "category membership of central instances was learned before membership of peripheral instances" (1973, p. 142) because prototypes are perceputually and cognitively salient, which facilitates learning. Therefore, it is hypothesized that item 1 and 15 are particularly difficult items because these sentences are not the prototypes of the subjunctive mood for the Japanese learners, and that their answers would be incorrect if they based on their judgment purely on the prototypical features. Item 1 involves a hypothetical " if " clause, but item 15 does not contain the hypothetical clause. Therefore, it was predicted that those subjects who looked for the prototypical feature of the target grammar in the items, that is, a clearly stated conditional clause, would make wrong judgment on those items.

Thus, the fact that the performance of the learners in FFB on those items was significantly more accurate than the performance of the learners in FFA seem to indicate that the FFB had a more positive effect in helping the students construct more native-like rules in their interlanguage system. However, since there were only two items in the test which could not be answered correctly if the learners had based their judgment on the prototype feature, future investigation is needed to obtain research evidence which either confirms or contradicts the results obtained in this study.

3. The Appropriateness Judgment Test

Hypothesis 3 is supported by the results of the appropriateness judgment test on the passive voice. There was no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the FFA and the FFB groups. Although the FFA group scored significantly higher than the FFB group in one item, the results were mixed for the rest of the items: The FFA group scored higher in 8 items, and the FFB group scored higher in 4 items. This implies that the FFB instruction does not seem to have any more facilitative effects on the learners in acquiring the appropriate use of the target grammar items in certain contexts than does the FFA instruction. Several studies have reported that although certain instruction is effective in the learners' receptive processing such as in an interpretation task, often it is not effective in the learners' active processing such as in a production task. For example, In VanPatten & Cadierno's study (1993), although the subjects who received processing instruction were more competent than the group which received traditional explicit grammar instruction in the interpretation task, they were only as competent as the traditional group in the production task. The present study seems to be compatible with those past studies because it suggests that instructional effects are less likely to appear in a task where students' pragmatic knowledge, that is the knowledge which plays a more important role in a production task than in a interpretation task, is required.

IV. Conclusion

The findings in the study imply that it is important to select appropriate consciousness-raising or input enhancement techniques that facilitate the acquisition of grammar targets. The two different types of form-focused instruction resulted in

different effects on the acquisition of complex, hard grammar targets. FFB was more effective than FFA in increasing the learners' target grammar knowledge both at structural and meaning levels. This suggests that the acquisition of complex grammar targets can be facilitated by making the complex relationship between the structure and meaning particularly salient through input enhancement techniques. The input enhancement techniques which do not draw the learners' attention to the relationship between the structure and meaning were less effective. Therefore, when the teacher uses form-focused instruction, it is important to consider the characteristics involved in grammar targets and decide what should be made salient for the learner. In order to find out what types of input enhancement techniques work well in teaching different grammar targets, various types of input enhancement techniques need to be compared and tested in the future.

The form-focused instruction used in the present study did not show any significant difference in facilitating the acquisition of the target grammar at use level. However, the knowledge about how to use the target grammar appropriately in a situation plays a crucial role in communication. Therefore, in order to further examine the role of form-focused instruction, it seems important to investigate its effects in increasing the learners' pragmatic knowledge about the target grammar in the future.

Notes

1 . The term input is generally considered as the language data that the learner is exposed to and that contains meaning (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993, Sharwood Smith 1993). The term intake on the other hand, is commonly defined as the part of input that has actually been processed by the learner and turned into knowledge of some kind.

2 . The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, Form B revised (1965) was used as a standardized English test. The test consisted of three sections,

that is, grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension. The test contained 100 multiple choice questions in total (40 questions in the grammar, 40 questions in the vocabulary, and 20 questions in the reading comprehension section.)

3. This paper is based on the dissertation presented to International Christian University for the degree of doctor of philosophy in 1998.

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