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*Exploring focus on form  
in language teaching*

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Mirosław Pawlak

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## AN OVERVIEW OF FOCUS ON FORM IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

### ABSTRACT

Form-focused instruction is an extremely complex and multidimensional field, the investigation of which is of relevance to both researchers and practitioners and, as such, holds the promise of closing the gap between theory, research and pedagogy. This introductory paper provides a definition of focus on form in language teaching, discusses various interpretations of the concept, describes the past, present and future research directions, and outlines the criteria that successful studies in this area should satisfy. It also briefly presents the organization of the volume and makes a strong case for further empirical investigations of the contributions of teaching formal aspects of language.

### 1. Introduction

Even a cursory look at the tables of contents of professional journals in the field of applied linguistics or the titles of numerous monographs and edited collections brought out by major publishing houses clearly shows what an important issue teaching formal aspects of language has become in recent years. This revival of interest in grammar teaching, currently more commonly referred to as *form-focused instruction*, or simply *focus on form*, can be attributed to research findings demonstrating that an exclusive focus on meaning does not guarantee the attainment of high levels of grammatical accuracy, formal instruction works and its effects are durable, and, equally importantly, purely communicative pedagogy may not be adequate in all educational contexts (cf. Doughty and Williams 1998b; Ellis 2001a, 2005a, 2006a; Pawlak 2006a; Nassaji and Fotos 2007). A major impetus for investigations in this area has also been provided by Long's (1991) seminal distinction between *focus on form* and *focus on forms* as well as such key theoretical positions as the Teachability Hypothesis (Pienemann 1985), the Interaction Hypothesis (Long 1983, 1996), the Output Hypothesis (Swain 1985, 1995), the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt 1990, 2001), Input Processing Theory (Van Patten 1996, 2002) or Skill-Learning Theory (DeKeyser 1998, 2001). All of these developments have contributed to substantially extending the scope of studies of form-focused instruction. This is evidenced by the fact that researchers have now

moved beyond the initial question of whether pedagogic intervention is effective to address such issues as the value of different techniques, the timing, sequencing and intensity of instruction, the effect of treatment in relation to specific features and learner variables, or teacher cognitions about grammar teaching. Moreover, language forms no longer only refer to grammatical structures and the term now also covers lexical, phonological, sociolinguistic or discoursal features, even if research in these domains is still scant (cf. Ellis 2001a, 2005a; Housen and Pierrard 2005a; Williams 2005; Pawlak 2006a).

Given the importance attached to focus on form in language teaching, it may come as a surprise that relatively little research in this area is being carried out in Poland and that there are still few publications dealing with form-focused instruction, let alone such that would reflect the latest theoretical developments, empirical evidence and pedagogical recommendations. One plausible explanation is that, as is the case with most foreign language contexts, formal instruction has never been abandoned, there is a widespread belief that it is efficacious and should be part of any language course and, quite understandably in light of such sentiments, grammar continues to occupy an important place in the available teaching materials. In such a situation, it would indeed make little sense to carry out studies aimed to convince practitioners of the value of grammar teaching whereas the pervasive reliance on the structural syllabus and the PPP sequence discourages scholars from exploring the value of innovative instructional options and advancing solutions that are unlikely to gain popularity. Still, it is necessary to be cognizant of the latest trends in form-focused instruction and undertake research projects seeking to verify their applicability to our setting as such awareness can greatly contribute to enhancing the overall quality of language education.

It is such a pressing need to familiarize theorists, researchers, methodologists, materials writers as well as teachers with current issues in teaching language forms that provided a rationale for compiling this edited collection, which contains contributions by applied linguists from Poland and abroad. Since the field is exceedingly complex, characterized by imprecise definitions, terminological confusion, numerous and often contrasting taxonomies, various theoretical underpinnings, diverse lines of enquiry and often contradictory research findings, the main aim of this introductory chapter is to provide a succinct overview of key issues in focus on form in language teaching. It also presents the organization of the volume and briefly discusses the contents of the papers included in each section.

## 2. Defining *focus on form* in language teaching

Over the years numerous terms have been proposed to refer to pedagogic intervention aiming to draw learners' attention to formal aspects of the TL, perhaps the best-known of which are *analytic teaching*, *instructed second language acquisition*, *instructed language learning*, *formal instruction*, *code-focused instruction*, *form-focused instruction*, *focus on form*, *focus on forms* or simply *grammar teaching* (cf. Stern 1992; Ellis 1994; Spada 1997; Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991; Gass and Selinker 2001; Ellis 2002; Larsen-Freeman 2003; Ellis 2005a, 2006a; Housen and Pierrard 2005a; Pawlak 2006a; Nassaji and Fotos 2007). The existence of such a multitude of labels and the fact that they are used inter-

changeably would not be problematic if they were to mean the same thing, but this is often clearly not the case. While all such terms can be contrasted with *meaning-focused instruction*, which "(...) refers to instruction that requires learners to attend only to the content of what they want to communicate (...)" (Ellis 2001a: 13) and is a characteristic feature of immersion programs, they sometimes describe disparate instructional techniques and place specific demands on the way the treatment should be provided, its timing, intensity or role in the curriculum. Besides, researchers tend to employ different terms in different publications and choose to confine their application to the teaching of grammatical structures on one occasion only to extend it to other language subsystems on another.

Partly responsible for the confusion is Long's (1991) influential distinction between a *focus on form* and a *focus on forms*, where the former involves shifting attention to aspects of the code in response to learner problems as they arise in the process of message conveyance, and the latter refers to traditional instruction based on the preselection of isolated TL features, their systematic presentation and decontextualized practice. As Doughty and Williams (1998a: 4) emphasize, however, "(...) *focus on forms* and *focus on form* are not polar opposites in the way that *form* and *meaning* have often been considered to be. Rather, 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" (emphasis original). Still, with time, the two terms have been subject to different interpretations with the effect that the distinction that Long (1991) envisaged has become somewhat blurred. This is because *focus on form* is no longer confined to corrective reactions as learners are trying to get across genuine messages, with researchers tending to include in this category planned interventions or even such that involve brief, explicit instruction of formal knowledge before the performance of communicative activities (cf. Doughty and Williams 1998b; Ellis 2005a; Williams 2005). On the other hand, as forcefully argued by the proponents of Skill-Learning Theory such as Johnson (2001), DeKeyser (1998) or R. Sheen (2005), *focus on forms* also provides learners with copious opportunities for meaningful communication and can utilize many of the techniques used in *focus on form* (see Pawlak in this volume, for a more detailed discussion of this distinction). Thus, it would appear that in classroom practice there may be little difference between the two approaches at the level of instructional options and what is of much greater significance is whether teachers rely on a structural or task-based syllabus, a point to which we return below.

It is such problems that have prompted researchers to opt for broader and more inclusive conceptualizations of form-focused instruction which encompass practices associated with both of the approaches discussed above. Spada (1997: 73), for example, characterizes it as "(...) any pedagogical effort which is used to draw the learners' attention to language form either implicitly or explicitly. This can include the direct teaching of language (e.g. through grammar rules) and/or reactions to learners' errors (e.g. corrective feedback)". Ellis (2001a: 1), in turn, defines it as "(...) any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form", while Housen and Pierrard (2005a: 2) describe it as "any systematic attempt to enable or facilitate language learning by manipulating the mechanisms of learning and/or the conditions under which these occur". What these

definitions have in common is that they allow a whole spectrum of instructional techniques, ranging from direct rule provision, metalingual explanations and output practice to enhancing the target form in the input, designing communicative tasks requiring its use and employing implicit error correction. Moreover, they do not exclude *a priori* any lesson design or curricular decision, which means that both the PPP and various task-based sequences can be applied, depending on the nature of the instructional target, learner characteristics or the specificity of a particular setting.

Unless clearly indicated otherwise, the term *focus on form* used in the title of this book and the present chapter is also meant to have such a broad application rather than only refer to the kind of incidental shift of attention to the code in Long's (1991) initial conceptualization. This is because, in the opinion of the present author, there is a need to investigate the value of all available instructional options since in the vast majority of classrooms teachers will need to combine them in one way or another to accomplish successful lessons. Another point that needs to be clarified is that, in line with current tendencies in conceptualizing form-focused instruction, the term *form* as used throughout this volume refers not only to grammatical structures but also to lexical, phonological and pragmatic features. The inclusion of relevant contributions is intended to demonstrate that interfaces between form, meaning and use are of vital importance in the case of all language subsystems and to provide a stimulus for more empirical investigations in these neglected research domains.

### 3. Classifications and taxonomies of instructional options in focus on form

Attempts to provide classifications of the techniques and procedures employed in teaching language forms have been made for a long time but they initially centered around the ways in which grammatical structures can be presented and practiced (e.g. Paulston and Bruder 1975; Eisenstein 1980; Sharwood-Smith 1981). These efforts gained momentum and took on a new dimension, however, with the emergence of theoretical positions stressing the role of attention and noticing in the process of language learning (Schmidt 1990) or such that explained how these processes can be assisted through the provision of the right kind of input (Long 1996; van Patten 1996) or opportunities to produce output (Swain 1995). With such developments, it was necessary to devise techniques that would enable integration of pedagogic intervention within communicative activities, and to recognize that research into formal instruction should be extended to include lexical items, phonological features or pragmatic conventions. As a consequence, numerous taxonomies of options in form-focused instruction have been proposed, which, similarly to the definition of the concept itself, have gradually tended to be more inclusive and take into account not only innovative proposals but also quite traditional presentation and practice techniques that teachers commonly apply in their classrooms.

Although Long's (1991) initial distinction has had a major impact on our understanding of form-focused instruction and has contributed to opening up a new and extremely fruitful research agenda, it is too general to inform teaching and too difficult to operationalize for the purposes of empirical investigations. Therefore, Doughty and Williams (1998b), for example, while retaining the key criterion that attention to the

code should occur in connection with meaningful communication, adopt a broader perspective on the concept of *focus on form*. They argue that it can be both *reactive* or *proactive* (i.e. arising from errors committed by learners or planned in advance to address problematic features), *explicit* and *implicit* (i.e. TL features are focused upon with the students being aware of the instructional target or having no such awareness) as well as *sequential* and *integrated* (i.e. preceding or following a communicative task, or being integrated with meaning at all times). Ellis (2001a), in turn, goes one step further and offers a taxonomy which encompasses both traditional instructional techniques and types of intervention falling into the category of focus on form as defined by Doughty and Williams (1998b). He makes a distinction between *focus on forms*, based on the linguistic syllabus and the PPP, *planned focus on form*, which entails planning communicative tasks involving specific TL features and enabling intensive treatment thereof, and *incidental focus on form*, where learners' attention is shifted to formal aspects of language in reaction to problems with comprehension and production of various forms and instruction is extensive. It should be noted that the last category only in part overlaps Long's (1991) original formulation because apart from *reactive focus on form*, or provision of corrective feedback, it includes *preemptive focus on form*, or queries from teachers or learners concerning linguistic items perceived as problematic. A similar view is adopted by Williams (2005), who, apart from *focus on forms*, distinguishes between *planned* and *spontaneous focus on form*, with the caveat that the former can also be *reactive* (e.g. error correction aimed at a TL feature) and *proactive* (e.g. seeding texts with multiple instances of the target form), and in both cases the treatment can be *targeted (intensive)* or *general (extensive)*.

While the classifications proposed by Doughty and Williams (1998b), Ellis (2001a) and Williams (2005) are an important improvement on the initial conceptualization of *focus on form* and *focus on forms*, mainly because they enable better operationalization of the former in research and make its utilization more feasible in classroom practice, they still fail to provide a coherent and detailed system of options that would be approachable both to researchers and practitioners. One taxonomy which comes close to meeting this crucial criterion was proposed by Ellis (1997) and has recently been modified and updated by Pawlak (2006a). It is based on a distinction between *learner performance options*, intended to present a particular form and provide students with opportunities to use it in a more or less deliberate manner, and *feedback options*, aimed to supply learners with negative evidence concerning production of specific TL features. The former are subdivided into *productive* and *receptive focused communication tasks*, designed in such a way that their completion necessitates the use or comprehension of a specific form in the course of message conveyance without this requirement being made explicit, and *feature-focused options*, employed to ensure the mastery of isolated features. When *feature-focused options* are applied, learners are fully aware of the pedagogic goals pursued by teachers who may opt for activities aimed at developing *explicit* or *implicit* TL knowledge. In the former case, they can choose between *deductive* or *direct instruction*, where learners are supplied with rules and apply them in exercises or tasks, and *inductive* or *indirect instruction*, where students are requested to arrive at generalizations on the basis of instances of use of a feature, or through performance of *consciousness-raising tasks* (Fotos and Ellis 1991) or *dictogloss activities* (Swain 1998). The

development of implicit knowledge may involve *output-oriented options*, which require learners to produce the target feature first in highly controlled *text-manipulation activities* and later in freer *text-creation tasks* (Ellis 1997, 1998), as evident in the PPP procedure. Alternatively, it may entail the employment of *input-oriented options*, such as *input enrichment techniques* (i.e. *input flood*, where the frequency of occurrence of a feature is increased, and *input enhancement*, where the feature is made salient through visual highlighting or special stress patterns), *structured input activities* (i.e. such that are intended to trigger the right kind of input processing) (van Patten 1996) or *interpretation tasks* (i.e. such that trigger noticing and cognitive comparisons) (Ellis 1995). Here, learners are not requested to produce the target features but, rather, attend to them in the input specifically contrived to illustrate their use and try to work out form-function mappings. Finally, as regards feedback options, they involve the provision of corrective feedback, which can be *overt (explicit)*, where learners' attention is deliberately directed to the error (e.g. immediate correction followed by a request to repeat the correct form), or *covert (implicit)*, in which case care is taken not to interrupt the flow of communication and jeopardize the meaning-focused nature of the activity (e. g. using a *clarification request* in response to an error or using a *recast* which reformulates the incorrect utterance but preserves its intended meaning).

Another classification of choices in form-focused instruction which might be a useful point of reference for teachers and researchers has also been proposed by Ellis (2005a) and includes five basic categories, many of which overlap with the options characterized above. They are as follows:

- (1) *Explicit instruction*, which "requires students to pay deliberate attention to the targeted form with a view to understanding it" (2005: 717). It can be *didactic*, based on rule provision, or *discovery*, requiring learners to work out how a specific feature functions.
- (2) *Implicit instruction*, which "requires learners to infer how a form works without awareness" (2005: 717). It may involve the use of *non-enhanced input*, in which case learners are requested to memorize data illustrating the use of the targeted form or simply supplied with such data, or the employment of *enhanced input*, where the TL feature is highlighted in some way (e.g. using bolding or italics) to promote noticing.
- (3) *Structured input*, where "instruction requires learners to process L2 data that has been specifically designed to induce 'noticing' of the targeted form and that can only be comprehended if the targeted form has been processed" (2005: 717).
- (4) *Production practice*, where "instruction requires learners to produce sentences containing the targeted form" (2005: 717). This is further subdivided into *controlled practice*, in which case students produce sentences containing the target feature in fill-in-the gap, translation or transformation activities, and *functional practice*, where learners employ the feature in their own sentences in a specific situational context.
- (5) *Negative feedback*, where "instruction consists of feedback responding to students' efforts to produce the targeted structure" (2005: 717). The feedback can be *implicit*, when the correct form is modeled without specifically indi-

cating that an error has been made, or *explicit*, when the student is fully aware that he has produced an inaccurate form.

As Nassaji and Fotos (2007: 15) explain, the value of such taxonomies lies in the fact that they "(...) contribute to our understanding of FFI [form-focused instruction], its elements, and the various ways in which it can be implemented in L2 classrooms", and they provide "(...) a useful conceptual tool that can guide teachers, teacher educators, and researchers in their selection and investigation of various aspects of FFI in both research and pedagogy". Still, valuable as they are, classifications of this kind should not blind us to the fact that it is not only the choice of a specific instructional option or a combination of such options but also issues involved in lesson planning and curriculum design that ultimately determine the type of form-focused instruction provided. Thus, the main difference between, say, *focus on forms* and *planned focus on form* is not the use of direct grammar explanations and input-enrichment techniques, respectively, but, rather, the fact that the former relies on a structural syllabus, where TL features are preselected and taught one by one, whereas the latter represents a weak variant of the task-based approach (Skehan 2002), where attention to form arises from the tasks that learners transact and the problems they encounter. In a similar vein, in the *focus on forms approach* lessons follow the PPP sequence, while *planned* and even more so *incidental focus on form* is viewed as an addition to or an extension of communicative tasks rather than an instructional activity conducted for its own sake. In fact, the basic assumption underlying many of the classifications presented above is that while various instructional options can be applied depending on circumstances, this should only happen within a task-based framework since the use of the structural syllabus and the PPP ignores developmental sequences and does not promote the growth of implicit knowledge (Long and Robinson 1998; Ellis 2002).

Although such a stance might be warranted in situations where learners have abundant in- and out-of-class exposure to the TL or at least have attained high levels of proficiency and only need practice in using different language features in communication, it cannot be applied to all classrooms and situations. Rather, particularly in foreign language contexts, such as the one referred to by many of the contributors to this volume, form-focused instruction should proceed along the lines suggested by the proponents of Skill-Learning Theory but, at the same time, be eclectic enough to draw on alternative techniques, lesson designs and syllabus types. This means that, depending on a specific situation, there is a place in the classroom for such seemingly mutually exclusive options as deduction and induction, output-based and input-based activities or controlled practice and focused communication tasks. There is also no reason why some lessons or lesson sequences should not be taught according to the PPP and others should not involve planned or incidental focus on form, and why the structural syllabus cannot coexist with a task-based or functional one. As the papers included in this collection demonstrate, quite diverse techniques and procedures can aid different groups of learners in gaining greater control over various TL forms, which shows that not only is such eclecticism beneficial but it may also prove to be a practical necessity for teachers.

#### 4. Past, present and future research directions

Research into form-focused instruction has undergone considerable modifications in the last few decades, which is visible in the evolution of the main lines of enquiry pursued. According to Ellis (2001a), early empirical investigations represented three main strands, namely *global method studies*, *comparative studies* and *classroom process research*. The studies falling into the first category included large-scale research projects designed to explore the effectiveness of explicit and implicit instruction, as embodied in the Grammar Translation Method and the Audiolingual Approach (e.g. Smith 1970). The empirical investigations in the second strand centered around the ultimate achievement of instructed and naturalistic learners, and sought to determine whether grammar teaching affects the natural order of acquisition (e.g. Pienemann 1984). As regards studies of classroom processes, they aimed to obtain an accurate and detailed picture of how teachers provide formal instruction and involved observation and description of different aspects of classroom discourse, such as the correction of learner errors (e.g. Chaudron 1977). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, emphasis was shifted to studies which attempted to determine, both for theoretical and pedagogic reasons, the effect of instruction on the acquisition of specific language features (e.g. Day and Shapson 1991) as well as such which, once again, examined the impact of instruction on acquisitional orders and sequences (e.g. Eckman, Bell and Nelson 1988). The main findings of this early research were that it is impossible to unambiguously determine the superiority of any single method, there is a need to investigate the products and processes of instruction, grammar teaching results in greater production accuracy of the targeted features, and there exist developmental orders and sequences which are largely impervious to pedagogic intervention.

Since the late 1990s studies of focus on form have been influenced by major theoretical positions in the field of SLA such as those mentioned in the introduction to this paper, with the effect that researchers no longer seek to determine *whether* instruction works but, rather, *what types* of instruction are most likely to trigger language development (cf. Ellis 2001a). As shown in recent overviews of form-focused instruction (e.g. Doughty and Williams 1998b; Doughty 2001; Ellis 2001a; Nassaji and Fotos 2004; Williams 2005; Ellis 2005a, 2006a; Nassaji and Fotos 2007) and articles published in the latest issues of professional journals, research of this kind is mostly experimental in nature and addresses such issues as:

- (1) the effectiveness of explicit and implicit instruction (e.g. Robinson 1996);
- (2) the effects of drawing learners' attention to TL forms in communicative tasks as opposed to an exclusive focus on meaning and content (e.g. Williams and Evans 1998);
- (3) the impact of raising metalinguistic awareness of particular TL forms in consciousness-raising activities (e.g. Fotos and Ellis 1991; Piechurska-Kuciel 2005) or dictogloss tasks (e.g. Swain 1998; Lapkin, Swain and Smith 2002);
- (4) the impact of deductive and inductive presentation on the acquisition of different aspects of grammar (e.g. Erlam 2003);
- (5) the effect of input enrichment techniques on the acquisition of specific TL features (Trahey 1996; Lee 2007);

- (6) the relative value of structured input activities in comparison with traditional instruction (e.g. VanPatten and Oikarinen 1996), meaningful output practice (e.g. Morgan-Short and Bowden 2006) or enriched input (e.g. Marsden 2006);
- (7) the role of corrective feedback in improving the mastery of specific TL features (e.g. Doughty and Varela 1998; Pawlak 2004; Mackey 2006a);
- (8) the comparison of the effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback, both oral (e.g. Ammar and Spada 2006; Ellis, Loewen and Erlam 2006) and written (e.g. Sachs and Polio 2007).

Many of these issues have also been investigated in descriptive studies, the number of which has grown considerably in the last decade, and there have been attempts to combine the two paradigms with a view to obtaining a more accurate picture of the nature and effects of focus on form (see the following section for a discussion of methodological issues). In the first place, there is a growing body of descriptive research intended to explore how teachers manage to integrate form and meaning in classroom discourse, focusing in particular on the effects of reactive and preemptive incidental focus on form (e.g. Lyster and Ranta 1997; Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen 2001; Loewen 2003; Majer 2003; Pawlak 2005; Lyster and Mori 2006; Y. Sheen 2006; Loewen 2007). An important improvement on this line of enquiry has been the appearance of still rather infrequent studies tapping into teachers' and learners' interpretations of interactional focus on linguistic features (e.g. Carpenter et al. 2006), which can help us better understand, for example, why some types of feedback are more frequent or more effective than others. Descriptive studies of form-focused instruction have also been conducted within the framework of Sociocultural Theory (Lantolf 2006), with the main emphasis being placed on exploring the process of testing hypotheses and constructing L2 knowledge through collaborative dialogue (Swain and Lapkin 2007; Swain, this volume). Finally, there is a substantial body of research investigating teacher cognitions about form-focused instruction which has been primarily concerned with teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching (e.g. Schultz 2001; Pawlak 2006b; Pawlak and Drożdżal-Szelest, this volume) as well as their practices and cognitions in focus on form (e.g. Borg 2003; Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis 2004; see Borg 2006, for a comprehensive review).

The findings of all such empirical investigations have sensitized us to the fact that the nature of the effects and the overall value of formal instruction is a function of a number of mediating factors. As a consequence, in the words of Norris and Ortega (2001: 204), "A more complex agenda has begun to unfold within L2 type-of-instruction research that investigates not only the relative effectiveness of particular instructional techniques but also the potential impact of a range of moderator variables", although it must be admitted that research of this kind is still in its infancy. For one thing, there have been attempts to examine the effect of various instructional options as a function of such learner factors as age, language aptitude, intelligence, working memory or learning style (e.g. Skehan 1998; Robinson 2002; Sheen Y. 2007). Researchers have also sought to determine the properties of particular targeted forms that might influence the effect of intervention on their acquisition in terms of explicit and implicit knowledge (e.g. de Graaff 1997; DeKeyser 1998, 2005; Housen, Vandaele

and Pierrard 2005; Ellis 2006b). What is of vital importance in this connection, there are more and more studies which move beyond morphosyntactic aspects to explore the impact of instruction on lexical (e.g. Laufer 2005), phonological (e.g. Pawlak and Pospieszyska 2003) and pragmatic (e.g. Takimoto 2006) features. Another two promising lines of enquiry are represented by empirical investigations of the timing, duration and intensity of instruction (Lightbown 1998; Doughty 2001; Pica 2007) as well as those exploring ways in which focus on form can be incorporated into communicative tasks and task-based sequences (Ellis 2005a; Skehan 2007; Willis, this volume). Finally, there are studies which seek to apply Cognitive Grammar to teaching specific TL features (e.g. Król 2006; Bielak, this volume), relate the findings of corpus-based research to form-focused instruction (e.g. Barbieri and Eckhardt 2007), explore the ways in which grammatical structures are dealt with in teaching materials (e.g. Nitta and Gardner 2005; Michońska-Stadnik, this volume), and compare the effects of different planning and curricular options (Pawlak, this volume).

All these research endeavors have been instrumental in demonstrating that even though formal instruction is powerless to alter the natural processes of acquisition, it does contribute to language learning, with diverse techniques and procedures being beneficial depending on contextual factors and moderator variables (cf. Ellis 2001a; Nassaji and Fotos 2004; Ellis 2005a, 2006; Fotos and Nassaji 2007). On the other hand, however, our knowledge about the role of formal instruction or the influences impinging upon its effectiveness is still scant and the available research findings are often inconclusive or contradictory, which provides a rationale for conducting further studies. In the first place, it is necessary to carry out replication studies with an eye to verifying earlier findings and, despite considerable advances in this area, extend the research agenda to include even more languages, linguistic features and contexts of instruction. In particular, it is of vital importance to complement the existing body of research with context-specific studies as only by considering the specificity of a particular educational context together with its strengths and limitations can researchers offer pedagogic recommendations that would be both effective and practicable. Secondly, as Ellis (2001a, 2006a) emphasizes, empirical investigations should strive to finally determine the contributions of explicit knowledge and its relationship to implicit knowledge, and be brought even closer to the concerns of practitioners by addressing crucial pedagogic issues. In the opinion of the present author, the latter requirement calls for conducting research in actual classrooms, not only in order to test specific theories or hypotheses but also in response to the problems teachers encounter, and, whenever feasible, in cooperation with them. Such studies should examine the relative value of single instructional options and their combinations as well as explore their effectiveness in relation to specific TL features, learner differences and educational levels. Irrespective of problems in designing valid and reliable research of this kind, it would also be interesting to compare the benefits of various planning and curricular choices, such as the application of the PPP and task-based sequences, reactive and proactive focus on form, etc (cf. Pawlak 2006a). Without doubt, there is much potential in research into learners' expectations and teachers' cognitions about form-focused instruction, particularly if it is related to classroom practices, learning outcomes or the value of different techniques (cf. Borg 2006). Last but not least, focus

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on form research might greatly benefit from falling back upon advances in neuroscience since the techniques of electroencephalography and functional magnetic resonance imaging can help us investigate interfaces between implicit and explicit knowledge as well as the effect of different teaching techniques (cf. N. Ellis 2007).

## 5. Issues in research methodology

Ellis (2001a) claims that, as is the case with other kinds of classroom research, focus on form research reflects either the *confirmatory tradition*, which can be found in correlational and experimental studies, involves manipulation of the learning context and quantitative analysis, and the *interpretative tradition*, which is evident in descriptive, ethnographic and teacher-cognition studies, eschews intervention and emphasizes qualitative analysis of the data. In the case of the confirmatory paradigm, the most typical examples of empirical investigations into form-focused instruction are *comparative* and *experimental studies*. While the former have mainly compared the ultimate levels of attainment and the developmental patterns manifested by instructed and naturalistic learners, the latter have explored the impact of instruction on the acquisition of specific features and the value of different instructional options. Another difference between the two categories is connected with the fact that comparative research has largely been abandoned due to methodological problems and inconclusive findings whereas true laboratory experiments and classroom-based quasi-experiments continue to flourish and produce tangible, albeit sometimes conflicting outcomes. As regards the interpretative tradition, research has mostly utilized *descriptive studies*, which have examined the output produced by instructed learners or the occurrence of preemptive and reactive focus on form in classroom discourse, and *introspective studies*, which have aimed to examine the beliefs that classroom participants hold about instruction provided and their interpretations of specific instances of focus on form. Clearly, there is no reason why the confirmatory and interpretative paradigms should not be combined in some form of *hybrid research*, a solution that is likely to provide valuable insights into the nature and effects of instruction and is becoming popular with researchers (e.g. Mackey 2006a). Also, an important source of evidence about the role of instruction could be *action-research* which teachers undertake to improve on local practices. Although such studies are not sufficiently rigorous and their value is limited, Ellis suggests that "Perhaps SLA researchers should treat the results of action research as hunches or perspectives to be investigated subsequently more formally" (1997: 206).

Regardless of the paradigm adopted, research into form-focused instruction suffers from a number of weaknesses which should make us circumspect about interpreting its findings and offering foolproof pedagogic recommendations on their basis. Norris and Ortega (2001: 201), for example, conclude their meta-analytic review of studies of instructed language learning as follows: "We also found (...) that the state of experimental and quasi-experimental research methods and reporting practices within the domain of studies investigating L2 instructional effectiveness is generally not conducive to the systematic accumulation of knowledge about particular variables". Apart from such woes as investigating clusters of instructional options, treatment incompatibility, inconsistent operationalization of constructs, a failure to

employ pretests, posttests and control groups, scant information about the design or inadequate clarity in reporting the findings, the fundamental problem in such studies lies in the measurement of TL knowledge (cf. Norris and Ortega 2000; Ellis 2001a; Norris and Ortega 2001, 2003).

In the first place, researchers utilize a wide variety of *grammaticality judgment*, *comprehension* and *production tasks* which tap different types of linguistic knowledge in different modes, with the effect that they often produce disparate results. Moreover, there are still quite a few studies, including some contained in this volume, which measure gains in the accurate use of the target form only in terms of highly controlled language production such as that required on a discrete-point test, thus failing to provide insights into the subjects' implicit knowledge, which is a yardstick against which acquisition is most reliably measured. This is undoubtedly a serious design flaw and, therefore, as Ellis (2001a: 79) argues, "(...) until FFI studies, as a matter of routine, include some measure of learners' ability to process a structure under real-operating conditions (as in spontaneous speech), doubts will remain about the nature of the reported instructional effects". Even when such measures are included, however, they differ widely and the production they elicit is often far from spontaneous (e.g. sentence formation on the basis of a set of prompts), not least because designing a communicative task requiring the use of a specific feature may pose a major challenge (Loschky and Bley-Vroman 1993). It is such problems that have motivated researchers such as Ellis (2005b, 2006a) and Erlam (2006) to experiment with different types of tasks with an eye to designing reliable and valid measures of explicit and implicit knowledge.

The measurement of TL knowledge is also connected with the permanence of treatment gains since improvement in the accuracy of use of a particular structure immediately after the intervention does not guarantee that it will be maintained over time. Thus, it is of paramount significance to incorporate into research designs not only immediate but also delayed posttests, a requirement that quite a few studies still fail to meet (Norris and Ortega 2000). Besides, it would be even more beneficial to plan two or more delayed posttests which should be sufficiently spaced so that researchers can obtain evidence either for attrition of the gains or competence beginning to emerge after an incubation period. In addition, the inclusion of multiple measurements would enable researchers to focus not only on the accurate production of TL features but also trace the processes of interlanguage construction such as the subjects' movement through developmental stages (Doughty 2003). Obviously, problems in appraising the effects of intervention also apply to descriptive studies of classroom discourse and action research projects since the former typically investigate them in terms of uptake, or successful incorporation of the correct form in subsequent output, while the latter use imperfect tools and are not likely to evaluate the statistical significance of the observed changes in performance.

All of this shows that some important points have to be kept in mind when conducting form-focused instruction research. When it comes to experimental studies, they should best be classroom-based, include a control group and measure treatment gains by means of a pretest, an immediate and at least one delayed posttest, scheduled several weeks after the treatment. It should also be remembered that treatments

should not be too short, both explicit and implicit knowledge should be tapped in terms of production and reception, the reliability of outcome measures should be reported and sufficient information about the design should be provided to facilitate replication. Moreover, while cross-sectional research has provided useful insights, it should be accompanied by longitudinal studies which would illustrate the evolving status of a particular form in the interlanguage, describe the stages of its acquisition, often taking into account L1 influence, and better assess the subjects response to the treatment (cf. Norris and Ortega 2000; Ellis 2001a; Doughty 2003; Norris and Ortega 2003). At the same time, in the opinion of the present author, there is no reason why, as postulated by Norris and Ortega (2001) or Ellis (2005a), such investigations should only examine isolated instructional options, mainly because actual teaching inevitably entails the integration of various teaching devices. As regards descriptive research, the effect of preemptive and reactive focus on form can be assessed not only in terms of uptake but also on the basis of tailor-made posttests, and our understanding of its value might greatly benefit from the inclusion of introspective and retrospective instruments of data collection such as think-aloud protocols or stimulated recall (cf. Mackey 2006b). There is also a need to conduct hybrid research which would incorporate elements of quasi-experimental and descriptive studies, thus forging links between learning outcomes, what happens in the classroom and teachers' and students' perceptions. Finally, it would be imprudent to entirely abandon comparative studies since, when carefully designed to include a process component, they can become powerful tools in evaluating the effects of instruction at the level of organization of single lessons and lesson sequences.

## 6. Organization of the volume

Although the task was not easy given the diversity of the contributions, a decision was made to divide the book into four parts containing articles sharing a concern with theory, practice and research or dealing with similar topics. In order to help readers more easily identify the issues which are of interest to them as well as to enhance clarity and coherence, the papers in each part are grouped according to the theme they touch upon rather than alphabetical order.

Part I, entitled *Interfaces between theory and practice*, has five contributions seeking to illustrate how different theoretical positions can serve as a basis for teaching formal aspects of language. In the article opening this part, Danuta Gabryś-Barker uses evidence from cognitive psychology and neurolinguistics to make a case for drawing on a multiplicity of dimensions and perspectives in teaching grammar as well as viewing implicit and explicit instructional approaches as complementary. Anna Nizegorodcew, in turn, combines SLA, psycholinguistic and pragmalinguistic perspectives to illustrate the value of teachers' feedback in making students aware of their use of inaccurate forms. She stresses the importance of explicit teacher feedback and argues that learners' awareness of such negative evidence is an indispensable aspect of instruction. In the third paper, Terence Odlin demonstrates how differences in the ways English and Spanish encode subjective meaning may result in comprehension problems for the native speakers of the former and argues that effective teaching should address such

issues. Merrill Swain draws upon the tenets of the Output Hypothesis and Sociocultural Theory to show that output can function as a socially-mediated cognitive tool. She argues that collaborative dialogue in which learners reflect on language use triggers construction of TL knowledge and helps them to perform beyond their competence, comments on how such interaction can be investigated, and discusses the ways in which it assists learning strategic processes and language forms. Finally, Szymon Wróbel outlines the cognitive theories of language proposed by Chomsky, Langacker and Jackendoff, explains how they conceptualize rules of mental grammar and reflects upon their implications for foreign language pedagogy.

Part II, *Research into teaching and learning of language forms*, brings together six contributions reporting the findings of studies investigating the effectiveness of focus on form in teaching specific TL features and learners' use of such forms. The first paper by Jakub Bielak reports the results of a study which compared the relative value of explanations grounded in cognitive and standard descriptive grammars in teaching English possessives. Although the former proved to be more effective, the author argues that more research is needed to show the utility of Cognitive Grammar in language pedagogy, emphasizes the challenge of translating it into pedagogically-oriented explanations, and acknowledges the potential value of traditional grammars. Another application of Langacker's linguistic description to form-focused instruction is made by Agnieszka Król-Markefka who describes the results of a diagnostic research project which investigates Polish learners' use of English articles. Basing upon process-oriented perspectives on the role of metalinguistic knowledge, she argues that errors in the use of the targeted forms result from the inadequacy of pedagogic rules and claims that such rules should be founded on analyses proposed by Langacker's cognitive linguistics. Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak addresses the role of production-oriented and comprehension-based instruction by exploring the effect of output practice and interpretation tasks on productive and receptive mastery of English inversion. The findings are mixed and lead her to suggest that both types of pedagogic intervention are effective and should be combined in teaching language forms. Mirosław Pawlak, in turn, compares the relative effectiveness of the focus on form and focus on forms approaches in the teaching of English past unreal conditional. On finding neither to be superior on measures of explicit and implicit knowledge, he advocates integrating the two options in classroom practice and illustrates how this goal could best be accomplished. In the fifth paper, Ronald Sheen questions the current advocacy that incidental learning promotes passage through developmental sequences and eventually leads to accurate production of TL forms. He presents the results of a cross-sectional study in which meaning-focused instruction provided over the period of five years is unlikely to trigger significant grammatical change in the production of English third-person interrogatives and argues that explicit pedagogic guidance is a necessity when grammatical accuracy is the goal. In the last contribution in this part, David Singleton, Justyna Leśniewska and Ewa Witalisz support the claim that there is continuity between grammar and lexis, and demonstrate empirically that advanced learners of English differ from native speakers in lexical choices in adjective phrases where the adjective is preceded by an intensifier, a straightforward structure that exists in Polish and English.

Part III, *Focus on form in classroom practice* includes five articles presenting specific techniques and procedures that can be employed in teaching linguistic items. It opens with a contribution by Edward de Chazal who describes and appraises a series of language lectures delivered as a component of English for Academic Purposes program, arguing that such a traditional deductive approach may encourage learners to explore target language phenomena. Subsequently, Dave Willis discusses the components of a task sequence, makes a three-way distinction between a focus on meaning, language and form, and demonstrates how they can be accomplished in a task-based lesson. Since the contrast between learner-driven focus on language and teacher-led focus on form is of particular relevance to him, he illustrates how each fits in with the stages of a task-based teaching sequence. Task-based learning is also the focus of the paper by Aleksandra Kledecka-Nadera in which she presents and evaluates a specific instance of a structured communicative task intended to aid learners in mastering the use of gerunds and infinitives. In the next paper, Piotr Cap introduces a pragmatic perspective by exploring the applicability of pragmatics-based instruction to the explanation of a number of grammatical phenomena such as the passive, inversion and cleft sentences. The part closes with a contribution by Ewa Waniek-Klimczak who shows how incidental focus on form can be applied to pronunciation instruction. She argues that this approach is particularly useful in teaching stress and rhythm while traditional focus on forms instruction plays an important role in raising learners' awareness of systematic differences between the L1 and TL sound systems as well as contrasts within the foreign language.

Finally, Part IV, entitled *Teacher training, instructional materials and educational policy*, contains five papers dealing with variables somewhat external to classroom practice but exerting a considerable impact on learning outcomes. First, Michael Swan discusses a number of conceptual complexities faced by foreign language teachers, connected with the notion of grammar, the distinction between form, meaning and use, selection of instructional goals and effective teaching and learning. He highlights some common misconceptions in these areas and argues that teachers should not be overly concerned with theoretical issues but, rather, channel their energies into providing instruction that is suitable for a particular group of learners. Subsequently, Miroslaw Pawlak and Krystyna Drożdżal-Szelest discuss the findings of a study which seeks to investigate prospective teachers' beliefs about grammar, grammar learning and grammar teaching, and then use them as a basis for proposing a set of guidelines for teacher training programs and identifying future research directions. The next two papers are concerned with teaching materials. Anna Michońska-Stadnik analyzes four elementary school coursebooks with respect to the presentation and practice of grammar and vocabulary, and shows that, despite attractive layouts, they contain many unrealistic and outdated techniques, which should make teachers wary about the materials they choose. Andrea Nava, in turn, analyzes the descriptions of the passive found in seven pedagogic grammars for ESL/EFL teachers with the help of the framework of pedagogic options in grammar teaching proposed by Ellis (1997). It turns out that such resources operationalize the acquisition of the structure in terms of problems which are explained in keeping with the findings of SLA research but, when providing guidelines for teaching, there is a marked preference for traditional error-avoiding output

practice. In the last contribution, Waldemar Markiewicz discusses language education in the reformed secondary school curriculum in Poland, placing particular emphasis on the role of grammar and addressing the questions of whether and how it should be taught.

## 7. Conclusion

As the present overview has aptly demonstrated, form-focused instruction is an exceedingly complex and multidimensional domain, the investigation of which poses a formidable challenge. This difficulty is mainly the outcome of huge terminological confusion, conflicting interpretations of similar concepts, diverse theoretical perspectives, the proliferation of partly overlapping divisions, still limited scope of relevant research as well as such methodological problems as inconsistent operationalization of variables, imperfect measurement tools and the frequent failure to determine the durability of treatment gains. As a consequence, the findings of focus on form studies have been fragmentary, indecisive and sometimes contradictory, with the effect that they do not provide a solid basis for making confident and consistent pedagogic recommendations. Such a state of affairs is a cause for concern since the role of form-focused instruction is a line of enquiry regarded as particularly relevant for teacher education, one which may contribute to bridging the gap between theory and research, on the one hand, and language pedagogy, on the other (Ellis 1997, 1998; Nassaji and Fotos 2007). Therefore, there is an urgent need to continue in our efforts to disambiguate the complexities of form-focused instruction by conducting further research along the guidelines outlined above, amending the existing theoretical models, and, most importantly perhaps, familiarizing practitioners with such issues, thus translating theory and research into classroom practice. It is hoped that the papers included in this volume will promote the attainment of these goals and help applied linguists, materials writers and teachers enhance the quality of foreign language education.

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# PART I

## INTERFACES BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE



*Danuta Gabryś-Barker*

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COGNITIVE AND NEUROLINGUISTIC  
EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF  
COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES  
TO L2 GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the issue of L2 grammar instruction and two complementary approaches to it, the implicit (covert) and explicit (overt) ones. This is an ongoing discussion which bears directly upon the choice of the most appropriate approach to be adopted in L2 grammar instruction in the FL classroom. The extreme positions taken by traditionalists i.e. the Grammar Translation Method or more modern approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching no longer seem to be satisfactory – indeed have they ever been? Evidence gathered from cognitive studies and more recently neurolinguistic research shows that developing grammatical competence means both: 1) the ability to process consciously and use conscious knowledge but also 2) to produce grammatical patterns automatically via activation of implicit knowledge. Grammar is biologically grounded and mentally complex and this complexity is reflected in multifaceted ways of learning it. Therefore, teaching also has to take account of the variety of perspectives and dimensions. The article argues for this multiplicity and reviews various research findings which suggest that the two approaches are like ‘the yin and the yang’, to quote the metaphor used by N. Ellis (2005).

## 1. Introduction: Research methodologies in L2 acquisition and learning

Traditional approaches in SLA research studies are subject to controversy and produce conflicting results. This is obviously due to the complexity of the issues investigated, multiplicity of interacting variables and a human focus – individual variability – cognitive and affective – not always open to ultimate interpretations but for most of the time in a state of fluctuation and change. We are more able to see patterns and tendencies than find complete theories and models to explain the researched issues. We often get soft data which allows for multiple interpretations. It also seems that not enough of a multidisciplinary in research is employed. Applied linguists in SLA re-

discover what has been investigated for example some time ago in cognitive or educational psychology but which has seldom found its way into SLA discussions.

These days one of the relatively fast growing areas but certainly more and more popular and concerned with issues of language: acquisition, learning, processing etc. is observed in neurolinguistics. This new branch of science builds on the technological achievement of neuroimaging and on clinical research carried out on people whose language powers are impaired because of different types of brain disorders (e.g. aphasia, dementia). Neurolinguistic studies, by investigating localization of functions in different brain areas and showing different aspects of language processing (spatial and temporal), demonstrate how different language competences contribute to comprehension and production processes at the level of conscious (deliberate and controlled) as well as subconscious (automatic and uncontrolled) processing. In this, neurolinguistic studies may offer new possibilities for the development of SLA theories and models. These contributions can be seen on three levels:

- explanatory: the development of explicit theories of language and language acquisition in support of existing hypotheses and assumptions;
- diagnostic: in the case of special educational needs learners (e.g. blind or dyslexic learners) in determining their aptitudes and learning profiles;
- practical: in the application of language teaching methods, techniques and materials specific to a context or an individual learner (Gabrys-Barker 2006: 84).

Paradis (2000: 179) sees quite clearly the value of neuroscience in studying SLA processes and highlights some of its benefits:

(...) the role of cerebral structures underlying implicit linguistic competence, metalinguistic knowledge and pragmatic ability, and through the combination of both experimental and clinical behaviour studies on the one hand, and brain imaging studies using various techniques on the other to determine the relative reliance on these structures (as well as mechanisms responsible for motivation) in the acquisition, representation and processing of native language(s) and language(s) learnt or acquired in life.

The multidisciplinary character of research in SLA advocated above can be seen in the combination of cognitive and neurolinguistic perspectives and methodologies employed to explain language acquisition/learning phenomena.

## 2. Grammar in different approaches to L2 language instruction

I would like only to highlight here the major focus and objectives in L2 teaching concerning the issue of grammar found in what can generally be described as the traditional or conventional approach versus more modern language teaching methodologies. Approaches are generally defined at two interacting levels:

- (1) *theory of learning* (the psychology of learning: what are the processes involved in learning and consequently how do they translate into a classroom context?), and
- (2) *theory of language* (what kind of system is language and how does it function?).

The adoption of and belief in a certain approach will determine the methodology of instruction in terms of the main objectives, materials, classroom tasks and, consequently, the roles that teachers and learners are expected to perform to reach their pre-defined objectives. Hence, a conventional classroom is seen as teacher-dominated, whereas a more modern one as learner-centered. Since these are quite well-known things, I will just try to summarize the feature we are interested in here, which is the position of grammar in these two, very generally delineated approaches. Although they are discussed here as extremes, it has to be understood that in reality they exist in a certain continuum or operate eclectically depending on the teaching context (see Table 1).

Approach	Method	Objective(s)	Grammar	Type of instruction
CONVENTIONAL (behavioristic psychology and structural linguistics)	Grammar translation	Grammatical correctness	Focus on accuracy	Explicit rules, rote learning, L1 use
	Audiolingual method	Grammatical correctness, reproductive speaking	Accuracy, errors not allowed, elimination of L1 and transfer, patterns (structures)	Drills, pattern practice, no explicit rules
UNCONVENTIONAL (humanistic psychology, cognitive psychology, transformational – TG grammar and cognitive grammar)	Humanistic methods (Suggestopedia, The Silent Way, CLL)	Creativity (communication), development of self, role of affectivity	Learner generated, discovery learning	Visualization, drama, acting out, multisensory teaching
	Communicative teaching (CLT)	Communicative competence (effectiveness)	Implicit, no rules, focus on fluency, no L1 (initially)	Interaction, immersion in authentic language (initially), learner-centered (focus on learners' needs)

Table 1. General outline of approaches to L2 grammar instruction.

As can be seen from the table, the place that grammar occupies in different approaches ranges from L2 grammar being the center of attention (the conventional approach) to grammar being neglected or eliminated (the unconventional approach). Of course, elimination of grammar in L2 instruction is an unrealistic goal, as even very basic communicative situations require some sort of competence in grammar to understand and/or to produce comprehensible messages. However, what is observed here is a different understanding of how grammar is learnt: explicitly via rules, hence grammar learning becomes the focus of instruction and accuracy of language production the ultimate goal, or implicitly via exposure and language practice in communica-

tion, so that implicit learning of grammar, i.e. subconscious learning, can be seen as a by-product of interaction.

These two opposite treatments of L2 grammar derive from the ongoing debate as to the place of explicit and implicit knowledge, and, consequently, the type of instruction that would be most conducive to the development of communicative competence. And although it would be very misleading to talk about the predominance of communicative language teaching (CLT) in L2 instruction these days, since CLT, as it was first understood, has undergone a long evolution and really is an eclectic method that still emphasizes the need for a communicative focus, it has found more and more visibly space for explicit grammar instruction and even the role of L1 in the L2 teaching process. The failure of traditional methods to help learners to communicate creatively and of communicative teaching to create fully competent L2 language users (not just pidginized ones) clearly points to the need for a happy medium' in teaching grammar. Numerous studies on form-focused instruction – therefore very much grammar-oriented (for an extensive overview see Pawlak 2006) – show the effectiveness of this approach, but they also point out that form-focused instruction is a necessary condition to become communicatively effective (to a different degree in different educational contexts). Pawlak concludes the discussion on form-focused instruction in the L2 classroom context as follows:

(...) not only does form-focused instruction enhance the overall effectiveness of classroom language learning, but it may also be a necessity in some contexts, particularly when learners aim to go beyond mere communicative ability and attain high accuracy levels. In the first place, language classrooms usually fail to constitute an acquisition-rich environment and even immersion programs tend to produce learners who can communicate effectively but do so inaccurately and inappropriately (2006: 249).

N. Ellis (2005: 339) sees these two different approaches to language instruction as relating to two different kinds of learning, which call for different types of instruction:

(a) that implicit and explicit language learning are different (b) that they promote different aspects of language proficiency, and (c) that attentional focus in input processing and output processing provide different opportunities for the interface of explicit and implicit knowledge, when taken together, have simple but profound consequences for language learning and instruction.

As a consequence, there is the need to develop: "(...) a balanced learning curriculum that provides opportunities for meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, form-focused learning, and fluency development" (2005: 339).

### 3. The biology of grammar

The basis for any effective approach to language instruction derives from understanding what language stands for as a system; here it relates specifically to an understanding of what grammar is as a linguistic and cognitive (processing) phenomenon. In their

discussion of what the concept of grammar stands for, Anderson and Lightfoot (2002) view it as a *language organ* which is biological in nature. Also Ullman (2006: 273) admits that the study of the biology of language has and will have an ever growing impact on our understanding of how language works:

(...) as the study of all the biological bases of language is increasingly integrated with the investigation of the processing and representation of language, our understanding of the biocognition of language, and of its implications for the whole host of larger issues, will grow dramatically.

With reference to “the biology of grammar”, Ullman (2006: 264) also highlights the fact that the biological basis of the cognition of syntax has not yet been thoroughly investigated and hence understanding of it lags behind, studies of the lexicon and generally conceptual semantics, for example. He justifies this fact by pointing out the complexity of grammar. This complexity relates not only to the surface structure of syntactic patterns (sentences, utterances) but also to the fact that much of it is implicit and innate – if we wish to take a UG perspective on language.

Lightfoot and Fasold (2006) in their discussion of the characteristic features of grammar (more precisely, sentence structures) state:

Perhaps the most startling thing about the structure of sentences is not about structure at all, but the fact that much of grammatical structure does not have to be learned. People ‘know’ a lot about what is or isn’t a possible grammatical structure without having been taught, or even having the right kind of experience to have learned it. Instead, there appears to be a language organ that encompasses a person’s language ability, with its own intrinsic properties. These properties determine much of what the ultimate structure of someone’s grammar will be, independently of their experience (2006: 129-130).

This is the well-known poverty-of-the-stimulus argument quoted in defense of the existence of innate language knowledge. The neurolinguistic perspective on innateness taken by Elman et al. (1996, quoted in Dąbrowska 2004: 60-61) sees innateness as a three-dimensional phenomenon represented by human genomes (‘bodies’ coding information):

- (1) *Representational*: the genome prespecifies the neural microcircuitry required for the activity, thus in effect endowing the organism with innate knowledge.
- (2) *Architectural*: the genome specifies the general characteristics of the processing system such as the types of neurons and their properties, the types of neurotransmitters, the degree of interconnectivity in various regions of the brain, and the overall pattern of interconnectivity (i. e. which brain regions are connected and their characteristic sources of input and output).
- (3) *Chronotopic*: the genome controls the timing of the developmental processes which build the brain, such as the number of cell divisions at particular stages of development and the patterns of synaptic growth and pruning in various regions.

It is also believed that genetically encoded information and the ability to process and compute data (language input) grow with the development of connectivity resulting from external factors such as experience and interaction with the environment, so they are not purely innate – even in the case of L1. The latter – the external context – obviously has important implications for L2 language acquisition.

Lightfoot and Fasold (2006) highlight other characteristic features of a grammar system that can be explained from the perspective of Universal Grammar and the innateness argument:

- *compositionality* – sentences are composed from phrases to clauses and sentences via projection from mental lexicon and merging operations;
- *recursion* – no limitations of grammatical processes, an infinite number of sentences can be produced by the use of recursive devices such as adjunction, embedding and coordination;
- *restrictions on recursion* (e.g. on deletion and movement within a sentence) – often innately known by language users.

This formal model and understanding of grammar (syntax) is juxtaposed (but in reality complemented) with a functional approach, stating the importance of language use and its significance for flexibility of language structure. It seems that this approach gets a more favorable reception these days. However, it may be the case that only these two approaches combined can give a truer picture of language: its formal descriptions as reflected in some degree of innateness (UG) and some degree of learnability through experience or language use. These assumptions relate to the mother tongue (L1), but also to L2 contexts.

The descriptive characteristics of grammar, as presented by Lightfoot and Fasold (2006), reflect universal properties of all languages and language use. However, within this “intrinsic part of the language organ” (2006: 122) significant differences operate in the syntax of different languages. This of course is of particular importance in the L2 context: the extent to which innate principles will influence L2 syntax development and result in, for example, language transfer. One of the major challenges of L2 instruction is to create *intrinsic mechanisms* for L2 production from conscious to automatic processing (which is characteristic of L1).

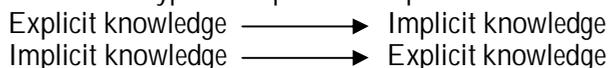
The innateness position as presented by Chomsky and his followers, with its emphasis on biological ability to acquire languages, is often contradicted by the position taken by connectionists, mostly cognitive psychologists. The connectionist view is that linguistic knowledge

(...) emerges gradually as learners acquire new sequences, restructure their representations of old sequences, and, over time, extract underlying patterns that resemble rules. Linguistic knowledge in this sense comprises an elaborate network of nodes and inter-node connections of varying strengths that dictate the ease with which specific sequences or rules can be accessed (Ellis 2005: 142).

Both of the positions, innatist and connectionist, emphasize the implicit character of linguistic knowledge as primary. Explicit knowledge is seen as a separate domain, de-

veloped by different mechanisms of learning/acquisition (2005: 144) which is also supported by both approaches.

This strong belief in separation, as proposed among others by Hulstijn (2002) and in neurolinguistic research (Paradis 2004), is strongly contradicted by the studies of De Keyser (1998) who claims that the following processes of conversion are possible and result from different types of exposure and practice:



The weak interface position, in its various modifications, as described by Ellis (2005: 144), "(...) acknowledges the possibility of explicit knowledge becoming implicit but posits some limitations on when and how this can take place". These limitations relate to:

- the developmental stage of a learner;
- the learner's ability to 'notice' and apply the already known rules;
- the ability to use explicit knowledge to create learner output.

No matter which position is dominant, there is no question that explicit knowledge is once again given more significance in learning, especially in grammar learning processes as this language sub-system is the most rule-grounded.

#### 4. Neurolinguistic mechanisms in SLA (Paradis 2004)

Paradis (2000) believes that in our language functioning – be it monolingual or bilingual/multilingual – we essentially rely on one neurofunctional system responsible for language(s) processing which works by accessing different subsystems responsible for different languages (the Subset Hypothesis). This ability to access different subsystems varies for different languages of a multilingual, so brain potential is not equally well applied in all languages.

Competences	Mechanisms (modules)
Cognitive system	1. conceptual representation (language independent) 2. lexico-semantic representation (language dependent) 3. comprehension of messages received 4. formulation of messages
Implicit linguistic competence	Internal grammatical system at the level of: 1. phonology 2. morphology 3. syntax 4. semantics
Explicit metalinguistic competence	Conscious knowledge monitoring: 1. comprehension 2. production (correctness of an utterance)
Pragmatic competence	Registering verbal and non-verbal clues to: 1. understand the intentionality of the message heard 2. produce intentionally clear messages
Motivational system	Affectivity in language comprehension and production

Table 2. SLA from a neurolinguistic perspective (Paradis 2004, in Gabryś-Barker 2006: 82).

This is obviously determined by a multiplicity of factors, for example, language competence in particular languages, cognitive styles, context and pragmatic constraints or affective (motivational and attitudinal) factors. In describing the neural mechanisms responsible for language processing, Paradis (2004) describes modules operating at cognitive and affective levels that are both deliberate (non-automatic and controlled) and automatic (see Table 2).

It seems that the competences Paradis understands to be fundamental for an SLA model have a lot in common with the concept of communicative competence introduced quite some time ago by Hymes and based on a social and psychological understanding of language and communication and on the observable phenomena of human communication.

## 5. The Declarative/Procedural Model of Ullman (2006)

The position that learning is both explicit and implicit points to the need for focused and explicit, AND implicit grammar teaching. This position is not only supported by psycholinguistic research but also by the neurolinguistic, or biocognitive, as Ullman (2001) puts it, interpretation of language competence embracing not only grammar but also lexicon, as these two are dependent on each other and their interface is clearly observable in language processing.

In his discussion of the biology of language, that is, the relations between language and brain, Ullman (2006: 263) writes:

The biocognition of syntax is still less well understood than that of the lexicon, conceptual-semantics, or phonology. This is perhaps not surprising given the particular complexity of syntax. Nevertheless, the evidence thus far has begun to shed light on a variety of questions, including the functional neuroanatomy of syntax, the spatiotemporal dynamics of syntactic processing, and the biocognitive separability and domain-specificity of this linguistic function.

The Declarative/Procedural Model of Ullman (2001) is well supported now by neurolinguistic studies using the brain imaging techniques of PET (positron emission tomography), ERP (event related potential), MEG (magnetoencephalography) or fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imagery) to observe brain activation at different stages of language processing, with respect to different aspects of language processing and in differently focused tasks (e.g. comprehension versus production of sentences).

The major premise of the Declarative/Procedural Model is the existence of two types of memory (knowledge) systems. They are the *declarative* and the *procedural*, which operate in any context of human functioning and both perform nonlinguistic and linguistic functions. The declarative memory system embraces knowledge of facts and events, their learning and representation. Ullman (2006: 263) assumes that

The knowledge learnt in this system is at least partly, but not completely, explicit – that is, available to conscious awareness. The hippocampus and other medial temporal structures learn new memories, which eventually depend largely on neocortical regions, particularly in the temporal lobes.

The procedural memory system is seen as the one sub-serving subconscious, or non-conscious, learning and is responsible for the development of skills and habits (as understood by psychology). Ullman (2006: 264) describes its functioning as that of a network existing in the brain of interconnected structures located in the basal ganglia and Broca's area. Broca's area is largely dominant in syntax and its processing. In terms of linguistics domination, Ullman points out that:

Declarative memory underlies the lexicon which contains all idiosyncratic, word-specific knowledge, including the sounds and meanings of words, and whether a word takes a morphologically irregular form. The procedural memory system subserves aspects of the mental grammar, which underlies the rule-governed sequential and hierarchical computation of complex linguistic structures (2006: 264).

The distinction between declarative memory/knowledge and procedural memory/knowledge relates directly to explicit (metalinguistic) knowledge and implicit linguistic competence respectively. Table 3 presents the characteristics of the two concepts as discussed by Paradis (2004).

Type of memory:	Implicit	Explicit
Characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observed in systematic language behaviour</li> <li>- assumed but not conscious</li> <li>- resulting from PDP</li> <li>- statistical frequency based</li> <li>- compatible with existing rules</li> <li>- invariant of IQ</li> <li>- the norm</li> <li>- acquired at early stage</li> <li>- procedural (internalized and automatic)</li> <li>- inflexible (task-specific, sub-skills independent of each other)</li> <li>- incidental but dependent on frequency of occurrence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- conscious use of a rule in language behaviour</li> <li>- ability to verbalize the rule</li> <li>- conscious recall of data</li> <li>- related to IQ</li> <li>- a specialized ability</li> <li>- learnt</li> <li>- declarative (embraces episodic, experiential and semantic memory)</li> <li>- flexible (integrating different sources)</li> <li>- attention as important variable in its functioning and development</li> </ul>

Table 3. Implicit versus explicit memory (based on Paradis 2004: 53-57).

Neurolinguistic studies of patients suffering from various brain injuries or lesions and structural brain changes resulting in neurological malfunctioning (aphasia, dementia, Parkinson's disease and many others) demonstrate that implicit linguistic competence based on procedural knowledge and metalinguistic (explicit) knowledge grounded in the declarative system function in separation, as they are neurally connected with different parts of the brain (a strong non-interface position, as mentioned earlier), which is evidenced by the language behaviour observed in the patients mentioned above. Paradis (2004: 222) comments on the importance of this distinction in relation to L2 learners and states that implicit linguistic competence and metalinguistic (explicit) knowledge: "(...) contribute two separate neurofunctional subsystems to the verbal communicative system. (...). In the absence of implicit competence, incipient second-language speakers will have to rely entirely on metalinguistic knowledge and to

compensate for their deficiencies in both competence and knowledge by relying on pragmatic devices”.

He emphasizes that the level of activation of both linguistic competence and metalinguistic knowledge is directly related to motivation and affect. As recent neuro-linguistic studies (Schumann 1997) show, affectivity is primary to cognition and filters it:

The use of neuroimaging techniques has allowed scientists to observe that there are specific areas of the brain responsible for forming and processing emotions – the amygdala (a part of the limbic system) and separate ones responsible for cognitive functions – the prefrontal cortex. Various research projects (among them LeDoux 1996) demonstrate that there is interaction between “the two brains” and what is more, the information entering the brain is received first by the emotional brain and filtered through it (Gabrys-Barker 2007).

So affectivity reappears once again as a variable conducive to learning outcomes. Perhaps lack of success in L2 grammar instruction is directly related to this lack of positive motivation and attitude, or more generally-speaking, to negative affectivity, which makes brain activation threshold higher and thus requires more effort.

## 6. Implicit versus explicit learning of L2 grammar

Becoming a successful L2 language learner and user is determined by the whole array of factors and, unlike L1 acquisition where success is inevitable, not everyone becomes a highly skillful L2 user (Hulstijn 2005). One of the factors discussed in literature is the impact of implicit versus explicit learning on language success (Reber and Allan 2000; N. Ellis 2005; R. Ellis 2005). In the context of classroom instruction, the issue of explicit and implicit learning is of major significance as it determines the type of instruction to be employed in teaching. So an understanding of the value and appropriacy of different types of instruction cannot be underestimated, especially in the case of grammar instruction. The two terms *explicit* and *implicit* are used to describe definite types of methodology (teaching and learning) which take a fixed attitude towards the variables affecting learning processes: memory and knowledge (see Table 4).

Concept	Implicit	Explicit
Knowledge	Automatic processing without effort, subconscious, speedy, inability to verbalize on data	Non-automatic processing, conscious use of data, ability to verbalize data and possibly transfer to other contexts
Learning	No awareness of rules and concepts observed, unintentional	Conscious processing of data with focus and goal, intentional
Instruction	No focus on rules/form in teaching, non-intentional	Focus on rules in two different ways: 1) deductive (rules are given and illustrated); 2) inductive (rules are discovered by the learners)

Table 4. Key concepts: implicit versus explicit.

Furthermore, Ellis (2005: 151) elaborates on the features which distinguish the two types of knowledge, implicit versus explicit (see Table 5).

Characteristics	Implicit knowledge	Explicit knowledge
Awareness	Intuitive awareness of linguistic norms	Conscious awareness of linguistic norms
Type of knowledge	Procedural knowledge of rules and fragments	Declarative knowledge of grammatical rules and fragments
Systematicity	Variable but systematic knowledge	Anomalous and inconsistent knowledge
Accessibility	Access to knowledge by means of automatic processing	Access to knowledge by means of controlled processing
Use of L2 knowledge	Access to knowledge during fluent performance	Access to knowledge during planning difficulty
Self-report	Nonverbalizable	Verbalizable
Learnability	Potentially only within critical period	Any age

Table 5. Implicit versus explicit knowledge (Ellis 2005: 151).

The above characterization of implicit and explicit knowledge relates directly to the discussion of the effectiveness of the two approaches to instruction and consequently learning types, in which Hulstijn (2005: 133) suggests different researchers' positions on the different factors conducive to the success of these approaches:

- (1) the regularity and complexity of the system underlying the data (N. Ellis 2005; Williams 2005);
- (2) the frequency and salience with which any underlying regularity of the data is represented in the input to which learners are exposed (N. Ellis 2005; Williams 2005);
- (3) learners' individual differences in knowledge, skills and information processing styles, which might be beneficial or detrimental to discovering underlying regularities (Reber, Walkenfeld and Hernstadt 1991; Reber and Allen 2000; Robinson 2005).

The importance of these three factors and the way they interact in different modes of learning (explicit versus implicit) and hence how different modes of instruction (explicit versus implicit) influence this interaction should be investigated in a multidisciplinary way: from a linguistic and psychological perspective (as suggested by Hulstijn 2005: 133). We can also agree that brain studies on the way different types of memory and knowledge are being activated neurally may give support and evidence of the effectiveness of different teaching and learning modes in different contexts and for different learning purposes.

## 7. Conclusions

Within general studies of learning processes and training to develop meta and cognitive skills, learner training courses such as NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) use a general four-stage framework, which follows four learning stages (O'Connor and Seymour 1990: 8):

- (1) unconscious incompetence;
- (2) conscious incompetence;
- (3) conscious competence;
- (4) unconscious competence.

These four stages highlight the dimension of implicit versus explicit and directly correspond to the model proposed by N. Ellis (2005: 340, see Figure 1).

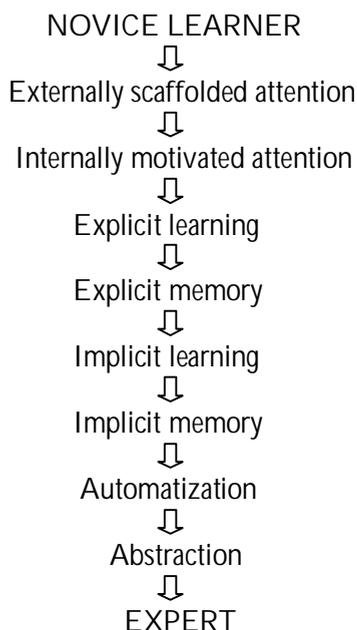


Figure 1. Developmental stages in learning (after N. Ellis 2005: 340).

If we relate both models directly to the issue of L2 grammar instruction, what clearly emerges is the need for both explicit and implicit teaching and learning (see Table 6).

NLP	Cognitive/connectionist	Focus of L2 grammar instruction and practice
Unconscious incompetence	Novice state	
Conscious incompetence	Externally scaffolded attention Internally motivated attention	Exposure Awareness of lack
Conscious competence	Explicit learning Explicit memory	Deductive teaching – explicitness of rules Inductive teaching – eliciting/discovery of rules, use of prior knowledge, use of metacognition Strategies of memorization (explicit, such as associations, mind-maps)
Unconscious competence	Implicit learning Implicit memory Automatization Abstraction Expert state	Internalizing through practice  Transfer to other contexts – transfer of training

Table 7. A learning cycle: implicit-explicit-implicit knowledge.

The model represented in Figure 1 very well illustrates what N. Ellis (2005: 341) calls “a dynamic network system” in relation to “the learning, representation, and processing of language”. The development of grammatical competence and its complexity derives from

the complexity of grammar in our minds; thus learning becomes a complex process in need of support from various approaches which do not exclude but rather complement each other. So, just to summarize the main points I tried to make in this brief discussion of the different approaches, the following can be said in defense of this view of complementarity of approaches:

- (1) various mechanisms are responsible for learning L2 grammar, so various approaches are necessary;
- (2) compensation for the lack of implicit input in the L2 classroom context occurs via explicit instruction and controlled context;
- (3) motivational aspects of learning grammar contribute to activation as affectivity precedes cognitive processing (and filters it);
- (4) explicit approaches allow for the development of transfer of learning in different instructional contexts;
- (5) L1 at the level of explicit knowledge can contribute to the development of grammar awareness and eliminate negative transfer.

N. Ellis (2005: 340) calls the two systems involved in grammar processing/learning *conscious processing* and *implicit processing*, "the yin and the yang". I would maintain that only this perception and understanding of L2 grammar instruction helps to create the conditions which will allow learners fully to develop from a novice state to that of expert language users.

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*Anna Niżegorodcew*

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PAYING ATTENTION TO FORM:  
STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF  
TEACHERS' FEEDBACK<sup>1</sup>

ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the concept of attention in the context of the SLA Focus-on-Form Approach and the Noticing Hypothesis, as well as with L2 teachers' corrective feedback. Apart from this, the author refers to cognitive psychology models of selective attention and to her own model of the expected optimal relevance of classroom communication based on Relevance Theory. The author's interpretation of the supervisory function of attention is combined with her critique of a sharp distinction between primary (naturalistic) and secondary (corrective) linguistic data. The above second language acquisition, psychological and pragmalinguistic perspectives serve to elucidate the usefulness of L2 teachers' feedback in making students aware of their non-target-like forms. The author concludes her speculations claiming that students' awareness of the corrective function of their teachers' feedback seems to be an indispensable part of effective L2 teaching and, in consequence, an indispensable aspect of L2 acquisition.

## 1. Introduction

*Attention to form* was disregarded in second language acquisition (SLA) theory as long as the processes involved in second language learning were viewed as internal and inaccessible to conscious noticing and reflection, predominantly under the influence of Universal Grammar Theory and other mentalistic theories. On the other hand, in second/foreign language (L2) teaching, *conscious attention to formal features* was neglected as long as L2 classroom teaching was viewed merely as the development of fluency and communicative competence.

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws on some ideas presented by the author in her paper *Uwaga w procesie nauki języka obcego* [Attention in foreign language learning] (Niżegorodcew forthcoming) and in her recently published book *Input for instructed L2 learners: The relevance of relevance* (Niżegorodcew 2007).

The Focus-on-Form (FonF) Approach in SLA theory (Long 1991), which puts stress on momentary focus on form in otherwise communicative classroom activities, as well as the growing interest of SLA theorists in learners' awareness of formal features, merits consideration from an L2 teaching perspective. Since *attention* is primarily a psychological term, it seems appropriate to search for such models of attention that could shed light on the FonF Approach and the Noticing Hypothesis. According to cognitive psychologists, "attention is a system responsible for selecting information and for preventing negative effects of the cognitive system overload" [this author's translation] (Nęcka et al. 2007: 178).

In SLA theory a sharp distinction has been made between *primary linguistic data*, that is, meaning-focused language heard by learners in a naturalistic environment, and *secondary linguistic data*, that is, form-focused *corrective feedback* heard by learners in the L2 classroom (cf. Carroll 1995). According to earlier cognitive models of language acquisition (cf. Ellis 1994), L2 learners are able to attain target-like L2 competence if they are provided with a copious amount of varied primary linguistic data at the appropriate level of difficulty, and/or if they negotiate meanings in interaction with more proficient L2 speakers.<sup>2</sup> In consequence, corrective feedback is considered unnecessary in those models.

However, in later cognitive L2 acquisition models, e.g. in the FonF Approach, secondary linguistic data, that is, teachers' corrective feedback, is viewed as indispensable additional information, without which target-like competence is not attainable. The question arises what makes learners consider linguistic data as primary, that is, meaning-focused, or as secondary, that is, form-focused. In other words, what makes learners focus their attention only on the meaning of an utterance, or on the form in the sense of its well-formedness from the point of view of target-like accuracy.

In this paper an attempt is made to interpret the above mechanisms as resulting from an intentional supervisory function of attention underlying L2 information selection by adult language learners. Intentional attention, as has already been recognized by Schmidt (2001), plays a crucial role in L2 learning by the constant shifting of focus from meaning to form and *vice versa*. Intentional shifts of attention make classroom communication a combination of fluency and accuracy practice. In my recently formulated claims (Nizęgorodcew 2007), I argued that it is the expected optimal level of relevance of linguistic data, rather than the distinction between primary and secondary linguistic data, that interchangeably focuses learners either on meaning or on form.

## 2. Parallel terminology

Some parallel terms used in SLA theory and in L2 teaching should first be clarified in order to avoid terminological confusion. The terms referring to underlying internal mechanisms depend on the accepted view on language acquisition/learning. The Universal Grammar Hypothesis refers to Chomsky's conception of a universal mental faculty consisting of a set of general grammatical rules applying to language *acquisition*.

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<sup>2</sup> As postulated, for example, by Krashen's (1981) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis and Long's (1983) Interaction Hypothesis.

On the other hand, language *learning* in cognitive approaches is viewed as processes responsible for creating mental representations of the target language on the basis of information processing mechanisms.

The term *interlanguage*, coined by Selinker (1972), referring to the language of L2 learners, is parallel to the term *L2 proficiency level* in foreign or second language teaching terminology. Under the influence of Krashen's (1981) and Long's (1983) hypotheses, interlanguage theorists claimed that interlanguage develops naturally towards the target language norms, given an adequate amount and quality of target language input and interaction. However, evidence from immersion classes and other L2 teaching settings (cf. Swain 1985) made some of them modify their claims (cf. Long 1991).

Since it was observed that *non-target-like features* are preserved in learners' interlanguage in spite of rich input and interaction with target language speakers, L2 form-focused instruction regained its status in SLA studies, at least those that take instructed learners into consideration (cf. Lightbown 2000). The FonF approach acknowledges that L2 learners are not able to acquire target-like forms if their attention is not focused on those forms. Similarly, the radical Communicative Approach with its preoccupation with communicative activities and fluency practice, has given way to a more balanced approach, in which form-focused instruction and accuracy practice has its role to play (cf. Pawlak 2006). In L2 teaching non-target-like features or forms are usually referred to as *erroneous forms*.

Another confusing term is *recasts*. The term is used in two senses. Firstly, recasts refer to reformulations of the less competent speaker's preceding utterances by the more competent interlocutor. Recasts are very common in child-directed speech, when caregivers expand child utterances on the basis of the context in order to give children support and to approve of their contribution to the ongoing discourse.<sup>3</sup> In naturalistic discourse between native and non-native speakers recasts are less common because they may be perceived as patronizing behaviour. On the other hand, in communicative L2 classroom discourse between teachers and learners, recasts are advocated as an unobtrusive way of providing target-like input (cf. Doughty 2001).

Recasts in the second sense refer to *corrective feedback*, that is, teachers' corrected and/or expanded repetitions of students' preceding erroneous utterances. In L2 classroom discourse providing corrective feedback on learners' erroneous forms is part and parcel of teachers' behaviour. Learners usually expect teachers to correct their errors. Whether corrective feedback in fact helps in eradicating errors is still an open question and depends on a number of factors, some of them being frequency, saliency and explicitness of the feedback. This paper attempts to account for the effectiveness of teachers' corrective feedback, drawing on the model of expected optimal relevance of classroom communication (cf. Nizegorodcew 2007).

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<sup>3</sup> In child-directed speech recasts usually expand child speech according to the contextual clues. For example, a caregiver expands a two-word child utterance into a well-formed sentence: Child: *Misiu jajo* [Misiu egg], Adult: *Misiu zaraz zje jajeczko* [Misiu is just going to eat up a (little) egg] (The author's own data).

### 3. The Focus-on-Form Approach: Pro and against

The Cognitive Focus-on-Form (FonF) Approach (cf. Long 1991) is an elaboration of the models which treat linguistic data as an important factor affecting the cognitive processes of L2 acquisition, such as the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (Krashen 1981), the Interaction Hypothesis (Long 1983), the Output Hypothesis (Swain 1985) and the Integrated Model of Instructed L2 Learning (Ellis 1990). According to the above models, L2 acquisition is possible when learners are primarily focused on the meaning of linguistic data, and the focus on form arises incidentally during otherwise communication-oriented activities. Consequently, a sharp distinction is made in the FonF Approach between *focus on form* (FonF), which "overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (Long 1991: 45), and *focus on forms* (FonFs), concerned with explicit teaching of L2 forms, which the proponents of the FonF Approach strongly disapprove of.

One of the advocates of the Focus-on-Form Approach treats paying attention to form as an important cognitive *microprocess* combined with a cognitive *macroprocess* of the internalization of L2 input (Doughty 2001). Doughty uses a metaphorical statement about "small cognitive windows of opportunity" (2001: 249), which refer to "a cognitive preference for re-utilizing" (2001: 229) language heard or seen recently. In terms of L2 classroom teaching, it means that learners tend to pay attention and remember what they have just heard. The corrective feedback provided by the teacher immediately after an interlanguage form produced by the student as a recast of the erroneous form is claimed to be most effective in making learners remember the target-like forms.

L2 classroom studies, however, do not corroborate Doughty's claim. On the contrary, in a small scale L2 classroom research study, Czekajewska (1999) found, while comparing errors only corrected by L2 teachers with those corrected by the teachers and repeated by the students, that in the case of the forms corrected by the teachers but not repeated by the students who had made the errors, immediately after the lesson the students remembered only about 10% of the corrections, as opposed to the situations in which the forms corrected by the teachers were repeated by the students, who remembered after the lesson about 50% of the repeated corrections. Such findings suggest that students could have ignored being corrected by the teachers in a more implicit and unobtrusive way. Czekajewska assumed that corrections would be better remembered in form-focused activities than in meaning-oriented activities but her research findings did not support her hypothesis. In both types of activities, her subjects remembered similar numbers of corrections, amounting to about 70% of the forms corrected during the lesson.

In a large scale study, Havranek and Cesnik (2001) discovered that successfully elicited learners' self-corrections were most effective among different types of corrections, whereas teachers' recasts of learners' interlanguage forms were the least effective types. The authors account for those findings by saying that "in many cases the learners probably do not realize that they have been corrected" (2001: 106). Similar results were also obtained by Lyster and Ranta (1997).

Havranek and Cesnik (2001) distinguished in their study between corrective feedback in communicative activities and in form-focused activities (practice situations). The results of the study indicate that for the corrected learners a communicative focus did not make a great difference for remembering the teachers' recasts of their erroneous forms. As far as their peers are concerned, they remembered recasts better in form-focused activities. It seems that the students who were speakers might not have realized being corrected, either in communicative or form-focused activities, because they were so preoccupied with speaking that they did not notice the teachers' interventions. Their peers, however, who only listened to the ongoing discourse, were provided with a better opportunity to notice the corrective function of their teachers' recasts in the activities they knew were focused on formal accuracy. Thus, a general approach to learning tasks might be essential for drawing students' attention to form.

Both Havranek and Cesnik's study results and Czekajewska's findings stand in sharp contrast to the FonF approach recommendation concerning the usefulness of teachers' feedback. It seems that teachers' feedback to be useful for students must be first noticed by them. This brings us to the crucial question of consciousness and students' awareness of teachers' feedback.

#### 4. The Noticing Hypothesis and students' awareness of teachers' feedback

According to Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990), language cannot be acquired/learned unless learners are conscious of the gap between their present L2 knowledge and the target forms. Learners can notice the gap when the target forms are frequently repeated by the teacher, in other words, when the provided L2 input is rich, and when the target forms are sufficiently salient for noticing. L2 classroom instruction can help in both these aspects: teachers can make target forms more salient for the learners to notice, as well as they can present them more frequently.

However, even large quantities of salient target-like input cannot make L2 students fully competent target language speakers. What is required, according to Swain's (1985, 1995) Output Hypothesis, is L2 learners' own output. Learners' interlanguage output helps them to notice the gap in their L2 knowledge and to reflect upon it. Consequently, interlanguage forms can function as input for conscious reflection. The question arises, with regard to noticing the gap in one's own interlanguage forms, whether speakers are able to focus their attention on the forms they are simultaneously producing (cf. Havranek and Cesnik 2001). Also, it is not clear how learners can notice the gap in their interlanguage if they are not provided with any feedback on their errors. Moreover, even if they notice some differences between target forms and their interlanguage forms, they may not have time to reflect upon them in oral interaction.

What follows is a dispute between those SLA researchers who claim that providing primary linguistic data suffices to acquire target-like forms (e.g. Krashen 1982; Prabhu 1987), and those who believe that secondary linguistic data is necessary in the L2 acquisition process (e.g. Doughty and Williams 1998). As has been said before, primary linguistic data refers to what language learners hear in the naturalistic environment, and also to the L2 classroom language which simulates naturalistic language use, as opposed to secondary linguistic data, referring to the language that learners

hear in the instructional environment which is specially focused on those features of learners' interlanguage they are not able to correct by themselves on the basis of primary linguistic data. Corrective feedback belongs to the second category but, as has been pointed out, unobtrusive corrective feedback may not be treated as correction by the corrected students.

It seems then that feedback is most effective in terms of making learners aware of the gap between their interlanguage and target forms when it is most explicit (cf. Carroll 1995). Explicit or overt feedback, in the form of teacher corrections, elicited student corrections and metalinguistic clues in L2 or L1, provides an opportunity to reflect on one's L2 knowledge and to recall the required target form (cf. Lyster and Ranta 1997). As far as the conscious focus of attention on form is concerned in otherwise meaning-focused activities, the concept is similar to conscious *monitoring* while facing production difficulties in Krashen's and Ellis's monitor models (cf. Krashen 1981; Ellis 1990).

Thus, a similar standpoint seems to have been reached by SLA theory and by L2 teaching practice. SLA theory claims that teachers' corrective feedback is effective if it draws learners' attention to those aspects of their interlanguage which could have passed unnoticed without it. In turn, L2 teaching practice describes various corrective techniques (e.g. metalinguistic remarks, cueing, intonation, gestures) which facilitate the noticing of mistakes and enable learners to self-correct or to rely on repeated peer-correction or teacher-correction. As has been said before, such explicit corrective techniques seem to be more effective than implicit feedback (recasts), which may not be consciously processed as correction.

Another problematic issue concerns the question of the degree of learners' awareness of teachers' corrective feedback. In the Noticing Hypothesis awareness has been equated with conscious noticing. However, Tomlin and Villa (1994) claim that noticing formal features in the linguistic data does not necessarily mean that the noticing process is fully conscious, as has been maintained by Schmidt. They refer to cognitive psychology and distinguish between three functions of attention: *alerting*, *orienting* and *detecting*. The alerting function makes learners ready to attend to linguistic data, the orienting one directs attention towards linguistic data, and the detecting one focuses attention on specific data. This distinction is helpful in modelling focus on form and the focus on meaning not as two discreet processes but rather as a continuum – from the full focus on form without taking meaning into consideration, which is very rare in the contemporary L2 classroom, to the full focus on meaning without considering form, which is much more common, with intermediate stages, when learners are focused interchangeably on meaning or on form.

According to Gass (1997: 4), in turn, primary linguistic data should be "related to some bit of existing knowledge (or gap in knowledge)" to be *apperceived*, that is, noticed by learners. Although the author does not explain further why some L2 data is noticed and other data is disregarded by the apperceiving mechanism, she makes an attempt to take account of a cognitive aspect of L2 acquisition in including a filtering device into her model. Although she does not call it an attentional device, the concept of *apperception* is very close to the psychological concept of variable attentional processes.

## 5. Models of selective attention applied to paying attention to teachers' feedback

Tomlin and Villa (1994) seem to have drawn on Posner's model of attention mechanisms (Nęcka et al. 2007). The model distinguishes between *alerting*, *orienting* and *supervisory* mechanisms. In the context of the L2 classroom, the alerting mechanism might refer to activating learners to attend to linguistic data but without focusing them specifically on any particular data, so it could be equated with warming students up to participate in a lesson or an activity. The orienting mechanism would refer to automatic focusing of attention on various linguistic data, materials and techniques as they appear in students' perceptual field (cf. *apperception* in Gass 1997). Finally, the supervisory mechanism could be responsible for the intentional control of the attention focus on topics, tasks, activities and particular linguistic data.

According to Nęcka et al. (2007), Posner's orienting mechanism of attention can be equated with incidental attention characteristic of children, and the supervisory mechanism with intentional attention characteristic of adults. As is well known, young learners are not yet able to control their attention, that is, they focus unintentionally on changing stimuli in their environment, likewise in their L2 classroom environment. Thus, it is extremely difficult to focus their attention intentionally on one object of study for a longer period of time. In the case of more mature learners, attention processes can be controlled intentionally to a much greater extent. Consequently, in more mature learners, it is attention that controls cognitive processing, whereas in the case of immature learners, information processing is controlled perceptually.

The supervisory attention mechanism is, first of all, responsible for selecting information to be processed. Among a number of models of selective attention, Anne Treisman's *attenuator model* combines two features: focus on meaning as a fundamental selecting criterion and gradual information processing (Nęcka et al. 2007). In terms of L2 learning, it might mean that at first L2 learners are not fully aware either of the meanings or of forms to be processed. The processing occurs at a preattentive warm-up level. Some forms and meanings are selected by the attention mechanism not only, or even not necessarily, due to the frequency of occurrence and saliency, but also on the basis of their automatic relevance to the learners. The remaining forms and meanings do not perish, however, but they are stored in a weak form, so that they can be retrieved later if intentional attention is focused on them. The next stage of information processing involves matching the selected information with the mental representations learners already possess, while the remaining weak forms and meanings are further attenuated. Finally, at the last stage of the process, conscious attention is focused on those meanings and forms which are meaningful and relevant to learners.

Focus on meaning as a fundamental selecting mechanism of attention may lead to comprehension errors whenever learners are too quick to interpret L2 forms according to their contextual expectations and general world knowledge. Similarly, in oral communication, L2 learners may disregard formal accuracy as long as they seem to be successful communicators. On the other hand, attention may be automatically focused on L2 forms, which by virtue of their novelty can become more relevant than the meanings conveyed through these forms. This is the case when we pay less attention to what somebody is saying than to how they are saying it. If a learner is inter-

preting an utterance as an exemplification of a grammatical tense rather than a meaningful message, the semantic criterion becomes irrelevant. Then the role of the teacher as a provider of feedback and a manager of L2 classroom discourse involves drawing students' attention either to form, if they are excessively focused on meaning, or to meaning, if they are only concerned with formal properties. I will discuss this issue in the following section.

It is also worth remembering that forms and meanings are not learned and taught in a socioaffective vacuum. Learners tend to save their face, especially vulnerable in the L2 learning contexts, where they are in an inferior position as those who do not have a sufficient L2 knowledge and skills to use the knowledge. Thus, the allocation of attention results not only from the aforementioned semantic and formal properties of teachers' feedback, but also from students' unwillingness to admit that they are not able to follow what the teacher is saying. In such cases, students tend to pay attention only to the communication channel and switch to non-verbal communication or, in monolingual contexts, to L1 to show their willingness to keep the channel open in whatever code.

Another psychological model of attention – Daniel Kahneman's model of attentional resources – views attention as a system of distribution of mental energy (Nęcka et al. 2007). Kahneman's conception takes into account the cognitive effort required to accomplish a task. Applying Kahneman's model to students' awareness of teachers' feedback, we could say that paying attention to the form in teachers' feedback provided during communicative activities requires additional energy, since it must counterbalance the fundamental cognitive criterion of information selection, which focuses attention first of all on meaning. On the other hand, focusing attention on form in teachers' feedback cannot last for too long. If cognitive effort is spent on focusing on grammatical structures instead of on the meanings conveyed through those structures, attentional resources are channeled towards focus on form and learners are easily distracted from L2 communication.

One more aspect which should be mentioned is the effect of controlled processing on attentional resources. According to Nęcka (2000), attentional resources are utilized only in the case of controlled and conscious processing. Fully automatized processing does not require any attentional resources. However, automatized behaviour may again become fully or partly controlled and need attentional resources. L2 learning is a typical cognitive activity in which fully controlled behaviour, involving L2 skills development, is gradually automatized. Yet some areas of L2 use cannot be fully automatized, such as the selection of appropriate vocabulary items to convey desired meanings or reference to grammatical rules in the case of production difficulties. In terms of attentional resources, more attentional control means a slower and less skillful performance. On the other hand, attentional control may improve performance only if erroneous forms are performance mistakes, and not competence errors.<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is attentional resources that are responsible for an erroneous form, and not the lack of internalized linguistic data.

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<sup>4</sup> The distinction between *mistakes* and *errors* was first introduced by Corder (1967).

Students paying attention to teachers' feedback have to engage their attentional resources to be able to focus on form. If their erroneous forms are due to a lack of attention in language production, such a controlled 'stop' is beneficial and students will be able to self-correct. However, if teachers' feedback refers to erroneous forms which indicate an ignorance of target forms, appealing to attentional resources will not help. In such cases, teachers might either refer to other learners' L2 knowledge or provide corrections themselves.

## 6. Expected optimal relevance of classroom communication

I have recently put forward the following claim: "the distinction between primary and secondary linguistic data cannot be maintained with reference to instructed L2 teaching/learning contexts on account of the fundamental purpose of language instruction: focusing the learners' attention on L2 forms in order to enable them to fluently express meanings" (Nizgorodcew 2007: 149). Consequently, teachers' feedback does not only have a corrective function, but it also serves as a model of L2 communication. Such a combined focus is facilitated by shifting learners' attention from form to meaning, and *vice versa*.

My intention was to conceptualize teachers' input, including teachers' feedback, within the framework of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995) – a theory of interpretation of incoming messages. Teachers' feedback in my understanding of the term refers to the language intentionally presented to the learners by the teacher in order to facilitate the L2 learning process. According to Relevance Theory, L2 learners automatically search for optimal relevance of the teachers' feedback, that is, they automatically assume that what they pay attention to in the input is relevant to them. The question arises what the L2 learners pay attention to in the teachers' feedback: form or meaning?

According to Sperber and Wilson, teachers' feedback is relevant when it produces enough *contextual effect* for the least processing effort. Contextual effect refers to the learners' use of their knowledge in the context of particular communication, that is, taking into consideration the teacher's role and the circumstances in which the feedback is given. Relevance Theory claims that every act of overt communication, such as teachers' feedback, creates in the audience the expectation of optimal relevance. That is why I claim that teachers' feedback is treated by learners as optimally relevant. However, what counts as optimally relevant varies with particular teachers addressing particular learners in particular circumstances.

Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) claim that there is a gap between the semantic representation of the heard utterances and their interpretation by the audience. This gap is filled by the inferencing mechanism. The authors of Relevance Theory distinguish between two layers of communication: *the informative intention* and *the communicative intention*. I believe that these layers of intention can also be distinguished in teachers' feedback. The informative intention refers to teachers' wish to provide students with an accurate form, and the communicative intention – to teachers' wish to inform learners of their corrective intention. For example, if teachers provide recasts of students' erroneous utterances, they do not only provide accurate L2 forms, but they also

communicate to students their corrective intentions. From learners' perspective, although recasts can be observed without noticing the corrective intention, the failure to notice the corrective intention results in the failure to note relevant information, and interpreting the recasts as teachers' echoing of learners' utterances. In consequence, learners will not focus their attention on their erroneous forms, and will not have a chance to self-correct them.

It seems that Relevance Theory elucidates one of the most difficult problems in SLA theory: whether paying attention to the input, including teachers' feedback, necessarily involves conscious processing. As has been said before, in accordance with cognitive theories, attentional processes do not have to be conscious. Similarly, according to Relevance Theory, the process of paying attention in overt communication is automatic. We pay attention to the most efficient information, that is, the information that enables us to arrive at contextual assumptions with the smallest expenditure of energy. A conscious (or partly conscious) process refers to the interpretation of the information we have paid attention to because it involves the act of full or partial comprehension.

The learners may be at first unaware of the teachers' feedback, e.g. in the case of misunderstandings concerning the function of recasts, but they may later become partly or fully aware of their corrective function, particularly if their attention is intentionally drawn towards erroneous forms by the teachers, provided they are ready to put more effort and/or find more contextual assumptions. Treisman's *attenuator model* of attention and Kahneman's model of attentional resources seem to account well for the psychological processes underlying the selecting mechanism of attention, its gradual nature and the cognitive effort involved in it, applied to the interpretation of the 'paying attention to form' dilemma in SLA theory and in L2 classroom teaching.

According to the FonF Approach, L2 classroom input, including teachers' feedback, is most useful for acquisition when L2 classroom communication is focused on meaning, while the overt focus on form arises incidentally during communicative activities. I would like to expand this view from an L2 teaching perspective and in the light of Relevance Theory, claiming that a simultaneous focus of attention on fluency and accuracy practice can be interpreted as moving to a higher level of expected optimal relevance.

From what has been said above, it follows that the role of the L2 teacher is indeed crucial. It is the teacher who draws the learners' attention to fluency or/and to accuracy. On the basis of their experience with L2 teacher's language use, learners interpret it as linguistic data in which communicative and corrective functions are much more closely linked than in everyday communication. Teachers are expected to provide corrective feedback on what learners have said, and the learners are also allowed to inquire about formal correctness. Their corrective feedback, stemming from *ad hoc* situations, learners' erroneous forms and language problems, focuses learners' attention on the form of the messages, which otherwise might be disregarded.

However, in view of the natural tendency to focus one's attention on the most relevant information, whatever is in focus in the L2 classroom communication becomes automatically optimally relevant. That is why in order to become facilitative of L2 learning processes, teachers' feedback must be interpreted as secondary (correc-

tive) linguistic data. Anything that helps learners to arrive at such an interpretation is conducive to L2 learning. According to this view, enhanced language awareness helps learners in interpreting teachers' feedback as having a corrective purpose, as well as an active approach to one's own L2 learning and using active communication strategies (cf. Nizęgorodcew 1993).

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to combine three theoretic perspectives: the SLA theoretic approaches, involving the Focus-on-Form Approach and the Noticing Hypothesis, cognitive psychology models of selective attention, and a model of the expected optimal relevance of classroom communication based on Relevance Theory. The three perspectives have served to elucidate the usefulness of L2 teachers' feedback in making students aware of their non-target-like forms. The most important conclusions that can be drawn from the foregoing discussion are the following:

- L2 classroom research indicates that the most explicit corrective feedback is the most useful. On the other hand, SLA theory presents different stand-points concerning the effectiveness of teachers' feedback.
- SLA theory is also differentiated as far as learners' conscious focus on formal accuracy is concerned. Cognitive psychological theory treats attention processes as a continuum, from preattentive, subconscious processes to fully intentional, conscious processes.
- Focus on meaning is considered a fundamental selecting mechanism of attention in psychological theory. According to Relevance Theory – a theory of interpretation of incoming messages, human beings automatically assume that what they pay attention to in the input is relevant to them.
- The distinction between primary and secondary (corrective) linguistic data is less pronounced in L2 classroom communication than it is in naturalistic communication.
- The role of the L2 teacher is crucial, among other things, in drawing learners' attention to meaning (fluency) and/or to form (accuracy).
- Students' awareness of the corrective function of teachers' feedback seems to be an indispensable aspect of effective L2 teaching.

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*Terence Odlin*

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THE CONTRASTIVE GRAMMAR  
OF SUBJECTIVE MEANINGS AND  
WHY IT MATTERS FOR SECOND  
LANGUAGE READING

ABSTRACT

When languages differ in how they realize particular subjective meanings, a major learning challenge will be to apprehend just what signals to watch for in the new language. Even in closely related languages such signals can differ, and failure to cope with the difference may jeopardize understanding the stance that an author has taken; moreover, some production difficulties may arise from a less-than-perfect processing of meanings. The passage of Ortega y Gasset analyzed in this paper shows a number of likely difficulties for L1 speakers of English in reading L2 Spanish. Even though these languages express many subjective meanings in similar ways, the divergences pose some potentially serious comprehension problems that effective teaching should address.

1. Comprehension, production, and transfer

In a recent analysis of cross-linguistic influence Ringbom (2007) emphasizes the need for researchers to understand better the relation between comprehension and production. As he suggests, the relation is a complex one, and much remains only partially explained. Still, his analysis advances some interesting and usually plausible generalizations, including his conviction that “formal cross-linguistic similarities play a more important part in L2-comprehension than in L2-production” (2007: 24).

Like other transfer researchers, Ringbom has also noted a contrast between the challenges imposed on speakers of languages very different from the target as opposed to those imposed on speakers of languages quite similar. His own research on the acquisition of English foregrounds a difference in the difficulty for native speakers of Finnish, a language very different from English, and the relative ease for native speakers of Swedish. Since Swedish and English are Germanic as well as Indo-European whereas Finnish is non-Indo-European, the differing success of the two groups is quite striking: although some Finnish speakers do achieve high proficiency in English, the numbers are smaller and the required effort greater. The contrasts in

success do not seem to be due to socio-cultural differences either, since the Swedish speakers that Ringbom studied are also Finnish citizens, and in more ways than not they resemble their Finnish-speaking counterparts as far as social and cultural background is concerned. The difference in success indicates that language background much more than any other factor explains the relative success of the Swedish speakers.

Detailed evidence in Chapter Six of Ringbom's book shows that Swedish speakers enjoy an advantage in tests of both comprehension and production. In reading comprehension tests, for example, the Swedes (a term used by Ringbom to refer to the Swedish-speaking Finns) show a consistently higher performance over many years. The lexical and grammatical similarities between Swedish and English no doubt contribute to success in tests of production as well: other evidence in the same chapter shows that Swedes enjoy an advantage on production tests involving the use of prepositions and articles.

Ringbom accordingly sees much of the relative difficulty of the Finns (a term used to refer to the native speakers of Finnish) being due to the great difference between Finnish and English. Although he often uses the term 'unrelated', he tacitly acknowledges that there are in fact some cross-linguistic correspondences. He suggests, however, that the correspondences are hard to detect. For instance, he cites a study by Nikula (1996) that looked at the use of pragmatic force modifiers, as in the English 'sort of', which can hedge on an assertion, and 'really', which can strengthen one. Although the Finns Nikula studied did use such forms and although their speech showed occasional influence from Finnish, their interlanguage English often showed simply no pragmatic modifier at all. Both Ringbom and Nikula attribute some of the absence here to the fact that interlingual equivalents of English modifiers are often in the bound morphology of Finnish, as in the suffix '-h-An', which Nikula (1996: 78) illustrates with 'sillahan se kieli muuttuu', "that's how language changes, you know". According to Nikula, without the suffix on the first word "the 'as we all know' character of the (...) utterance would be lost" (1996: 78). Indeed, in Nikula's study of interactions between Finns and native speakers of English, there are only two instances of Finns using English 'you know', whereas their native speaker interlocutors used 'you know' 52 times in the same conversations (1996: 75). It thus seems to be difficult for Finns to notice such a meaning correspondence since the formal realizations of pragmatic force modification are so different in the two languages. Indeed other evidence also suggests that differing formal realizations make correspondences hard to notice, as in a study of spatial reference by Jarvis and Odlin (2000). Both Swedes and Finns produced accurate prepositional phrases as well as prepositional errors. However, only the Finns produced so-called zero prepositions, as in 'C. C. [Charlie Chaplin] and woman go to sit the grass' (2000: 544). Because Finnish relies very heavily on nominal case inflections and very little on prepositions, it appears that some Finns have difficulty, at least in the early stages, to notice or understand the systemic importance of prepositions in the meaning of English sentences with spatial reference.

If these cases involve a failure of learners to notice key details in the target language, certain production difficulties may stem from comprehension problems related to less-than-perfect processing of meaning. The causal relation just suggested presents an interesting but difficult challenge for researchers, partly because comprehension

problems can be hard to spot. As Ringbom observes, production difficulties are usually easy to notice since they manifest themselves as errors or reductions that may not be incorrect but seem characteristic of non-native performance (e.g. an underuse of pragmatic force modifiers). In contrast, comprehension difficulties often only surface in face-to-face interactions where it becomes clear that a learner has not understood something.

## 2. Subjective and objective meanings

Apart from the observational problem, another reason that comprehension difficulties may be hard to study lies in the nature of comprehension itself. Ringbom (2007: 23) asserts that 'all' comprehension is approximate. Some might argue that this assertion is too strong (e.g. Paradis 2004: 17), yet it does seem to be true in many situations and for at least two reasons:

- referential communication often shows some vagueness;
- total comprehension would often require something not entirely possible: the same understanding by the listener or reader of the subjective states of the speaker or writer.

Although referential communication normally succeeds in establishing certain agreements about referents (or at least about the meaning of the referring expressions), the basis for the agreement may not always correspond to any objective reality.<sup>1</sup> A particularly striking example of illusory agreement is seen in investigations by Lehrer (1983) of the use of terms referring to properties of wine. While she found that expert wine specialists agreed on a fairly wide range of actual physical characteristics of different types of wine, non-experts succeeded in establishing accurate reference for very few properties (e.g. sweetness). Even so, the non-experts chatting with one another about the wines had the illusion of agreeing on many more properties. Although such imprecision appeared in a fairly restricted domain, it is not untypical of a great deal of referential communication, as Lehrer observes even in professional fields such as psychiatry and phonetics, where there is a premium on precision. Further examples of everyday imprecisions are discussed by Channell (1994).

The studies of referential vagueness suggest not only that imprecision is part of everyday communication but also that much of what passes for referential and objective meaning is highly subjective (cf. Ogden and Richards 1923). Although definitions of subjectivity vary somewhat, some notion of inner states must be present, whether a term such as *point of view* is used, or *stance*, *self-expression*, *attitudes*, *feelings*, or *beliefs* (cf. Lyons 1982; Langacker 1990; Finnegan 1995; Hyland 2005). No matter what the term,

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<sup>1</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in any detail the old philosophical problem of whether there can actually be objective meanings or an objective reality. Nagel (1974) and Lyons (1977) provide worthwhile discussions of the problems, however, and the approach to be assumed here is one taken by many recent cognitive linguists (e.g. Langacker 1990; Maldonado 2002; Traugott and Dasher 2002). This approach involves scalar conceptions of meaning: that is, continua of subjective-objective meanings are used to clarify patterns within and across languages.

understanding the inner state of another individual, human or non-human, has long been recognized as a major philosophical challenge, as the title of a classic essay by Nagel (1974) suggests: 'What is it like to be a bat?' Obviously, the problems in understanding another human being are not nearly as formidable as divining the inner state of a bat. Nevertheless, Nagel finds that even the inner states of other humans also remain somewhat inaccessible even while he acknowledges such human capacities as the ability to imagine the perspective of another (1974: 440-442).

Yet whatever the philosophical difficulties, people do communicate subjective states, and any language has its own publicly shared conventions to further such communication. The formal means can vary tremendously and involve different patterns of lexis, morphology, syntax, as well as phonetics and phonology (Paradis 2004: 221). Despite a wide range of possible formal devices, every language necessarily engages only a relatively small selection. The limited repertory must nevertheless help evoke something about the vastly differing experiences, beliefs, and memories of individuals. In their formulation of relevance theory, Sperber and Wilson (1995: 16) observe that "While grammars neutralise the differences between dissimilar experiences, cognition and memory impose differences on even common experiences". In other words, a rather restricted range of linguistic means must attempt to evoke a vast array of different mental states. Further on in this paper, there will be other observations about relevance theory. For now, however, a pedagogical implication should be noted: without a clear understanding of the available forms (whether lexical, syntactic, etc.), a language learner will have very little access to the subjective state of anyone using the second language.

The study by Nikula (1996) of pragmatic force modifiers considered a fairly wide range of subjective stances in Finnish and English, and any detailed contrastive analysis could show just as many if not more complexities: even with a limited repertory of formal devices, languages manage to evoke a wide range of subjective meanings. There is no definitive typology of such meanings, but Finnegan (1995: 4) identifies three important kinds: meanings involving an individual's *perspective*, an individual's *affect*, and an individual's *epistemic* stance. Meanings involving individual perspective include person deixis, most importantly first person singular forms such as English 'I' and 'me' or Spanish 'yo' and 'me'. Such forms are not always free morphemes, of course, as in the Spanish '-o' which can function as a first-person singular marker of present tense verbs as in *hablo* (I speak) and *creo* (I believe). Markers of spatial deixis can indicate locations near the speaker (e.g. 'this') or ones farther away ('that'), and markers of temporal deixis can signal the current moment of speaking (present tense or adverbs such as *now*) as well as some time before (e.g. past tense) or some time later on (e.g. future tense), along with special forms such as the present perfect (Lyons 1977, Chapter 15). Besides deictic expressions, there are other ways of indicating perspective, as discussed by Biber et al. (1999) and by Langacker (1990).

Affective meanings most typically involve emotion, but just how wide or narrowly to frame a theory of emotion has been controversial (e.g. Ortony, Clore, and Collins 1988; Lazarus 1991). In any case, emphatic markers are among the most common indicators of affect, and languages show a wide range of special indicators. Emphatic meanings can be expressed through virtually any formal means (e.g. word

order, affixation, intonation, etc.). Such meanings show considerable variation both within a single language and across languages. If there is some core meaning of emphasis either within or across languages, it is probably an expression of a speaker's (or writer's) commitment to something else being said.

Epistemic meanings involve belief and knowledge, as well as related notions of logical deduction, for example, of judgment or of probability. Once again, the formal material for expressing such meanings can vary greatly within and across languages. In English for example, the notion of possibility can be expressed, among other ways, as a noun ('possibility'), an adjective ('possible'), an adverb ('possibly', 'maybe', 'perhaps'), as modals (e.g. 'may', 'might', 'can', 'could'), as well as in collocations in certain contexts such as 'I suppose that...' or 'I bet that...' (the latter being a slightly stronger statement of possibility than the former). Apart from modality itself, there are related epistemic domains such as evidentiality, which concerns the source of a person's knowledge or belief (Aikhenvald and Dixon 2003; Odlin and Alonso-Vázquez 2006).

The three kinds of subjective meaning just discussed do not necessarily exhaust the range of possible types, nor are they always independent of one another. For example, while evidential meanings are primarily epistemic, they can also evoke affective ones, as Escobar (1997) and others have observed. Such interactions add language-specific complications to the semantic and pragmatic systems and make cross-linguistic comparisons of these systems all the more challenging. Contrastive difficulties confront not only investigators of language transfer but also those studying meaning changes in the history of a language (e.g. Ball 1994; Traugott 2006). Although the kind of contrastive analysis done in historical pragmatics will certainly differ from the kind in second language research in certain ways, both require comparisons of meanings, subjective as well as objective. Although no one making such comparisons can assume that the meanings in two languages will be entirely equivalent, there will normally exist some semantic information that provides a basis for identification and comparison.<sup>2</sup>

Contrastive analysis poses problems not only for linguists: language learners often try to establish meaning correspondences between their native language (or some other) and the language they are trying to acquire, the correspondences involving semantics or pragmatics, or both. As discussed in the case of Finnish learners of English, some production difficulties may arise from a less-than-perfect processing of referential meanings (as in the Jarvis and Odlin study) and of more subjective meanings (as in the Nikula study). Even in cases where production may not be a goal of language learning (as for most scholars reading ancient languages), it remains important to achieve an optimal understanding of what one reads or hears, including the subjective as well as the referential meanings. Thus whether the goal is comprehension

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<sup>2</sup> An example from historical linguistics that is relevant to the subsequent discussion is where the Latin reflexive pronoun 'sibi' changed into a distal demonstrative in Spanish 'ese' (Penny 2002). Such a change may seem surprising but in fact it reflects a continuity of an intensifying function that both reflexives and demonstratives often show (König and Siemund 1999). In synchronic contrastive analysis there can also be very different formal expressions of the intensifying function in two different languages, as in a case discussed by Odlin (2007a) of Irish cleft sentences and intensifying adverbs in English.

alone or production along with comprehension (cf. Ringbom 2007: 98), understanding subjective meanings will often be crucial. Comprehension of objective meanings alone might prove acceptable in some situations, as when the meteorological details of a television weather report will likely matter much more to a language learner than will how the person on camera seems to feel about the weather. Yet, in contrast, success in academic reading can depend very much not only on managing to decode the objective meanings but also on sensing how an author seems to regard those meanings: signals of perspective, affect, and epistemic stance may all play a key role in just what a text means.

When languages differ in how they realize particular subjective meanings, a major learning challenge will be to apprehend just what signals to watch for in the new language. Even in closely related languages such signals can differ, and failure to cope with the difference may jeopardize understanding the stance that an author has taken. The following analysis looks at possible difficulties of just such a case.

### 3. An example from Spanish

If the above reasoning is correct, the challenges of academic reading in a second language may prove formidable even when the native language is closely related if there exist significant structural contrasts. Some of the difficulties of interpreting subjective meanings can be illustrated through a contrastive analysis of a brief passage of Spanish prose and the challenges it could pose for native speakers of English. Like Swedish, Spanish is a language considered to be fairly close to English even though the reasons for the small language distance are somewhat different. For L1 speakers of Swedish learning English, and for L1 speakers of English learning Swedish, much of the ease comes from the core Germanic vocabulary seen in many nouns and verbs as well as function words such as prepositions and auxiliaries. In contrast, for L1 speakers of Spanish learning English and for L1 speakers of English learning Spanish, the advantages conferred by cross-linguistic similarity result mainly from the very large number of words English borrowed from Latin as well as from a Romance sibling of Spanish, namely French. The lexical similarity of Spanish and English will be especially evident in the passage below, although there are points where the grammars of the two languages also overlap a good deal. Yet despite the considerable overlap, there remain some differences that can make second language reading difficult, including certain subjective meanings. Especially significant is the fact that these meanings are often coded by grammatical structures.

The passage chosen to illustrate the difficulty comes from a key chapter in *La Rebelión de las Masas* (*The Revolt of the Masses*) by the Spanish intellectual José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955). First published in 1930, the book-length essay quickly gained international recognition as a serious reflection on the weaknesses of modern European society, and the Spanish original was soon followed by versions in other languages, including the authorized translation into English in 1932. Even after seven decades much in the work remains topical, and its appeal no doubt stretches far beyond the field of Spanish literature, with students of philosophy, literary theory, sociology, and history among those who may find the work significant. The anonymous English

translation of 1932 succeeds in suggesting many of the strong indicators of stance that Ortega uses, but as will be seen, there are points where the translator inevitably had to resort to something in English quite different from the Spanish original.

The passage comes from the first two sentences of the eighth chapter, sentences which provide readers with a partial explanation for the title of the book:

Quedamos en que ha acontecido algo sobremanera paradójico pero que en verdad era naturalísimo: de puro mostrarse abiertos mundo y vida al hombre mediocre, se le ha cerrado a éste el alma. Pues bien: yo sostengo que en esa obliteración de las almas medias consiste la rebeldía de las masas, en que a su vez consiste el gigantesco problema planteado hoy a la humanidad (1930/2005: 123).

The authorized English translation renders the passage thus:

We take it, then, that there has happened something supremely paradoxical, but which was in truth most natural; from the very opening-out of the world and of life for the average man, his soul has shut within him. Well, then, I maintain that it is in this obliteration of the average soul that the rebellion of the masses consists, and in this in its turn lies the gigantic problem set before humanity today (1932: 75).

I provide a more literal word-for-word translation below:

Quedamos en que ha acontecido algo sobremanera  
 Agree-1stPL on that has happened something exceedingly  
 paradójico pero que en verdad era naturalísimo:  
 paradoxical but that in truth was – natural – quite  
 de puro mostrarse abiertos mundo y vida al hombre  
 from sheer show-INF-REFL open-ADJ world and life to-the man  
 mediocre, se le ha cerrado a éste el alma. Pues bien:  
 mediocre REFL him-DAT has closed to this (=him) the soul. So well  
 yo sostengo que en esa obliteración de las almas medias  
 I maintain that in that obliteration of the souls average-ADJ  
 consiste la rebeldía de las masas, en que a su vez consiste el  
 consists the revolt of the masses in which in its turn consists the  
 gigantesco problema planteado hoy a la humanidad.  
 gigantic problem posed today to the humanity<sup>3</sup>

In just 64 words Ortega provides numerous indicators of his stance, many of them lexical (not surprisingly) but also many that are grammatical:

### 1. *Lexical items*

Lexical indicators of stance include the intensifiers ‘puro’, ‘en verdad’, and ‘sobremanera’. In addition, the ending ‘-ísimo’ on ‘naturalísimo’ also functions as an intensifier (historically related to a Latin superlative inflection but in Spanish closer in meaning to intensifiers such as ‘muy’ (very). Two rather highly charged words in the context are

<sup>3</sup> The key for abbreviations is as follows: INF (infinitive), REFL (reflexive), ADJ (adjective), DAT (dative), PL (plural).

'gigantesco' and 'obliteración', and even though neither 'cerrado' nor 'alma' would necessarily indicate any emotional meaning alone, the collocation 'cerrado... el alma' is just as charged as 'obliteración'. The adverbs 'pues bien' also indicate an assessment of the preceding conclusion (and will be discussed more below), and the adverb 'hoy' indicates time deixis.

## 2. *Verb tenses*

In addition to 'hoy', the verb tenses also indicate temporal deixis. The passage includes verb phrases in the present simple ('quedamos', 'sostengo', 'consiste'), the present perfect ('ha acontecido', 'ha cerrado'), and the imperfect ('era'). There is also an infinitive ('mostrarse') as well as a perfective participle ('planteado'), but these are non-finite forms, of course, with no temporal deixis signaled by the forms themselves. The imperfect 'era' indicates a development occurring in the past. In contrast to the imperfect, the present tenses clearly frame the thesis offered by Ortega in his ongoing imaginary conversation with readers. The most salient tense forms, however, are the two cases of the present perfect. These cases accord well with the common semantic characterization of the perfect as *current relevance* (Comrie 1976; Carey 1996) – something has happened: the soul of the mediocre man has closed in on itself. In this sense, then, it is not surprising that Ortega would employ the present perfect to allude to his earlier discussion of the world changing into its modern condition, with the change starting in the past ('era') yet having consequences for life in the present.

## 3. *Pronoun and determiner usage*

The subject pronoun 'yo' indicates speaker deixis, as is also the case in English 'I'. However, 'yo' is not obligatory in Spanish and is relatively infrequent, being reserved mainly for emphatic statements. The final syllable of 'sostengo' also indicates first-person-singular, with 'yo' reinforcing the sense of subjective stance.

The pronoun 'le' most typically indicates an indirect object (also called a dative by many Spanish grammarians). In the passage 'le' can be interpreted thus, and it is co-referential with the prepositional phrase 'a éste', which also functions as an indirect object. However, the context of the sentence also makes 'le' special. The English translation 'his soul' accurately conveys the sense of possession in this pronoun. 'El alma' alone would be translated as 'the soul', but the 'le' makes the possessive determiner *his* a normal translation choice in this context. Yet this construction does not involve mere possession, and as will be seen, it fits the pattern of one type of *subjective dative* identified by Maldonado (2002).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bull (1965) characterizes the core meaning of the Spanish indirect object as an *involved entity*. He objects to characterizing the modern indirect object with the Latin term *dative*, and he cites certain differences between the ancient and modern systems. His objections have not, however, deterred the continued use of the term by Maldonado and many others. In fact, there is (in spite of the historical changes) considerable diachronic continuity here. Spanish 'le' derives from the Latin dative pronoun 'illi' (Penny 2002), and two meanings of the dative were, in the terminology of Gildersleeve and Lodge (1895/1990: 223-224), *possessor* and *personal interest*, the latter term clearly similar to Bull's *involved entity*. The *personal interest* meaning category that Gil-

In other contexts, the demonstrative pronoun 'éste' and the demonstrative determiner 'esa' function as proximal and distal in typical spatial deictic reference (Lyons 1977). However, their use by Ortega also involves what Lyons (1977: 667) calls *textual deixis*, in effect locating meanings (subjective or objective) within a discourse space (cf. Fauconnier and Turner 1996). This textual use of demonstratives is common in Spanish, English, and many other languages, but there may well be an additional subjective meaning. Spanish grammarians have long noted the use of demonstratives for laudatory and pejorative overtones (e.g. Salazar 1990), and both 'éste' and 'esa' can be read as pejoratives in their use by Ortega. Although 'esa' is more frequently noted as having a pejorative potential, the proximal 'éste' can likewise function as a pejorative, as Salazar observes. One might argue that neither demonstrative by itself adds anything pejorative in this passage since 'éste' alludes to the 'hombre mediocre' (mediocre man) and 'esa' occurs with 'obliteración', with 'mediocre' and 'obliteración' obviously pejorative. Even so, the demonstratives can also be read as having an independent negative force.

Along with the demonstratives, there are several definite articles, although most of them seem to involve generic reference without any clear subjective stance. For instance the feminine singular 'la' in 'la humanidad' is a normal way in Spanish (but less so in English) to signal generic reference. Nevertheless, at least one article use seems to have a subjective as well as a referential function: the masculine singular definite article 'el' in 'el gigantesco problema'. In this case Ortega could have chosen an indefinite article ('un') instead, and that choice would be just as grammatical. However, the indefinite would have suggested that the problem was not unique but rather one of a number of gigantic problems. Conferring uniqueness, the 'el' makes clear just how seriously Ortega takes the problem; by this analysis, then, *el* adds subjective force beyond what 'gigantesco' evokes. Although articles are frequently interpreted as simply referential markers, the analysis here is consistent with that of Epstein (1996: 109) for the English definite article: "In its referential function, it signals that a referent is accessible from the point of view of both speaker and hearer. In its expressive function it marks the sole viewpoint of the speaker".

As with the demonstrative and article use, the reflexive pronoun 'se' raises questions about whether or not a particular morpheme makes an independent contribution to subjective meaning. The 'se' preceding the verb phrase 'ha cerrado' does allow an interpretation as a reflexive if we equate it with a highly literal translation 'has closed itself', with the subject being 'the soul'. However, two facts complicate any analysis. First, the figurative sense of a soul closing might allow other interpretations besides the reflexive.<sup>5</sup> Second, the dative structures 'le' and 'a éste' described above can be viewed as making this construction polysemous.

The reflexive construction of Spanish can have highly varied meanings; Whitley (2002: 173-184) details ten different sorts. Along with the ordinary reflexive, two oth-

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dersleeve and Hodge posit includes a subcategory often cited in such cases: namely, the ethical dative.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, one possible analysis would characterize 'el alma' as a direct object instead of as a subject. The merits of these very different analyses go beyond the scope of the present paper, though, and either analysis would be compatible with the subjective meaning discussed further on in this paper.

ers seem applicable here: the reflexive of “emotional reaction” (2002: 180) and the reflexive of “unplanned occurrences” (2002: 183). As Whitley notes, emotional responses are often characterized with a reflexive as in ‘Ella se sorprendió’ (‘She (her)self surprised’ = ‘She was surprised’). The figurative meaning of closing the soul arguably makes it plausible to read Ortega as describing the emotional effects seen in modern mediocre lives. It should be noted, however, that such a meaning would not indicate Ortega’s own affective stance but rather the affective state of the referent (‘el hombre mediocre’).

Nevertheless, the other meaning (unplanned occurrences) does seem a likely statement of Ortega’s own stance. Whitley gives an example (2020: 183) of where a plural dative (‘les’) occurs in ‘Se les perdieron las llaves’, which translates roughly as ‘They lost the keys’. Whitley characterizes such cases as ones where the Spanish indirect object is an involved entity in something unintended, whether or not those who lost the keys have any responsibility for the loss. The closing of souls might likewise be viewed as an unintended calamity, and that does indeed appear to be the position of Ortega.

Apart from the analyses of the reflexive and the dative by Whitley, another approach by Maldonado (2002) requires attention since it aims to distinguish *objective* from *subjective* datives. Drawing on the theories of cognitive grammar of Langacker (1990), Fauconnier and Turner (1996), and others, Maldonado considers cases like ‘se les perdieron las llaves’ to be one type of subjective dative. However, this type (which he terms *setting datives*) are not as extreme on his subjectivity scale as those such as ‘Adrian me le arruinó la fiesta a Victoria’ (‘Adrian ruined Victoria’s party for me’), which he terms *sympathetic datives*. For Maldonado, a key difference between sympathetic and setting datives is that the former but not the latter can have first-person dative pronouns (e.g. ‘me’). The basis for his distinction goes beyond the scope of the current discussion, especially since his analysis considers both types of dative subjective. It is worth adding, however, that Maldonado sees subjective datives as typologically common, and he gives plausible examples from Flemish and Nahuatl. Comparable examples have also been noted in Newari (Langacker 1990: 253-254) and in Georgian and Malayalam (Blake 1994: 149).

#### 4. VS word order

Like English, Spanish is usually classified as an SVO language. However, the latter shows much more flexibility in regard to alternative word orders in basic clause constituents, as seen in a corpus-based contrastive analysis by Matinez Caro (1998). In three of the clauses in the passage, Ortega places the subject after the verb: ‘ha acontecido algo...’, ‘consiste la rebeldía...’, ‘consiste el gigantesco problema...’ (the head of the subject NP in each case has just been given – ‘algo’, ‘rebeldía’, and ‘problema’ – but the modifiers of these heads make the entire NPs much longer). Each of these orders has a special function, and understanding some crucial points in this passage requires distinguishing the different subjective meanings coded in each of these VS patterns.

The first case (‘ha acontecido algo...’) shows what linguists often call a *presentational function* (e.g. Lozano 2006). At the beginning of the chapter, Ortega introduces

something ('algo'), although what he introduces has been considered in previous chapters. The re-introduction to what has happened ('ha acontecido') serves as a synopsis that will inform the subsequent discussion. The indefinite reference of 'algo' is characteristic of new material introduced in discourse (e.g. Givón 1979), and the authorized English translation manages to convey the presentational function both with the indefinite pronoun 'something' and with the dummy subject 'there', which is a common presentational structure in English. As a language that eschews dummy subjects, Spanish relies on VS order for the presentational function.

The second VS structure ('consiste la rebeldía...') differs greatly from the first. Here the prepositional phrase before the verb ('en esa obliteración...') is in focus, and the authorized translation employs a common focusing device in English, the cleft sentence: 'it is in this obliteration of the average soul that the rebellion of the masses consists'. The clause in the Spanish original is syntactically simpler: AVS (i.e. Adverbial Verb Subject), where the permuted prepositional phrase 'en esa obliteración...' functions as an adverbial. Interestingly, the permuted order of the Spanish original and the cleft structure of the English translation have a parallel in another translation context, where permuted clauses in German are sometimes translated into English with cleft structures (Doherty 2001). Furthermore, while German has cleft sentences, translators from English to German sometimes find the AVS option better suited to the pragmatic meanings of clefts in the English source text (Doherty 1999).

As focus constructions, cleft and AVS structures involve subjective meanings since emphasis of some kind is their characteristic function (cf. Stein 1995). A definition of *focus* by Carston (1996: 311) offers further insight: "focus is the syntactic constituent in which dominates all the information that contributes directly to relevance". Her definition is formulated within the framework of relevance theory (e.g. Wilson and Sperber 1993; Sperber and Wilson 1995), which has proven useful for many fields including second language acquisition (Odlin 2007a) and translation studies (Gutt 1998). In the AVS clause 'en esa obliteración... consiste la rebeldía...', the prepositional phrase in focus serves to highlight the importance of Ortega's assertion, which can also be formulated as an SVA clause: 'la rebeldía de las masas consiste en esa obliteración de las almas medias' (the revolt of the masses consists in the obliteration of average souls). The identification of spiritual obliteration with mass rebellion is the same whether the AVS or the SVA order is used. Yet while semantically equivalent in truth conditions, the two clauses are not pragmatically equivalent. The AVS foregrounds the assertion in a way that the SVA cannot, thus spotlighting the relation of spiritual annihilation to the title of Ortega's book. The cleft sentence in the authorized English translation likewise foregrounds the identification even while the SVA just given in the parenthetical translation is semantically but not pragmatically equivalent (cf. Prince 1978).

The third VS structure also has a preceding adverbial: 'en que... el gigantesco problema', but here the preposition takes as its object not a noun but a relative pronoun ('que'). It is possible to argue that this AVS pattern is also a focusing structure, especially since Ortega ends the sentence with the claim that the revolt of the masses (referred to by 'que') is the key problem confronting the human race (Ortega's subjective use of the definite article 'el' was discussed in the preceding section). Yet along

with the focus pattern here, there seems to be a related explanation for the AVS structure since using it creates a parallelism with 'en esa obliteración... consiste la rebeldía...'. In this instance the English translation, even though a very good one, simply cannot correspond closely to the source text.

#### 5. *Sentence boundaries*

The paragraph analyzed has only two sentences, but the points just made about VS word order indicate their crucial role in stating Ortega's position. It is conceivable that the author might have attempted to compress his thoughts into a single sentence or, conversely, divide them into three or even more. However, there does seem to be a clear rationale for two and only two sentences. The first, as suggested above, seems to function as a summary of earlier chapters, while the second invokes that summary to foreground Ortega's identification of spiritual obliteration and the revolt of the masses. Once again, the notion of relevance helps elucidate some structural characteristics. Hunston (1994: 198) has considered the boundaries of structural units to play a major role in evaluative discourse: "While all the information given (...) must be shown by writers to be important, the exact nature of the significance may be stated in a *Relevance Marker*" (emphasis in the original). She finds that "Relevance Markers have an important organizational role in that by referring to stretches of text of anything from a sentence to a paragraph or a whole article, they divide a text into *ad hoc* sections" (1994: 199). Two other characteristics she sees in such markers are that they can be either prospective or retrospective, and that they are 'metadiscoursal' since they inform readers about the progression of the text.

Although Hunston developed her notion of *Relevance Marker* for academic articles in English, it also applies well to the sentence, paragraph, and chapter divisions in the passage discussed above. Not only the VS structures that Ortega uses but also most of the pronouns and determiners can be viewed as Relevance Markers. Likewise the adverbs that begin the second sentence ('Pues', 'bien') serve as evaluative markers helping to mark the transition from the summarizing of the first sentence to the emphasized assertion of the second.

#### 4. Pedagogical implications

For English speakers only a few of the markers of subjective meaning in the above passage seem likely to present any special difficulty, but those few could pose serious problems indeed. The considerable similarity between Spanish and English vocabulary and grammar naturally makes the number small. The lexical resemblances between 'puro/pure', 'naturalísimo/natural', 'obliteración/obliteration', and 'gigantesco/gigantic' are all quite transparent, and other words such as 'verdad' resemble English forms such as 'verify' where the Spanish form offers some clues that attentive learners can use on their own, with less attentive ones also able to do so with a little help from instructors. Thus, although some basic vocabulary (e.g. 'pues' and 'bien') remains to learn, the lexical challenges of the passage are fairly minimal. One exception, however, is the special meaning of 'quedamos' in the first sentence. The most common meanings of the verb 'quedar' are 'stay' and 'remain' although it can also have a resultative

meaning. In Ortega's sentence, though, 'quedamos' indicates an intersubjective meaning of agreement between author and audience (cf. Traugott and Dasher 2002).

The similarities of verb systems in the two languages likewise pose few problems. The only likely one is the infinitive 'mostrarse', but the reasons for the difficulty do not involve a subjective meaning. The pronouns and determiners also pose few problems, although here some of the possible difficulties involve indicators of stance. As a pro-drop language, Spanish grammar does not require 'yo' before 'sostengo', and practiced readers of Spanish will recognize the emphatic signal in the presence of the pronoun. This signal often does get attention in second language courses, but inexpert Anglophone readers may ignore the special meaning. Much more problematic is the reflexive construction that also has the subjective dative (with both a pronoun and a prepositional phrase indicating the latter). Not surprisingly, Whitley (2002) devotes several pages to the difficulties of the reflexive and related dative constructions.

In a recent study investigating the problems that English speakers have with Spanish word order, Lozano (2006: 145) finds that "acquisition of formal syntactic properties is more readily acquired than discourse properties, which are persistently problematic". Indeed, the analysis of the Ortega passage suggests a partial explanation for such difficulty. The main problem posed by the VS structures in the passage is that the meaning of the word order differs in each case. The first involves a presentational construction, the second an emphatic structure, and the third involves both syntactic parallelism and an emphasis different from the preceding AVS clause. Successful readers thus have to note not only each VS order itself but also construct three very different interpretations of what functions each serves. If readers succeed in constructing these interpretations, the division of the paragraph into two sentences is likely to be implicitly clear, but any difficulty in interpreting the word orders will likely vitiate the understanding of the relation between these sentences. Along with the fact of the different meanings, the relative infrequency of AVS word order in English may be a problem. Although English does have this order (e.g. 'Here is Mary'), the corpus studies of Matinez Caro (1998) show the much greater propensity of Spanish to employ other word orders besides SVO. Connectionist research (e.g. Ellis 2003; MacWhinney 2005) has made a strong case for the importance of various kinds of frequency effects in second language acquisition, and the frequency contrast between VS order in Spanish and English thus seems a likely source of difficulty. In any case, the differing meanings that learners must tease out in such word orders probably constitute an even greater problem.<sup>6</sup>

The contrastive difficulties viewed as likely for Anglophone readers may or may not apply to speakers of other languages. It could be, for example, that Polish learners of Spanish would implicitly recognize similarities of pragmatic function between the flexible word order of their native language and those of Spanish. On the other hand, since Polish does not have articles, these learners might find it harder to say why Ortega used 'el' instead of 'un' with 'gigantesco problema'.

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<sup>6</sup> A related question is whether there exist cases of language-specific meanings that are not fully comparable to those in another language – or perhaps in any other language. Such comparability issues involve, of course, the problem of linguistic relativity. Odlin (2005, 2006, 2007a, 2007b) provides further discussion of these concerns.

Whatever contrasts seem likely to create difficulty for speakers of a particular native language, linguists and teachers can provide materials and other forms of aid to help learners with the patterns that often encode subjective meanings. Translation practice, for example, could help with recognizing the emphatic function of some AVS patterns. Yet any materials or activities that might help will require instructors who are themselves aware of the importance of subjective meanings, who can reliably analyze them in written or spoken passages in the target language, and who can anticipate the likely challenges that their students will face.

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THE OUTPUT HYPOTHESIS AND  
BEYOND: MEDIATING ACQUISITION  
THROUGH COLLABORATIVE  
DIALOGUE<sup>1</sup>

ABSTRACT

Building upon the claims of the Output Hypothesis and Sociocultural Theory, the present paper argues that the concept of output should be extended to account for its operation as a socially-constructed cognitive tool. Collaborative dialogue of this kind, which takes place when learners reflect on language use in the process of expressing genuine meanings, triggers the construction of linguistic knowledge and allows the participants to perform beyond their competence. In the first part of the article, theoretical claims and research findings concerning the role of input and interaction are outlined and then the noticing, hypothesis-testing and metalinguistic functions of output are illustrated. This is followed by a discussion of the role of interaction from the perspective of Sociocultural Theory as well as studies which provide evidence that collaborative dialogue mediates knowledge-building in the target language. Finally, some comments are offered on how the contributions of dialogic interaction can be investigated and how collaborative tasks can aid the learning of strategic processes and formal aspects of language.

## 1. Introduction

This chapter is about 'the output hypothesis and beyond'. In this chapter, 'the beyond' is collaborative dialogue. And what is 'collaborative dialogue'? It is knowledge-building dialogue. In the case of our interests in second language learning, it is dialogue that constructs linguistic knowledge. It is what allows performance to outstrip competence. It is where language use and language learning can co-occur. It is language use mediating language learning. It is cognitive activity and it is social activity.

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But those are the claims I would like to end this chapter with. To get there, I will take the following steps. First, in order to locate collaborative dialogue in theoretical and empirical claims about second language learning, I will examine very briefly current views on the role of interaction – and its components of input and output – in second language learning. Second, I would like to shift the frame of reference somewhat by considering interaction from the perspective of a sociocultural theory of mind. Third, I will consider several recent studies from this perspective. These studies suggest that at least some actual language learning can be seen to be occurring in the dialogues of participants, and that, as well as the separate consideration of input and output, a profitable focus of analysis of language learning and its associated processes may be dialogue.

## 2. Background

I begin with a brief overview of recent views of the role of interaction in second language learning. To a considerable extent, contemporary thinking and research about interaction have emphasized its role as a ‘provider of input’ to learners (cf. Gass 1997). This focus has its origins in Krashen’s comprehensible input hypothesis – the hypothesis that the *cause* of second language acquisition is input that is understood by the learner. Input, it is argued, can be made comprehensible in a number of ways. Long, in the early 1980s (for example, 1981, 1983), proposed that one way input is made comprehensible is through *interactional modification*, that is, through modifications to learners’ input as a consequence of their having signaled a lack of comprehension.

As Pica (1994) points out, this “modification and restructuring of interaction that occurs when learners and their interlocutors anticipate, perceive, or experience difficulties in message comprehensibility” has been referred to as *negotiation*. Through negotiation, comprehensibility is achieved as interlocutors repeat and rephrase for their conversational partners. Pica points out that negotiation is not the only type of interaction that might lead to learning. “But”, she states, “negotiation, with its emphasis on achieving comprehensibility of message meaning (...) has sparked and sustained considerably more interest in the field of SLA” (1994: 495). As I will try to show later in this chapter, a form of interaction which, for the present, I am calling collaborative dialogue, also deserves to be examined for its contribution to second language learning.

In research on negotiation, then, the focus has been on input, and how to make it comprehensible. Because of the theoretical framework in which this research has been embedded, it has been seen as enough to demonstrate that negotiation leads to greater comprehensibility of input. Virtually no research has demonstrated that the greater comprehensibility achieved through negotiation leads to second language learning. Indeed, it has only been recently (Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki 1994) that evidence has been provided suggesting a causal link between comprehensible input and second language acquisition, and that evidence was concerned only with the acquisition of the meaning of concrete nouns.<sup>2</sup> Clearly there is scope for more research explor-

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<sup>2</sup> Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki (1994: 481) claim that they have provided “the first clear evidence that access to modified input promotes acquisition”. However, they conclude cautiously

ing the relationship between comprehensible input and second language learning.

However, if we are to understand more fully the language learning that occurs through interaction, the focus of our research needs to be broadened. We need to look beyond the comprehension of input to other aspects of interaction that may be implicated in second language learning. For example, Lightbown and Spada (1990), Lyster and Ranta (1997), Doughty and Williams (1998), and others have explored how interaction provides opportunities for learners not only to negotiate the message of the input, but, in doing so, to focus on its form as well. Other researchers, for example, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) and Nassaji and Swain (2000), have explored the nature and type of feedback that will be most helpful to learners during interaction at different stages of their acquisition of a language form. Van Lier (2000) has moved beyond the concept of *input* to *affordance*, examining social interaction from an ecological perspective.

As van Lier's perspective implies, interaction is more than a source of comprehensible input, or input as feedback. Interaction also provides learners with the opportunity to use the target language, that is, to 'output'. Van Lier, along with others (for example, Kramsch 1995a), would not approve of the continued use of the term *output*, claiming that it limits our understanding of second language learning to an information-processing perspective rather than permitting us to broaden the perspective to one in which all social activity forms a part of the learning environment. But in this chapter I will continue to use the term *output* in ways it has already been considered in the published literature. However, later in this chapter I will alter my use of terminology to signal a broadening of the scope of output as communicative activity, to understanding it also as cognitive activity.

### 3. Output and SLA

Output might theoretically play several roles in second language learning. Relative to the potential roles of input in second language learning, those of output have been relatively underexplored.

The basis for my initial claim that perhaps output plays a role in second language learning (Swain 1985) was our research with French immersion students which showed that in spite of six or seven years of comprehensible input – some might say, 'acquisition-rich input' – in French, the written and spoken French of these students included numerous grammatical and syntactic deviations from native-speaker usage. Furthermore, our observations in grades 3 and 6 immersion classes suggested that

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as follows: "Although our studies support a causative relationship between negotiated interaction and acquisition, we acknowledge (...) the fact that different aspects of language (...) may not be acquired in the same way. Our studies examined only vocabulary acquisition, and only the acquisition of the meaning of concrete nouns. It does not follow that negotiated interaction will promote the acquisition of other aspects of the L2 or even that it is important in other aspects of vocabulary acquisition" (1994: 482). Since then, several other studies have demonstrated a relationship between negotiating meaning and the acquisition of some particular aspect of language. For example, Mackey (1995) found that negotiation was related to the acquisition of question forms.

although students used French in class, little of it included extended discourse, and, generally speaking, teachers did not 'push' their students beyond their current level of interlanguage as the teachers interacted with them.

As I have argued elsewhere (Swain 1995), it seems to me that the importance of output to learning could be that output pushes learners to process language more deeply – with more mental effort – than does input. With output, the learner is in control. In speaking or writing, learners can 'stretch' their interlanguage to meet communicative goals. To produce, learners need to do something. They need to create linguistic form and meaning, and in so doing, discover what they can and cannot do. Output may stimulate learners to move from the semantic, open-ended, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production. Students' meaningful production of language – output – would thus seem to have a potentially significant role in language development. These characteristics of output provide a justification for its separate consideration, both theoretically and empirically, in an examination of the value of interaction for second language learning.

One role for output in second language learning is that it may promote *noticing*. This is important if there is a basis to the claim that noticing a language form must occur for it to be acquired (Ellis 1994). There are several levels of noticing, for example, noticing something in the target language because it is salient or frequent. Or, as proposed by Schmidt and Frota (1986), in their *notice the gap principle*, learners may not only notice the target language form, but notice that it is different from their own interlanguage. Or, as I have suggested, learners may notice that they do not know how to express precisely the meaning they wish to convey at *the very moment of attempting to produce it* – they notice, so to speak, a 'hole' in their interlanguage.

Certainly, for many of the learners we have recorded as they interacted while working together on tasks (for example, Swain and Lapkin 1995; Kowal and Swain 1997), we have observed that those learners noticed 'holes' in their linguistic knowledge and they worked to fill them by turning to a dictionary or grammar book, by asking their peers or teacher; or by noting to themselves to pay attention to future relevant input. Our data showed that these actions generated linguistic knowledge that was new for the learner, or consolidated their existing knowledge. In line with van Lier (2000), one might hypothesize that learners seek solutions to their linguistic difficulties when the social activity they are engaged in offers them an incentive to do so, and the means to do so. The important point, however, in this context, is that it was the act of attempting to produce language which focused the learner's attention on what he or she did not know, or knew imperfectly.

Another way in which producing language may serve the language learning process is through hypothesis testing. It has been argued that same errors which appear in learners' written and spoken production reveal hypotheses held by them about how the target language works. To test a hypothesis, learners need to do something, and one way of doing this is to say or write something.

For example, in doing a task that required students to recreate in writing a text they had just heard (a difficult text consisting of five sentences), Rachel and Sophie (pseudonyms), two grade 8 French immersion students working together, wrote the

sentence: 'Meme les solutions écologiques causent quelquefois des nouvelles menaces' ('Even ecological solutions sometimes cause new threats'). In their written text, 'des' was crossed out and replaced by 'de'. On the basis of this written work, we might have concluded that this modified output – reflected in the change from 'des' to 'de' – represents the students' current hypothesis about the form a partitive should take in front of an adjective. We might further have argued that this process of modification represents second language acquisition (Pica et al. 1989; Swain 1993). However, our understanding of what Rachel and Sophie produced is immensely enriched by our being privy to their dialogue as they constructed the phrase 'des nouvelles menaces'.

Example 1:

1. Rachel: Cher[chez] nou..des nouveaux menaces.
2. Sophie: Good one!
3. Rachel: Yeah, nouveaux, des nouveaux, de nouveaux. It is des nouveaux or de nouveaux?
4. Sophie: Des nouveaux or de nouvelles?
5. Rachel: Nou[veaux], des nov[veaux] de nov[veaux].
6. Sophie: It's menace, un menace, une menace, un menace, menace, ay ay ay! [exasperated]
7. Rachel: Je vais le pauser.  
(I'm going to put it on pause [i.e. the tape recorder]).  
[They look 'menace' up in the dictionary]
8. Sophie: C'est des nouvelles! [*triumphantly*]
9. Rachel: C'est féminin... des nouvelles menaces.

(Kowal and Swain 1997)

In the text the students had heard, the phrase was actually 'de nouveaux problèmes', but Sophie and Rachel made rephrasing the text a main feature of their work. For them, two comparatively proficient students, this was a self-chosen means of making the activity more challenging; here we see them 'stretching' their interlanguage. In turn 1, Rachel has used the noun 'menaces' as a synonym for 'problèmes', and Sophie, in turn 2, congratulates her on this. But the phrase 'des nouveaux menaces' is not well-formed. To be well-formed, the partitive 'des' needs to be changed to 'de' because it precedes an adjective, and 'nouveaux' should be 'nouvelles', because 'menaces' is a feminine noun. In other words, by producing 'des nouveaux menaces', Sophie and Rachel have created for themselves a phrase that they can now reflect on. In effect, it has given them the opportunity to notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge. And this opportunity has arisen directly from having produced a phrase new to them.

Often, as researchers or teachers examining such a phrase, we can only hypothesize that Rachel's output in turn 1 represents a hypothesis about the target language. However, in this case, we are able to conclude that what Rachel said, did indeed, represent a hypothesis, as we then see Rachel and her friend Sophie put the phrase through a set of tests.

Rachel wonders if the partitive form she has produced is correct. In turn 3, she verbalizes the possibilities out loud to see what sounds best, and then explicitly formulates her question: "Is it 'des nouveaux' or 'de nouveaux'?", that is, "Should the parti-

tive be 'des' or 'de'?" She continues to test out her hypothesis in turn 5.

Sophie however is caught up with whether this new word that her friend has introduced is masculine or feminine. This is important because if 'menaces' is masculine, then the form of the adjective should be *nouveaux*; if it is feminine, then the form of the adjective should be 'nouvelles'. As we can see in turn 6, Sophie, too, tests alternatives, hoping that her saying it out loud will guide her to the correct choice.

They resolve the issue by turning to a readily available tool, their dictionary, and discovering that 'menaces' is feminine. Triumphant they give the implications of this discovery, that is, that the adjective should be 'nouvelles': in turn 8, Sophie provides the correct form of the adjective, and in turn 9, Rachel confirms Sophie's choice and provides the reason for that choice – that 'menaces' is a feminine noun. In their delight with this discovery, the issue of the partitive is laid aside, though later they return to it and change it from 'des' to 'de'.

To sum up, we have seen in this example that Sophie and Rachel, in trying to produce a phrase, came to recognize what they did not know. They formed hypotheses, tested them out, and finally, turned to a tool that would provide them with a definitive answer, their dictionary. Together what Sophie and Rachel have accomplished is the construction of linguistic knowledge; they have engaged in knowledge building. Furthermore, unlike in the sort of 'negotiation' sequence discussed by Pica, Sophie and Rachel have not engaged in this knowledge building because they misunderstood each other. They have done so because they have identified a linguistic problem and sought solutions. In their dialogue, we are able to follow the (cognitive) steps which formed the basis of their written product. Here, their output, in the form of collaborative dialogue, is used to mediate their understanding and solutions.

#### 4. Collaborative dialogue and SLA

Output of the sort we saw Rachel and Sophie engage in is an important part of the learning process. Wells (2000: 22 ms) points out that "One of the characteristics of utterance, whether spoken or written, is that it can be looked at as simultaneously process and product: as 'saying' and as 'what is said'". In 'saying', the speaker is cognitively engaged in making meaning; a cognitive act is taking place. 'Saying', however, produces an utterance that can now be responded to – by others or by the self. Wells suggests that it is frequently in the effort of 'saying' that a speaker "has the feeling of reaching a fuller and clearer understanding for him or herself" (2000: 22 ms). Furthermore, 'what was said' is now an objective product that can be explored further by the speaker or others.<sup>3</sup>

The two faces of an utterance – the cognitive activity and the product of it – are present in both output and collaborative dialogue. Collaborative dialogue is dialo-

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<sup>3</sup> Wertsch and Stone (1985: 167) claimed that "One of the mechanisms that makes possible the cognitive development and general acculturation of the child is the process of coming to recognize the significance of the external sign forms that he or she has already been using in social interaction". This would seem to be equally so for adults. Consider, for example, the first-time use of a term like 'mediation', and the fully elaborated meanings it may come to have after years of interaction within the discourse communities that use the term.

gue in which speakers are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building.<sup>4</sup> It heightens the potential for exploration of the product. What I would like to show, through examples, is that collaborative dialogue mediates joint problem solving and knowledge building. But first I wish to make two brief digressions: one is about terminology and one is about theoretical perspectives.

First, about terminology: the continued use of the terms *input* and *output* has recently come under question. Kramsch (1995 a), van Lier (2000) and others have pointed to the inhibiting effect of the 'conduit metaphor' on the development of a broader understanding of second language learning. As Steve Thorne (personal communication, February 1998) asked me: "Is your new, expanded output worthy of a new label?" He goes on to wonder "whether output, even given its new momentum by revisiting it through collaborative dialogue, will have the escape velocity to 'move beyond' its original identity ... ?" He ends by noting that he regrets not having thought up such a term yet. And so do I.<sup>5</sup>

I am sympathetic to the view that metaphors guide our work, in ways in which we are often unaware. In an article analyzing two metaphors for *learning* – the *acquisition metaphor* and the newer *participation metaphor* – Sford (1998: 11) concludes that the conceptual frameworks generated by each offer "differing perspectives rather than competing opinions", incommensurability rather than incompatibility. This provides me with some hope that differing perspectives will be seen as enriching and complementary.

Having said that, I now intend to avoid using the term *output* for the rest of this chapter, replacing it with such labels as *speaking*, *writing*, *utterance*, *verbalization*, and *collaborative dialogue*. This is an interim solution, one that will last until my own understanding of differing perspectives deepens enough for the appropriate terminology to emerge.

The second digression is to outline, in the briefest of forms, why the concept of dialogue might be important in considering second language learning, and how it is different from a consideration of comprehensible input and/or output. Vygotsky (1978, 1987) and others (for example, Wertsch 1985a; Cole 1996) have articulated a sociocultural theory of mind. The main premise of a sociocultural theory of mind is that cognitive functions such as voluntary memory, reasoning, or attention are mediated mental activities, the sources of which are activities external to the learner but in which he or she participates. Through a process of internalization (Gal'perin 1967; Arieviditch and van der Veer 1995), external activities are transformed into mental ones. In other words, as Stetsenko and Arieviditch (1997: 161) state: "psychological processes emerge first in collective behavior, in co-operation with other people, and only subsequently become internalized as the individual's own 'possessions'". This process is mediated by semiotic tools. Language is one of the most important semiotic tools.

Vygotsky argued that just as physical tools such as a hammer and saw allow us

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<sup>4</sup> Bereiter (1994: 9) proposed the term *progressive discourse* for dialogue in which "understandings are being generated that are new to the local participants and that the participants recognize as superior to their previous understandings".

<sup>5</sup> Alister Cumming (personal communication, June 1998) suggested the term *purposeful language production*.

to accomplish qualitatively different physical activities than we might without such tools, so do semiotic tools allow us to accomplish qualitatively different mental activities than those we accomplish without them. Physical and semiotic tools mediate our interaction with the physical and social environment. Language, as a particularly powerful semiotic tool, mediates our physical and mental activities. As a cognitive tool, it regulates others and ourselves. And, as we have seen, it can be considered simultaneously as cognitive activity and its product.

How does this help us to interpret Sophie and Rachel's dialogue? First, it suggests that their 'collective behavior' may be transformed into individual mental resources. This means that the knowledge building Sophie and Rachel have collectively accomplished may become a tool for their further individual use of their second language.<sup>6</sup> Initially socially constructed, their joint resolution may serve them individually.

Second, and importantly, their knowledge building was mediated by language – by a dialogue in which they drew attention to problems and verbalized alternative solutions – 'des nouveaux, de nouveaux', 'un menace, une menace'. This verbalization, this 'saying', provided an object ('what is said') to reflect upon – "*Is it des nouveaux or de nouveaux?*"; "*[Is it] des nouveaux or des nouvelles?*" That is, this verbalization objectified thought and made it available for scrutiny. The use of English here is significant.<sup>7</sup> They use English, their first language, to ask the question, putting in relief the object of their attention. As the dialogue continued, Rachel and Sophie conveyed the outcome of that reflection and scrutiny – "C'est des nouvelles", "C'est féminin ... des nouvelles menaces".

The problem Sophie and Rachel addressed in this dialogue was a language based-problem – one which arose as they tried to express the meanings they had in mind. To sum up, what is occurring in their collaborative dialogue – their 'saying' and responding to 'what is said' – is language learning (knowledge building) mediated by language (as a semiotic tool).

Finally, this theoretical perspective suggests that what we, as researchers, are observing in Rachel and Sophie's dialogue, is both social and cognitive activity; it is linguistic problem-solving through social interaction. As Donato and Lantolf (1990: 85) pointed out, developmental processes that are dialogically derived and constituted "can be observed directly in the linguistic interactions that arise among speakers as they participate in problem-solving tasks".

## 5. Language as a mediating tool

In other educational domains such as mathematics and science, language has been shown to mediate the learning of conceptual content. Newman, Griffin, and Cole (1989), for example, have studied children and teachers 'at work' in diverse content

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<sup>6</sup> Possibly the subsequent writing of their joint product supports the process of internalization/appropriation (Donato, personal communication, June 1998).

<sup>7</sup> The use of the first language to mediate second language learning creates a situation where the use of language as a mediating tool is particularly clear. Notable examples appear in Brooks and Donato (1994); Brooks, Donato, and McGlone (1997); Antón and DiCamilla (1998); Swain and Lapkin (1998).

areas such as social studies, science, and arithmetic. Their research reveals learning as a process of *joint constructive interaction* mediated by language and other cultural tools.

The Russian developmental psychologist, Nina Talyzina, demonstrated in her research the critical importance of language in the formation of basic geometrical concepts. Talyzina's research was conducted within the theoretical framework of Gal'perin (1902-1988), himself a contemporary of Vygotsky. With Nikolayeva, Talyzina conducted a series of teaching experiments (reported in Talyzina 1981). The series of experiments dealt with the development of basic geometrical concepts such as straight lines, perpendicular lines, and angles.

Three stages were thought to be important in the transformation of material forms of activity to mental forms of activity: *a material (or materialized) action stage, an external speech stage, and a final mental action stage*.<sup>8</sup> In the first stage, students are involved in activities with real (material) objects, spatial models, or drawings (materialized objects) associated with the concepts being developed. Speech serves primarily as a means of drawing attention to phenomena in the environment (1981: 112). In the second stage, speech "becomes an independent embodiment of the entire process, including both the task and the action" (1981: 112). This was instructionally operationalized by having students formulate verbally what they carried out in practice (i. e. materially) – a kind of on-going think-aloud verbalization. And in the final mental action stage, speech is reduced and automated, becoming inaccessible to self-observation (1981: 113). At this stage, students are able to solve geometrical problems without the aid of material (or materialized) objects or externalized speech.

In one of the series of instructional studies conducted by Talyzina and her colleagues, the second stage – the external speech stage – was omitted. The students in the study were average-performing, grade 5 students in Russia. The performance of students for whom the external speech stage was omitted was compared to that of other students who received instruction related to all three stages. The researchers concluded that the omission of the external speech stage inhibited substantially the transformation of the material activity into a mental one. They suggest this is because verbalization helps the process of abstracting essential properties from nonessential ones, a process that is necessary for an action to be translated in to a conceptual form (1981: 127). Stated otherwise, verbalization mediates the internalization of external activity.

Talyzina further noted that "the development of mental actions and concepts is not an end in itself ... [They] are subsequently employed in solving a variety of problems" (1981: 133). Often, in confronting a new problem requiring the application of already developed mental actions and concepts, students were observed to begin to apply them at the external speech stage, or even at the material stage. In collaborative dialogue, verbalization, which mediates the internalization of meanings created and the externalization of those meanings, is naturally and spontaneously evoked.

Holunga (1994), one of our former Ph.D. students, conducted a study concerned with second language learning, but it has many parallels to those carried out by

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<sup>8</sup> Talyzina discussed a stage which occurs between the external speech stage and the final mental stage. That stage, *an external unvoiced speech stage*, appears to be a transition between the other two stages during which external speech goes 'underground'. It is the beginning of inner speech, the final mental stage.

Talyzina and her colleagues. Holunga's research involved adults who were advanced second language learners of English. The study was set up to investigate the effects of metacognitive strategy training on the oral accuracy of verb forms. The metacognitive strategies taught in her study were predicting, planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Brown and Palincsar 1981). What is particularly interesting in the present context is that one group of her learners was instructed, as a means of implementing the strategies, to talk them through as they carried out communicative tasks in pairs (see Example 4 below). This group was labeled the metacognitive with verbalization, or MV, group. Test results of this MV group were compared to those of a second group who was also taught the same metacognitive strategies, and who carried out the same communicative tasks in pairs. However, the latter group was not instructed to talk about the metacognitive strategies as they implemented them. This group was called the metacognitive without verbalization, or M, group. A third group of students, included as a comparison group (C group), was also provided with language instruction about the same target items, i.e. verbs. Their instruction provided opportunities for oral language practice through the same communicative tasks completed by the other students, but the students in this group were not taught metacognitive strategies. Nor were they required to verbalize their problem-solving strategies.

Each group of students in Holunga's study received a total of 15 hours of instruction divided into ten lessons. Each lesson included teacher-led instruction plus communicative tasks to be done in pairs. The main activity of a lesson occurring near the end of the 15 hours of instruction was a task described as "a linguistically unstructured communicative task; that is, there was no one overt grammatical focus" (1994: 93). In this task each student dyad was given a list of names representing applicants for a university scholarship. Based on the information provided about each applicant, they were to decide who should get the scholarship.

The success of the instructional treatments can be seen in the qualitatively distinct ways student dyads from the different groups approached this task. Example 2 is from a pair of students, T and R, who were in the M group. T and R's dialogue in general resembles those of student dyads from the C group.

Example 2:

1. T: Who begins?
2. R: Me. Just a minute. Oh yeah, don't forget the teacher said to error correct. Ready ...' ummm. First guy, Albert Smit, age 45. No way. He can't qualify. He's too old. He's married and he has a social life. He must to spend his time with his family. 50 I think he not really interesting in study because it's his wife. If he don't get scholarship, he will go back to work.
3. T: I agree. He is 19. Its' not possible to give him the scholarship. Also his character does not look like a good person.
4. R: Yes, he has bad behavior. He probably will spend more time with his girlfriend. No for people one and two. Next person.

(Holunga 1994: 108)

The strategy training relating to error correction of the verb system that T and R had received prior to doing this task is not much in evidence in their dialogue. Al-

though in turn 2 R reminds T that the teacher has just told them to correct their errors, they pay no further attention to that externally imposed objective. Their dialogue is conversational: they focus on meaning and not on form.

As we see in Example 3, evaluation took the form of praise. As R says in turn 1, "... our discussion is good. We talked very well", T, in turn 2, understands this to refer to content, not form: "Yes. It's very interesting". And in spite of being told to focus on verb errors, T's "I can't" in turn 4 is accepted and responded to by R's empathetic comment in turn 5, "It's too difficult".

Example 3:

1. R: So far our discussion is good. We talked very well.
2. T: Yes. It's very interesting.
3. R: We didn't correct. Remember what the teacher said?
4. T: Oh yeah. For me I can't.
5. R: It's too difficult.

(Holunga 1994: 109)

The interaction between R and T is typical of that seen in 'negotiation of meaning' tasks: meaning is focused on and error is ignored in an attempt to create an effective social interaction. Although S and G of Example 4 also maintain an effective social interaction, and attend to the meaning inherent in the task, their dialogue is strikingly different from R and T's.

In Example 4, S and G begin the task by working out what they are supposed to do. In turn 4, S explains: "We have to speak about these people and justify our position". But, not only do they focus on the substantive content of the task, they talk about what verb form – "a conditional" – they might need to do the task, and why – "... not just the past. We have to imagine our situation now. We have to give our opinions now". This implementation of the strategies of planning and predicting has led them to verbalize not only the verb form needed but the function it will be serving in the current context, and to provide a concrete example (see turn 6).

Example 4:

1. G: Let's speak about this exercise. Did you read it?
2. S: Yes...
3. G: Okay. What are we suppose to do?
4. S: We have to speak about these people and ummm justify our position... you know our decision ... our decision about actions in ummm the past.
5. G: No. I think not just the past. We have to imagine our situation now. We have to give our opinions now.
6. S: So, for example, I choose Smit because he need it. No... it's a conditional. I would give Smit ... I would choose Smit because he need the money. Right. I WOULD give...
7. G: Needs it.
8. S: Yes, because he need it.
9. G: Yes, but no. He needs. 's', you forgot 's'. He needs it.
10. S: Did I? Let me listen the tape (*Listens to the tape*). Yes... yes. He needs. I have

- problem with 's'. I paying so much attention to conditionals I can't remember 's'. Can you control ... your talking?
11. G. It's big problem. I still must remember 'had had'. But we try.
12. S. Yes. We try. But I don't know.
13. G. We don't try... you know we don't get better. We don't improve. We must practice to change old ways.
14. S. Okay. Maybe good idea to listen to tape after we each talk?<sup>9</sup>
- (Holunga 1994: 98)

As G and S continue with the task, G in turn 7 corrects S's 'need' to 'needs it'. Interestingly, S responds to G's meaning "Yes, because he need it", not understanding that G is responding to a grammatical error. G in turn 9 first responds "Yes" to S's meaning, but she perseveres with her focus on form, "but no", going on to give the correct form again and telling S how to correct it: "He needs. 's', you forgot 's'". This focuses S's attention, and with some skepticism, she plays back the tape. She hears her error, corrects it, and in turn 10 provides an explanation for her error "I paying so much attention to conditionals I can't remember 's'". Having agreed that "It's a big problem", G in turn 13 comments on the importance of practice: "We must practice to change old ways". S suggests in turn 14, based perhaps on what she has just experienced, a way that they can effectively monitor their language use for errors: "Maybe good idea to listen to tape after we each talk".<sup>10</sup>

S and G's verbalization as seen in Example 4 serves several functions. For both speaker and hearer, it focuses attention; it externalizes hypotheses, tests them, and supplies possible solutions, and it mediates their implementation of such strategic behavior as planning and evaluating. Through their collaborative effort, they produce the appropriate verb form accurately, and propose a concrete plan to monitor its accuracy in future use. Speech comes to serve as "an independent embodiment of the entire process, including both the task and the action" (Talyzina 1981: 112).

The students in this study were tested individually, first by being asked a series of discrete-item questions in an interview-like format, and second by being asked three open-ended questions in which learners would give their opinions, tell a story, and imagine a situation. The questions were designed to elicit specific verb forms concerning tense, aspect, conditionals, and modals, and were scored for the accuracy of their use. A pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest were given. The delayed posttest was administered four weeks after the posttest.

The data were analyzed statistically as four separate tests: the first 40 discrete-item questions as one test, and each of the open-ended questions as three separate tests. Initial analyses were conducted to determine if there were significant gains in the accurate use of verb forms as a result of the instructional treatment, and if post-test

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<sup>9</sup> As Helen Moore pointed out (personal communication, June 1998), a lot of teacher educators would say that the focus on form seen in this dialogue would be inhibiting. Perhaps what is key are (a) roles (may work better with peers than with teachers) and (b) goals (T and R may see the activity as an opportunity to socialize; S and G see the activity as a learning exercise, not a socializing one).

<sup>10</sup> S's comment makes clear the difficulty of focusing on both 'saying' and 'what was said' simultaneously.

scores were maintained. The analyses revealed that the MV group made significant gains from pre- to posttests in all four tests; the M group made significant gains in only the discrete-item questions. And the C group showed no improvement on any of the four tests. Furthermore, both the MV and M groups' level of performance at the posttest level was maintained through to the delayed posttests four weeks later.

A second set of analyses was conducted to determine if there were statistically significant differences among the groups (using an analysis of covariance with pretest scores as the covariate). The results indicate that both experimental groups performed better than the comparison group on all four tests. Furthermore, the MV group's performance was superior to that of the M group on both the discrete-item questions and the third open-ended question which required the use of conditionals.

In summary, although those students who were taught metacognitive strategies improved the accuracy of their verb use relative to a comparison group that received no such instruction, students who were taught to verbalize those strategies were considerably more successful in using verbs accurately.<sup>11</sup>

Interpreting these findings through the lens of Talyzina's theoretical account suggests that for the MV group, external speech mediated their language learning. Verbalization helped them to become aware of their problems, predict their linguistic needs, set goals for themselves, monitor their own language use, and evaluate their overall success. Their verbalization of strategic behavior served to guide them through communicative tasks allowing them to focus not only on 'saying', but on 'what they said'. In so doing, relevant content was provided that could be further explored and considered. Test results suggest that their collaborative efforts, mediated by dialogue, supported their internalization of correct grammatical forms.

Verbalization was initiated through social interaction. The basis of their task solution was dialogue. Dialogue mediated their co-construction of strategic processes and of linguistic knowledge. Through such collaborative dialogue, the students engaged in knowledge building.

The role of dialogue in mediating the learning of such substantive areas as mathematics, science, and history is generally accepted. Yet, when it comes to the learning of language, the mediating role of dialogue seems less well understood. Perhaps this is because the notion of 'language mediating language' is more difficult to conceptualize and it is more difficult to be certain of what one is observing empirically.

Dialogue as a mediator of second language learning has found support in our current research (for example, Swain 1997; Swain and Lapkin 1998). The students we have been studying are grade 8 French immersion students who, although fluent, have a distance to go in their production of grammatically accurate French. We are interested in finding ways to move these students beyond their current interlanguage.

We have had students engage collaboratively in a variety of tasks (Kowal and

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<sup>11</sup> Birgit Harley (personal communication, April 1998) and Helen Moore (personal communication, June 1998) wondered whether the focus on language detracted somewhat from content. Perhaps it did (tests only measured the accuracy of verb use), but it is clear that it did *not* detract from the students' *engagement* with the task. Furthermore, in an informal analysis that Pauline Gibbons conducted (personal communication, April 1998), more language functions are apparent in Example 4 compared to Example 2.

Swain 1997; Swain and Lapkin 1998) which, through task design, we anticipated would encourage them to focus on form in the French they were producing. Spontaneously, in carrying out the task, students engaged in dialogue. Given the theoretical framework I have already outlined, our focus has been to examine closely the content of the students' dialogue. We have noted instances in the dialogue of language-related episodes (Swain and Lapkin 1995, 1998) in which language is a focus of attention. In these episodes, the students' dialogue mediated their learning. Language-related episodes may be thought of as serving the functions of external speech in the external speech stage outlined by Gal'perin and Talyzina. As with the other examples in this paper, Example 5 is illustrative.

In Example 5, Kathy and Doug (pseudonyms) are in the process of writing out a story based on a set of pictures they have been given (see Swain and Lapkin 1998 for details of the task). In the part of their dialogue provided below, they are working out how to write the second half of a sentence which begins with "Yvonne se regarde dans le miroir ..." ('Yvonne looks at herself in the mirror ...').

Example 5:

1. Kathy: Et brosse les cheveux (and brushes her hair).
2. Doug: Et les dents (and her teeth).
3. Kathy: Non, non, pendant qu'elle brosse les dents et... (No, no, while she brushes her teeth and...)
4. Doug: Elle se brosse... elle SE brosse (She brushes... she brushes [emphasizes the reflexive pronoun]).
5. Kathy: Pendant qu'elle se brosse les dents et peigne les cheveux (While she brushes her teeth and combs her hair).
6. Doug: Ya!
7. Kathy: Pendant qu'elle... se brosse... les cheveux, I mean, no, pendant qu'elle se PEIGNE les cheveux (While she... brushes... her hair, I mean, no, while she COMBS her hair).
8. Doug: Ya.
9. Kathy: Et se brosse... (And brushes...)
10. Doug: Les dents (Her teeth).
11. Kathy: Pendant qu'elle SE peigne les cheveux et SE brosse les dents (While she combs her hair and brushes her teeth [emphasizes the reflexive pronouns]).

(Swain and Lapkin 1998)

In Example 5, we see Kathy and Doug co-constructing the second half of the sentence that Kathy is writing down. They end up with the correct 'pendant qu'elle se peigne les cheveux et se brosse les dents' ('while she combs her hair and brushes her teeth'), but not without struggling with which verb goes with which noun, and the reflexive nature of the particular verbs they are using. Kathy starts off with 'brosse les cheveux', a phrase that translates well from the English 'brushes her hair'. But Doug's offer of 'et les dents' ('and her teeth') in turn 2 seems to suggest to Kathy that 'brosse' should be used with 'les dents', while 'peigne' should be used with 'les cheveux' (see turns 3 and 5). Doug quickly reacts to Kathy's use of 'brosse' in turn 3 by pointing out

through emphasis that 'brosse' is a reflexive verb: 'elle SE brosse'. Kathy incorporates this information in turn 5 for 'brosse' and for 'peigne' in turn 7 even though her emphasis in turn 7 is on using the verb that best accompanies 'les cheveux'. In turn 11, Kathy turns her focus to the form of the verbs as reflexives, thus fully incorporating Doug's contributions to this conversation.

This dialogue between Doug and Kathy serves to focus attention and to offer alternatives. Through dialogue they regulate each other's activity, and their own. Their dialogue provides them both with opportunities to use language, and opportunities to reflect on their own language use. Together their jointly constructed performance outstrips their individual competencies. Their dialogue represents "collective cognitive activity which serves as a transitional mechanism from the social to internal planes of psychological functioning" (Donato 1988: 8).

In our research we are beginning to tackle the issue of how to demonstrate that these language-related episodes (LREs) are occasions for second language learning. In one study (LaPierre 1994; see also Swain 1998), dyad-specific post-test items were developed based on recordings of the dialogues of each pair of students as they worked through a dictogloss task. Students' responses on the post-test showed a 70 to 80 percent correspondence with the solutions – right or wrong – that they arrived at in their dialogues. The posttest was administered a week to ten days after task-completion. We interpret these test results as a strong indicator that their dialogue mediated, in these cases, the construction of linguistic knowledge.

In another study (Swain and Lapkin 1998, in press) students were given pre- and posttests. As a research methodology, this did not work very well because, as it turns out, it is impossible to predict what pairs of students will talk about. We tried to predict what they would talk about by giving the 'same' task to another group of students and building a pretest based on the language-related episodes of those students. Even though we gave the students the very same task, and even though the students were French immersion students from the same grade level and even the same school, as we examined what our student dyads chose to discuss, it was obvious that 'the same task' is not 'the same task' for different pairs of students (cf. Coughlan and Duff 1994). Each pair focused on different aspects of language, and did so in different ways – an important message to researchers and teachers alike (Kowal and Swain 1994; Swain 1995; Kowal and Swain 1997; Swain and Lapkin 1998). For researchers, this principle makes problematic the use of a pre/posttest design if one is attempting to trace language learning specific to the dialogue of individual student pairs. In a relatively small number of instances where a language-related episode happened to relate to a pre- and posttest item, we were able to demonstrate that the LRE was an occasion for second language learning (Swain and Lapkin 1998). For teachers, this finding serves yet again as a reminder that what one intends to teach may only indirectly, if at all, be related to what is learned. Students set their own agendas.

## 6. Conclusion

In this chapter, the concept of output has been extended to include its operation as a socially-constructed cognitive tool. As a tool, dialogue serves second language learning

by mediating its own construction, and the construction of knowledge about itself. Internalization of process and knowledge is facilitated by their initial appearance in external speech.

From a research perspective, we need to find new methodologies to unravel this layered complexity. We also need to recognize that research in which students' activity is accompanied with verbalization is not a neutral environment. Verbalization is not just a research tool; it has important consequences for learning.

From a pedagogical perspective, the position argued in this chapter offers additional reasons for engaging students in collaborative work. It suggests that tasks which encourage students to reflect on language form while still being oriented to meaning making – that is, tasks which engage students in collaborative dialogue of the sort illustrated in this chapter – might be particularly useful for learning strategic processes as well as grammatical aspects of language. In many of the research tasks used in the study of negotiation, this reflective, problem-solving orientation is not demanded. The focus is instead on communication where “attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form” (Nunan 1989: 10). However, it is certainly feasible for a communicative task to be one in which learners communicate about language, in the context of trying to produce something they want to say in the target language.

In sum, collaborative dialogue is problem-solving and, hence, knowledge building dialogue. When a collaborative effort is being made by participants in an activity, their speaking (or writing) mediates this effort. As each participant speaks, their ‘saying’ becomes ‘what they said’, providing an object for reflection. Their ‘saying’ is cognitive activity, and ‘what is said’ is an outcome of that activity. Through saying and reflecting on what was said, new knowledge is constructed. (Not all dialogue is knowledge-building dialogue). In this way, our students’ performance outstripped their competence.

From a sociocultural theory of mind perspective, internal mental activity has its origins in external dialogic activity. The data presented in this chapter provide evidence that language learning occurs in collaborative dialogue, and that this external speech facilitates the appropriation of both strategic processes and linguistic knowledge. These are insights that a focus on input or output alone misses.

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WHAT ARE RULES OF GRAMMAR?  
A VIEW FROM THE PSYCHOLOGICAL  
AND LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

Current research being conducted in the field of cognitivism is producing more and more clear results, in the form of theories and models. They seem to be similar and distinct in various ways. In this paper I will try to outline what is common and what is different in the cognitive theories of language presented by Chomsky, Langacker and Jackendoff. My comparison will be based on the following aspects of their theories: (i) ontologies and epistemologies; (ii) relations between syntax and semantics; (iii) relations between grammar and lexicon; (iv) relations between lexicon and encyclopedia; (v) kinds of cognitive categories and operations; (vi) opinions on feature analysis; (vii) opinions on the idea of prototypes; (viii) ideas on the determination of the meaning of a linguistic expression. At the very end I suggest that the main point of contention in the work of the above-mentioned theoreticians has to do with the way they answer the question: what in a word is a rule of mental grammar supposed to be?

## 1. Syntactocentric view of language and beyond

### 1.1. Syntax

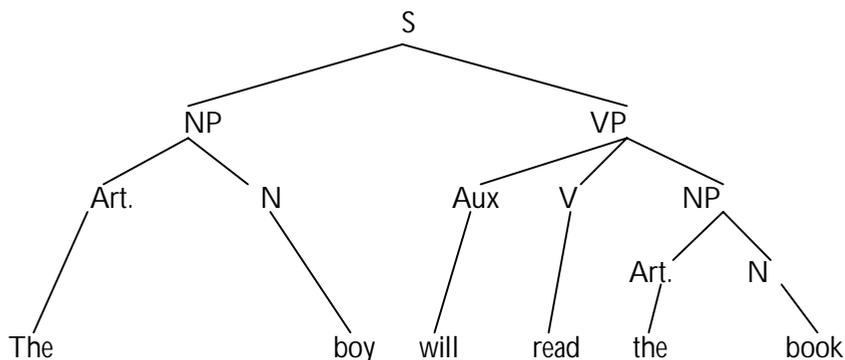
The aim of the linguistic theory proposed by Noam Chomsky was essentially to describe syntax, that is, to specify the grammatical rules underlying the construction of sentences. In Chomsky's mature theory, as expounded in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Chomsky 1965), the aims become more ambitious as he seeks to explain all of the linguistic relationships between the sound system and the meaning system of language. To achieve this, the complete 'grammar' of a language, in Chomsky's technical sense of the word, must have three parts, a *syntactical component* that generates and describes the internal structure of the infinite number of sentences of the language, a *phonological component* that describes the sound structure of the sentences generated by the syntactical component, and a *semantic component* that describes the meaning structure of sentences. The heart of the grammar is the syntax; the phonology and the semantics are

purely 'interpretative', in the sense that they describe the sound and meaning of the sentences produced by syntax but do not generate any sentences themselves.

The first task of Chomsky's syntax is to account for the speaker's understanding of the internal structure of sentences. Sentences are not unordered strings of words but, rather, words and morphemes are grouped into functional constituents such as the subject of the sentence, the predicate, the direct object, and so on. Chomsky and other grammarians can represent much, though not all, of the speaker's knowledge of the internal structure of sentences with rules called *phrase structure rules*.

The rules themselves are simple enough to understand. For example, the fact that a sentence (S) can consist of a noun phrase (NP) followed by a verb phrase (VP) can be represented by means of the following rule:  $S \rightarrow NP + VP$ . For the purpose of constructing a grammatical theory which will generate and describe the structure of sentences, we can read the arrow as an instruction to rewrite the left-hand symbol as the string of symbols on the right-hand side. The rewriting rules tell us that the initial symbol S can be replaced by NP + VP. Other rules will similarly unpack NP and VP into their constituents. Thus, in a very simple grammar, a noun phrase might consist of an article (Art) followed by a noun (N); and a verb phrase might consist of an auxiliary verb (Aux), a main verb (V), and a noun phrase (NP) (Chomsky 1987).

The information contained in the above derivation can be represented graphically in a tree diagram of the following form:



This *phrase marker* is Chomsky's representation of the syntax of the sentence 'The boy will read the book'. It provides a description of the syntactical structure of the sentence. Phrase structure rules of the sort I have used to construct the derivation were implicit in at least some of the structuralist grammars. Chomsky, however, was the first to render them explicit and to show their role in the derivations of sentences. He does not claim, of course, that a speaker actually goes consciously or unconsciously, through any such process of applying rules of the form 'rewrite X as Y' to construct sentences. To construe the grammarian's description in this way would be to confuse an account of competence with a theory of performance.

But Chomsky does claim that in some form or other the speaker has *internalized* rules of sentence construction, that he has *tacit or unconscious knowledge* of grammatical rules, and that the phrase structure rules constructed by the grammarian *represent* his competence. One of the chief difficulties of Chomsky's theory is that no clear and

precise answer has ever been given to the question of exactly how the grammarian's account of the construction of sentences is supposed to represent the speaker's ability to produce and understand sentences, and in precisely what sense of 'know' the speaker is supposed to know the rules of the grammar.

## 1.2. What is language for?

What is language for? A non-linguist would probably reply: 'For expressing meaning by means of sound (or gesture)'. If this commonsense answer is right, we should expect semantics (the study of meaning) to be at the heart of linguistic theory. It comes as a surprise to most beginners in contemporary mainstream linguistics when they find that, instead, the central component of language is presented as syntax. Semantics is not even in the second place; what comes next with respect to time devoted to it in linguistic curricula is phonology (the study of speech sounds). The aspect of language that to a non-expert seems the most important, namely the substance of what it can convey, is downgraded in favor of the austere technicalities of conveyance. This is true not only of the Chomskyan approach that has been dominant since the 1960s, but also of the structuralist approaches that preceded it.

In his seminal work *Foundations of Language*, Ray Jackendoff challenges this dominant, syntactocentric view (Jackendoff 2002). Semantics, he maintains, is not just a handmaiden of syntax, humbly interpreting structures that are generated elsewhere. Understanding what 'John kissed Mary' means is not just a matter of slotting the words 'John', 'Mary' and 'kiss' into a syntactic frame [Noun Phrase [Verb; Noun Phrase]]. Rather, semantics, or *conceptual structure*, to use Jackendoff's term, has a generative role in its own right. In the conceptual structure, KISS combines with two objects, JOHN and MARY, to form the event [KISS (JOHN, MARY)]. Conceptual representations such as [KISS (JOHN, MARY)], syntactic representations such as [Noun Phrase [Verb; Noun Phrase]] and phonological representations such as 'Jöhn kissed Móry' have what Jackendoff refers to as *parallel architecture*, in that all are generated by *formation rules* of their own and are linked by *interface rules*.

Jackendoff is not the first linguist to challenge syntactocentrism. For decades, various rival approaches that might be called *semantocentric* have argued that the syntactic structure of a sentence is in some fashion derivable from its meaning. These approaches challenge, to a greater or lesser degree, Chomsky's view of language as essentially separate from the rest of the human cognitive apparatus. But Jackendoff argues against giving primacy to meaning on several grounds. For example, nothing in the conceptual structure [DEFEAT (CAESAR, GAULS)] explains why it can be linked to two different kinds of syntactic structure – a sentence ('Caesar defeated the Gauls') and a noun phrase ('Caesar's defeat of the Gauls'). What makes Jackendoff's work both interesting and refreshing is that his challenge to syntactocentrism is mounted from a viewpoint fundamentally sympathetic to Chomsky's view of language. Jackendoff agrees that language stands substantially apart from the rest of cognition, even while questioning Chomsky's view of how the language faculty is organized. As he writes:

While I agree that syntactic structure alone is insufficient to explain human linguistic ability, and that human language processing is not accomplished by doing all syntactic analysis first, I do not agree that syntactic structure is therefore a trivial aspect of human linguistic capacity, merely incidental to language processing. [...] In studying natural language, one ignores (or denigrates) syntax at risk of losing some of the most highly structured evidence we have for any cognitive capacity (Jackendoff 1988: 15).

Sympathy with Chomsky's approach to language often goes along with a lack of interest in other approaches, such as those explored by psychologists in recent years under labels such as *connectionism* and *parallel distributed processing*. But in this respect, too, Jackendoff is not a typical Chomskyan. He is keen to build bridges between research on grammar pure and simple and research that involves modeling or exploring directly what happens in the brain when language is used. He is thus not content with the doctrine that a firm line can be drawn between linguistic competence as an abstract system and the way in which this competence is implemented in human brains, with only the former being of concern to linguists.

In particular, Jackendoff is interested in psychological and neurological questions about the lexicon – that is, about what linguistic items are stored or memorized as units, and about what relationships can exist between one stored item and another, and between them and linguistic expressions that are 'constructed online' from their constituent words in working memory (Jackendoff 1987). He shows that various seemingly promising answers to these questions are wrong. In particular, stored items are not necessarily words, and words are not necessarily stored. An item bigger than a word that is necessarily stored is an idiom, such as 'red herring' or 'kick the bucket'. A word that is not stored is one that is complex, in that it contains more than one element, such as 'dogs' (made up of 'dog' and '-s'), but which is formed in a regular fashion and whose meaning is entirely predictable. An example of a complex word whose shape is stored, because it is irregular, is the plural 'teeth'; and one whose meaning is stored because it is unexpected is 'scissors', which does not mean 'more than one scissor'.

As one might expect, many words are stored for both reasons, as is the case with 'commitment'. Speakers of English just have to learn that 'commit' accepts the suffix '-ment' whereas 'admit' and 'submit', for example, do not, and just have to learn also that 'commitment' does not mean 'commission' (as in 'the commission of the crime'). Jackendoff makes the point that the lexicon of stored items may contain many whose formation is regular and whose meaning is predictable, but which the brain nevertheless seems to prefer to access 'ready-made', so to speak, because of their frequency of use. In saying this, Jackendoff insists on the theoretical importance of an aspect of language that would be relegated by many linguists to the domain of 'performance' rather than 'competence', or to the domain of implementation rather than abstract structure.

At first sight, there is no obvious link between Jackendoff's parallel-architecture view of language and his interest in the psychology of lexical storage. However, such a link is established through what is perhaps the most startling proposal in his works. Some lexically stored items have empty slots, namely idioms with gaps such as 'to take X to task' or 'to be Xed out', meaning 'to be weary from too much X' (as in 'I was

conferenced out after four days' or 'Fred was Beethovened out after hearing all nine symphonies in one week'). Jackendoff proposes that every syntactic construction, such as the English construction whereby a sentence can consist of a noun phrase followed by a verb phrase, is simply an idiom in which all the slots are empty. Thus, the question whether linguistic rules exist alongside stored items – an issue which is much disputed among psychologists, neuroscientists and linguists – is answered in the negative, but Jackendoff does so for a novel reason. For connectionists, all regularity is a matter of degree, so a rule is merely a widely instantiated pattern of resemblance between stored items. For Jackendoff, by contrast, the pattern itself is a kind of stored item. The basic clausal structure [Noun Phrase [Verb; Noun Phrase]] is an idiom, just like 'The cat got his tongue', the only difference being that the former is instantiated in a vast number of versions, and the latter in just one. Jackendoff's proposal thus promotes the lexicon from the periphery of linguistic theory to its very center, despite the fact that lexical knowledge is the aspect of language that is subject to most variation between individuals.

A second novelty is Jackendoff's interest in how language has evolved. Most linguists have refused to discuss language evolution, on the grounds that one can do no more than speculate about it (e.g. Hauser, Chomsky and Fitch 2002: 1569-1579; Pinker and Jackendoff 2005: 201-236; Pinker and Jackendoff 2005: 211-225). But Jackendoff is not so pessimistic. If (as he claims) syntax and semantics are structured differently, this cries out for an explanation – it seems more natural that syntax should reflect semantics rather directly. Jackendoff offers a few hints toward an explanation in terms of linguistic prehistory; his proposals in this area are tentative, but he is certainly right in thinking that the question why language has come to be as it is one that linguists cannot permanently ignore.

## 2. Basic assumptions

The basic assumptions of cognitive theories of language are related to the ontology and the epistemology of human language. It is not the case that each of the above-mentioned authors expresses clearly the ontological and epistemological notions he is working with. In fact, only Jackendoff gives clear expression to the ontology behind his approach. The reason is that, for example, for Langacker, a cognitive theory of language analyzes meaning only at the conceptual level. One may interpret his first basic claim that "meaning reduces to conceptualization (mental experiences)" (Langacker 1987: 34) in the sense that perception is part of the process of conceptualization and, if so, then there are no clear boundaries between perception and interpretation. But, if perception is incorporated in the conceptualization process and if we accept that what we perceive is not always exactly what is going on in the external world (for example our perception of the light from a lamp, or perception of colors) then one may say that for Langacker there is no need for ontology, but just for epistemology, since his theory is concentrated only on the process of conceptualization: we cannot say anything about how the world really is but how we conceptualize it.

Jackendoff distinguishes between a real world and a projected world. We have conscious access only to the projected world, which is 'the world as unconsciously

organized by the mind'. Hence, for Jackendoff, there is also a clear difference between real reality and conceptual reality. As he explains, "(...) we can talk about things only insofar as they have achieved mental representation through this process of organization. Hence the information conveyed by language must be about the projected world" (Jackendoff 1988: 15). His major ontological categories are identified by features like thing, place, event, action, manner, amount, direction, sound, smell, time. These features are called *basic domains* in Langacker, but there is no claim in his work that these notions identify ontological categories. Perhaps, then, we have to understand them as such, but they are not explicitly defined so.

At this point, we can already highlight some basic assumptions common to Langacker and Jackendoff, namely: (1) meaning is conceptualization; (2) there is a difference between real world and conceptualized world; (3) there is no direct correspondence between these two worlds; and (4) the cognitive theory of language describes only the organization of this conceptualized world. What follows from these assumptions is that these theories deal only with epistemological categories and not with ontological categories. Another common view is that there are special cognitive processes and operations of conceptualization which are used by human beings for organizing not only linguistic but also non-linguistic information. The cognitive operations used by humans to organize and structure linguistic information are the same as those used to structure non-linguistic information. Human beings have an inborn capacity for such internal organization of information which is expressed by these operations.

### 3. On the relations between levels of linguistic description

A fundamental part of a theory of language are the claims concerning the relations between the levels of linguistic description such as semantics, syntax, pragmatics etc. Here I will include the problem of the distinction between *lexical* and *encyclopedic meaning*, which for Langacker and Jackendoff is directly related to the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. However, it is not the case that all authors express opinions on all these matters. Chomsky is typically most concerned with syntax; Langacker is most explicit on the semantics/pragmatics question; Jackendoff gives a special version of the relation between grammatical and lexical notions, without being explicit about the other two relational pairs.

#### 3.1. The relation between syntax and semantics

There are different opinions on the relation between syntax and semantics. For Langacker and Jackendoff, semantic structures are treated as a special case of the conceptual structure. But for Langacker, syntactic structures are dissolved in, expressed by semantic structures and the semantic structures are characterized relative to cognitive domains, called cognitive structures in Jackendoff (they are called differently and they consist of different elements, although their general function in both theoretical bodies are compatible). For Langacker, there is a need for only two levels of description of a linguistic expression, a *semantic one* and a *phonological one*. He describes syntactic

categories in terms of his basic cognitive notions of *profile/base*, *figure/ground* and *trajector/landmark*. Thus, a subject is said to be a nominal expression that corresponds to the trajector of a clausal head, and a direct object corresponds to its primary landmark. For example, in the construction 'long snake', the trajector of the adjective (a thing) is identified with the Noun, but the Noun adds more specific information to it; the landmark is a salient participant other than the trajector, in the case of 'long', it is a region along the length scale. In the same manner, "(...) verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions are all attributed trajectors and landmarks, regardless of whether they function as clausal heads" (Langacker 2001: 79).

Consequently, for Langacker: (1) Semantic structure is not universal; it is language-specific to a considerable degree. Furthermore, semantic structure is based on conventional imagery and is characterised relative to knowledge structures. (2) Grammar (or syntax) does not constitute an autonomous formal level of representation. Instead, grammar is symbolic in nature, constituting the conventional symbolisation of semantic structure. (3) There is no meaningful distinction between grammar and lexicon. Lexicon, morphology and syntax form a continuum of symbolic structures which differ along various parameters but can be divided into separate components only arbitrarily (Langacker 1987, 1999).

Jackendoff, on the other hand, distinguishes between *phonetic representation*, *syntactic structures*, *semantic structures* and *conceptual structures*. He declares that his aim is proposing a framework in which phonology, syntax, and semantics are equally generative. Syntax is thus only one of several parallel sources of grammatical organization. Jackendoff adopts the Conceptual Structure Hypothesis which in this case "proposes the existence of a single level of mental representation onto which and from which all peripheral information is mapped. This level is characterized by an innate system of conceptual well-formedness rules (...) the concerns of semantic theory with the nature of meaning and with mapping between meaning and syntax translate into the goals of describing the conceptual well-formedness rules and the correspondence rules, respectively" (Jackendoff 1983: 45). Semantic properties are not sufficient for Jackendoff to explain how the syntactic form of language reflects the nature of thought. In order to do that, one needs *grammatical constraints* which are part of his cognitive theory and explain the relation between syntax and lexicon. But "syntax is formally unlearnable unless the learner makes use of information from the underlying structure of the sentence, which they take to be derivable from the meaning" (Jackendoff 1983: 48).

Nonetheless, the *grammatical constraint* is a mystical notion since it lacks an explicit definition. According to it, several grammatical constructions characteristic of reference to 'thing' (a thing in the projected world) find close parallels in constructions that refer to other ontological categories. It seems that Jackendoff is applying the Chomsky-inspired syntactic theories to conceptualization processes, using the formal feature representation as in Bresnan's Lexical-Functional Grammar (Bresnan 1982a). There is, however, a distinction between lexical and grammatical categories, which is not different from the traditional view on that point.

### 3.2. The relation between lexical and encyclopedic meaning, semantics and pragmatics

There are different views on the status of syntax in relation to semantics but very similar opinions on the relation between encyclopedic and lexical meaning. Langacker was reluctant to accept the Chomskyan distinction between syntax and semantics and now he is rejecting the assumed significance in the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. Such a stance is based on his inability to distinguish between lexical and encyclopedic meaning, since, according to his basic assumptions, the conceptualization processes and structures are relevant for all kinds of knowledge, linguistic and non-linguistic. Both for Langacker and Jackendoff, this distinction has only methodological grounds, but assuming it within the framework of a cognitivist theory of language would damage the entire enterprise. As he explains, "I see no a priori reason to accept the reality of the semantics/pragmatics dichotomy. Instead, gradation of centrality in the specifications constituting our encyclopedic knowledge of an entity" (Langacker 1988: 56). This statement is very similar to Jackendoff's position who states:

There is not a form of mental representation devoted to a strictly semantic level of word meaning, distinct from the level at which linguistic and nonlinguistic information are compatible. This means that if, as it is often claimed, a distinction exists between dictionary and encyclopedic lexical information, it is not a distinction of level; these kinds of information are cut from the same cloth (Jackendoff 1983: 110).

## 4. Criteria for characterization of meaning

### 4.1. Conditional criteria

All the three scholars are concerned with the characterization of linguistic meaning. In this context, one may formulate another basic assumption which seems to be shared by the described theories as follows: We begin constructing our mental universe of experience registered in basic domains (or primitives, or basic cognitive categories), arriving at an ever higher level of conceptual organization by means of innately specified cognitive operations.

Langacker criticizes the description of meaning by both lexical primitives or prototypes and by feature analysis. The primitives approach is not relevant mainly because for Langacker the cognitive domains are open-ended, that is, are not fixed. However, as I have already pointed out, he accepts that there are some basic cognitive domains: "It is however necessary to assume some inborn capacity for mental experience, i.e. a set of cognitively irreducible representational spaces or fields of conceptual potential (...) Among these basic domains are the experience of time and the ability to conceptualize configurations in 2- and 3-dimensional space, color space, the ability to perceive a particular range of pitches, domains defining possible sensations of taste and smell, and so on" (Langacker 1988: 54-55). This definition closely resembles Jackendoff's features identifying the major ontological categories mentioned above.

What is important is that although both Jackendoff and Langacker assume that there are some basic irreducible representational fields of conceptual potential, for

some reason they do not see them as fixed and they avoid calling them primitives. One fundamental reason that could partly explain this position is that both of the scholars speak of conceptualization while emphasizing the subjective nature of linguistic meaning, which is one of the reasons for their assumption that even the basic cognitive fields are not fixed, although subjectivity does not presuppose dynamics and the opposite. It is, however, different when we come to cognitive operations which are also inborn capacities of conceptualization.

Langacker also criticizes feature analysis, not so much by arguing but by presenting an alternative view on that point: "(...) a cognitive domain is an integrated conceptualization in its own right, not a feature bundle" (Langacker 1988: 54). This sounds promising, but when he describes the main categorizing relationships – schematicity and extension – it appears that the former is a relation, where the more specified concept has a domain which adds some new non-conflictual features to the more abstract concepts (e.g. a circular object → a circular piece of jewelry), and the latter adds new and conflictual information (e.g. a circular object → arena, since there are rectangular arenas). It does not help much that this new information is presented by other domains; the fact remains that it is properties or features that are added or omitted.

Jackendoff represents one branch of the decomposition school as he believes in the necessity of decomposition of meaning but not by binary or *n*-ary features. Similarly to Langacker, he opposes the position expressed by Katz (1981), generative semanticists like Lakoff (1980, 1987) or evident in Johnson-Laird's (1983, 1987) procedural semantics whose major premise is as follows: The meaning of a word can be exhaustively decomposed into a finite set of conditions that are collectively necessary and sufficient to determine the reference of the word. His argument is: "But once the marker COLOR is removed from the reading of 'red', what is left to decompose further? How can one make sense of redness minus coloration?" (Jackendoff 1983: 113).

Thus, Jackendoff also ends up with basic irreducible not-decomposable cognitive fields. He argues that there are different necessary conditions for the field, for the thing in reality and for the projection of this thing. For example, spatial continuity is not a necessary condition for connecting four points in a rectangle but 'spatial continuity' is a necessary condition for the projection of the 'thing' stimuli. His criticism of the feature-based traditional decomposition approach analyzing word-meaning with necessary and sufficient conditions results in a modification of the theory expressed in new types of conditions, as follows:

- (1) necessary conditions – in a hierarchical structure of meaning the determination of the superordinate concept is a necessary condition for the subordinate one, e.g. COLOR is a necessary condition for determining the meaning of 'red';
- (2) typicality conditions – these are conditions which are typical but subject to exceptions and the latter are discrete, not continuous as the centrality conditions, e.g. There are green leaves but there are also leaves which are not green. Or, typical for Swedes is that they have fair hair, but there are Swedes with red and brown hair, etc.;
- (3) centrality conditions – they specify a central value for a continuously variable attribute, e.g. An argument and an example here may be Berlin and

- Kay's finding that leave-green is the prototypical green hue of color, which obviously satisfies certain centrality conditions of color (light) intensity;
- (4) intentional conditions – they are neither necessary nor sufficient, e.g. in defining the conditions on the projected (represented in the mind) notion 'thing', the intentional conditions are qualities like size, brightness, contrast (when the input is a visual stimulus).

There are also graded judgments which are kind of categorizing judgments and their main characteristic is that they define the categorization of a thing in relation to the context in which it appears. Jackendoff uses the notion of graded judgments in the formulation of the centrality conditions.

The notion of the centrality conditions reminds us of Langacker's *gradation of centrality*, quite contrary to Langacker's claim that his theory has nothing to do with that of Jackendoff. Let us repeat the quotation in its new context: "I see no a priori reason to accept the reality of the semantics/pragmatics dichotomy. Instead, (...) gradation of centrality in the specifications constituting our encyclopedic knowledge of an entity (...) I adopt an encyclopedic conception of linguistic semantics" (Langacker 1988: 58-59). Another obvious similarity between Jackendoff's and Langacker's ways of determining the meaning of linguistic expressions is that both emphasize the hierarchical order of cognitive semantic structures. For Jackendoff, the superordinate concept is a necessary condition for the subordinate one. The same idea is expressed by Langacker and his concept of base and matrix. To use his own words, "The base of a predication is nothing more than its matrix (or more precisely, those portions of such domains which the predication actually invokes and requires)" (Langacker 1988: 58-59).

The base is the knowledge which is presupposed for the determination of a concept's meaning, and this knowledge is organized hierarchically as the superordinate nodes of a network. 'Right triangle' is a superordinate domain of 'hypotenuse' and, without it, it is impossible to understand the meaning of the concept's 'hypotenuse'. In that sense, Langacker's base or matrix is identical to Jackendoff's necessary condition for the determination of meaning. Jackendoff's *typicality conditions* are expressed in Langacker by his two categorizing relationships of *schematicity* (which involves modification of information) and *extension* (which involves change of information).

#### 4.2. Operational criteria

The common premise adopted by the two cognitivists is that there are universal cognitive operations used for the structuring of knowledge, including linguistic knowledge. It is interesting to see if they end up with the same, similar or different operations. These structuring operations are essentially related to what I will call the *creativity hypothesis of human mind* which is embraced by all cognitivists. Langacker calls this sum of operations and cognitive structures the *dimensions of imagery*, which are the following: (1) profiling a profile on the basis of a term, e.g. 'line segment' is the profile on the basis 'right triangle' of the term 'hypotenuse'; (2) level of specificity, e.g. animal → reptile → snake → rattlesnake; (3) background assumptions and expectations, or the distinction between given and new information; (4) secondary activation, e.g. in creat-

ing metaphors; (5) scale and scope of predication, e.g. 'armnail' is impossible because it is not composed according to the expected scope of predication; (6) relative salience of a predication's substructures, e.g. the salience of 'compute' in 'computer' lies at the margins of awareness; (7) perspective (orientation, vantage point, directionality, objective construction).

Since Langacker does not distinguish between close-class elements and open-class elements, he adopts a description of the cognitive image and cognitive operations. However, from Chomsky's point of view, Langacker describes only lexical-item senses. In fact, Langacker's examples are lexical and morphological in character, that is roots, affixations, compounds, inflections, prepositions, adverbs, particles, nouns, verbs, adjectives, idioms, grammatical categories. Langacker defines those systems as great complexes in language that organize the structuring and 'viewing' of conceptual material.

These systems could be characterized by the following set of features: (1) *Structural schematization*: This system involves all forms of conceptualization of quantity or relations between quantities with dimensions such as time, space etc. The categories listed here are dimension, plexity, state of boundedness, state of dividedness, degree of extension, pattern of distribution, partitioning of space and time, axiality, scenedivision and geometrical schematization. (2) *Deployment of perspective*: This system examines how one places one's 'mental eye' to look out upon a scene. The categories which belong here are perspectival mode and degree of extension. (3) *Distribution of attention*: This system examines the allocation of attention which can be directed differentially over the aspects of the scene. The categories included in this system are level of synthesis, level of exemplarity, global vs. local scope attention, figure/ground, plus discourse concepts like focus, topic, comment, given and new. (4) *Force dynamics*: This system involves the forces that the elements of the scene exert on each other. The categories involved here are not discussed in this article but are said to be force, resistance to force, overcoming of such resistance, blockage to the exertion of force and the removal of such blockage.

## 5. Translating theory into practice

### 5.1. Debate on education

Following the presentation of three basic approaches to linguistics, which emphasise different elements of language, that is (1) syntax (Chomsky), (2) semantics (Langacker) and (3) lexical-semantics (Jackendoff), I would like to offer some tentative implications for foreign language teaching.

My suspicion is simple and probably because of its distinctive nature, a controversial one. It seems that our judgements on grammar and language architecture determine the way we think of how people learn language, both their mother tongue and any other. This assertion is controversial for it suggests that language is never a truly autonomous academic subject, and that it is not subject to unbiased and objective reasoning. In addition, it follows that views on foreign language teaching predetermine our views on education in general.

It seems that education based on Chomsky's approach to language assumes that what we can learn are syntax and formal aspects of language. This assumption generates a set of convictions in language teaching, implicitly or explicitly shaping education. One of the most important ones is that teachers should provide their students with declarative knowledge of grammar as well as a complete list of its rules.

Langacker's semantic approach implies a different way of teaching. When asked how much data concerning an object comes from the meaning of a word alone, for example the word 'glass', Langacker replies that it is all possible knowledge as attributed to the word itself, notwithstanding that not all bits of knowledge have the same meaning and status! There is no place for any exact order or a hierarchy of importance within a domain. It could be all sorts of things: the geometry of a glass (a cylinder closed from one side), its positioning in space (usually vertical), all possible functions (a container for a liquid, etc.), the size as compared to the human body, the material it was made of, the place of storage, the moments of appearing within reach and in our living space, etc. The infinite amount of domains does not seem to bother Langacker, and even so, he claims that a word and its meaning always stay flexible.

To Langacker, rules of grammar are schematic representations of complex symbolic expressions. These representations – referred to as *construction schemes* – reflect the level of compositionality, the degree to which the meaning of a compound expression is derived from meanings attributed to its parts. In this construction scheme, two structures combine to form a complex expression. A classic example is a morpheme '-er' added to the verb 'swim'. However, compound meaning of 'a lip' and 'to stick' does not provide parallel data. This demonstrates that language is only partially divisible. For Langacker, divisibility of grammar is a matter of measurement rather than zero-one programming. This in turn implies that efficient foreign language teaching should not be primarily focused on grammar but on living language vocabulary. Teaching then means imparting knowledge which is not discernible from the knowledge of a given object.

However, if we assume that a complex structure consists of parts, it does not make sense to measure the degree of its complexity. All that matters is whether a complex structure is dividable or not. Similarly, if there is a whole set of complex symbolic structures where certain parts of every single structure validate and categorize other parts, degrees of complexity do not really matter. My suspicion is that the question of the role of grammar is in fact a question of our representation of language.

A distinctive feature of cognitive science put forward by Jean Piaget, George Lakoff and Ronald W. Langacker is its search for complex and abstract representation in basic sensomotoric, spatial and perceptive experience. This 'genetically' privileged approach undermines the hypothesis of inherent complex tools such as mechanisms of language acquisition. Ray Jackendoff (1988: 15) confronts the concept of generativity with his experience-driven Abstract Representation Hypothesis. He compares sensomotoric representation of the sense of direction to an abstract concept of possession. It shows that although Piaget (2001: 34), Lakoff (1980: 45) and Langacker (2001: 26-27) are right in their assumption that an abstract meaning is predetermined by senses and that a sense limitation is gradually surpassed and transformed, they are wrong in claiming that there is no inherent foundation required in education and child

ontogenesis. Fodor (1975: 89) claims the opposite is true, since abstract meanings cannot be learned and thus must in some way be inherent to humans. Even if this converse assumption is a bit overstated, its basic concepts should be granted privilege.

This brings us back to our core dilemma, that is the linkage between semantics and syntax. Jackendoff, Chomsky, and Langacker all explain it differently. To better understand these differences, it is worth emphasizing that not all semantic distinctions bring syntactic implications. Just as phonological differences have no syntactic meaning for a group of words (e.g. 'star', 'galaxy', 'comet', 'moon'), differences in their meaning have no influence on sentence structure. This fact suggests that there could be reasons to keep apart semantic content, phonological form and the syntactic apparatus.

Many people do not agree with this idea. They opt for sublimating semantics because of its apparent influence on the structural solutions of syntax. It has been suggested, for example, that when we examine such a basic category as Thing, which encompasses such objects as houses, cars, but also horses, tables, chairs, etc., we can readily conclude that a syntactic category such a Nominal Phrase (or simply a Noun) is predetermined by Thing, and in fact derives from it.

We may however have some objections against reification of Nominal Phrase. This capacious category also encompasses objects like wars, earthquakes, concerts and lectures, values and guilty conscience, honesty and virtue, functions and goals, pleasure and perfection, cardinals and trigonometric functions, etc. Not all of them can be simply identified as Matter, *res extensa*. Their similarity is based on their capability of appearing as a Nominal Phrase (Subject) in relation to a Verbal Phrase (Predicate), rather than on obvious semantic unity. Moreover, they come with qualifiers and in gender and number inflections. It is therefore a collection of syntactical features rather than a set of ontological or semantic ones.

Concluding Jackendoff's reservations, a plausible hypothesis can be made: within a cognitive system, syntax should be granted some independence. Syntax, a secluded component of the cognitive system, can determine but can never be determined. From this perspective, rejection of syntax (Langacker) and extraction of syntax from the cognitive system (Chomsky) are two possible misrepresentations of the architecture of the human mind. There is no equivalent interaction between syntax and semantics and phonology; there are one-sided actions of one towards another. Consequently, we may come to a valid conclusion concerning education. I would argue that for Jackendoff knowledge of grammar rules and meanings of words (*de facto* not discernible from the worldview) intensify concurrently and are being absorbed simultaneously. Stephen D. Krashen (1981, 1985) provides a paradigmatic model of this two-sided and compromising approach to foreign language teaching. I believe it deserves our attention.

## 5.2. Implications for foreign/second language education

According to Krashen (1981, 1985), there are two independent systems of second language (L2) knowledge, acquired and learned. *Acquisition* is a product of subconscious processing similar to children's first language (L1) learning and requires life-like L2 interaction which focuses on communication rather than correctness, whereas

*learning* occurs through formal instruction and comprises conscious processing, which results in knowledge about the L2, e.g. grammatical rules. Krashen believes that learned competence acts as a monitor or editor, that is, whereas *acquired competence* is responsible for the fluent production of sentences, *learned competence* consciously corrects them. In sum, Krashen defends the idea of the Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis, according to which "adults have two distinctive ways of developing competences in second languages: (a) acquisition, that is by using language for real communication; (b) learning, that is 'knowing about' language" (Krashen and Terrell 1983: 45).

Krashen has made an attempt to explain the acquisition process using a model in which *comprehensible input* plays the crucial part. The input goes through an affective filter which, according to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, is "a mental block, caused by affective factors that prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device" (Krashen 1985: 100). The Language Acquisition Device can be thought of as a program which enables the learner to set the parameters of the Universal Grammar, a specific module at the base of all human languages which handles any specific language and consists of a series of parameters which are set differently for different languages.

If relevant input is the essential part of foreign/second language acquisition, it should be the main focus in the process of teaching. It could reasonably be argued that the interpretation of comprehensible input could be extended to the analysis of the style and features of subject-matter-centered texts, grammar-related clarifications, and terminology issues which may take place during the initial *silent period*, through which every language learner passes. This allows the development of analytical, mathematical, and scientific competencies students need to deal with a language typical of the Investigative Environment, followed by the traits of the Enterprising Environment, preparing for career and status acquisition, i.e. presenting materials, discussing issues, and giving short talks which presuppose not only knowledge but the implementation of the respective competencies as well.

The relevant input can be provided via various activities, namely: (1) *affective-humanistic activities* (dialogues, interviews, personal charts and tables, preference ranking, personal information, strategies development, all of which focus on analytical thinking as well as use of language); (2) *problem-solving activities* (describing processes and tasks, charts, graphs, maps, developing speech for particular occasions, advertisements, typical for both academic and professional environments); and (3) *content activities* (e.g. academic subject matter), where the most important thing is students' own choice of materials to be analyzed, processed and presented in different styles and even registers.

It is claimed that immersion teaching is successful because it provides comprehensible input and that bilingual programs succeed to the extent they provide such input. Although it is difficult to set up immersion programs in a non-native environment, it is possible to provide comprehensible input which is at a bit higher level than the level of the students. In Krashen's (1985) terms, it is the  $i + 1$  ("input + a bit more"). The 'a bit more', in my opinion, could go beyond linguistic features and also cover the subject-matter terminology and materials in the students' specific fields. This is because any foreign language teaching devoid of consideration for professional

development of a specific group of learners aims at achieving abstract skills applicable in imaginary circumstances. Real-life situations related to the pursuit of a career are much more important than abstract ones; that is why comprehensible input could provide the much needed background for meaningful communication. Naturally, the lower the level of the students, the more structured and formal the teaching methods are, whereas the sooner professionally-oriented activities are introduced, the more comprehensible the input becomes.

McLaughlin (1987) claims that none of Krashen's hypotheses is clear in its prediction. For example, the acquisition-learning distinction is not properly defined and the claim that the two processes are distinct cannot be empirically tested. If only acquired forms can lead to spontaneous speech, as Krashen (1981, 1985) claims, then it should be impossible for anyone who learns a foreign language in a classroom, and is taught in their native language, to ever be able to produce spontaneous speech in the target language. This is clearly untrue. Likewise, Krashen provides no criteria for establishing  $i + 1$ , or for delineating different levels of input.

According to Krashen, the study of language structure can have general educational advantages and values that high schools and colleges may want to include in their language programs. It should be clear, however, that examining irregularity, formulating rules and teaching complex facts about the target language is not language teaching, but, rather, is 'language appreciation' or linguistics. The only instance in which the teaching of grammar can result in language acquisition (and proficiency) is when students are interested in the subject and the target language is used as a medium of instruction. Very often, when this occurs, both teachers and students are convinced that the study of formal grammar is essential for second language acquisition, and the teacher is skillful enough to present explanations in the target language so that students will better understand. In other words, teacher talk meets the requirements for comprehensible input and perhaps, with the students' participation, the classroom becomes an environment suitable for acquisition. Also, the filter is low in regard to the language of explanation, as the students' conscious efforts are usually on the subject matter, on *what* is being talked about, and not the medium.

This is a subtle point. In effect, both teachers and students are deceiving themselves. They believe that it is the subject matter itself, the study of grammar, that is responsible for the students' progress, but in reality their progress is coming from the medium and not the message. Any subject matter that would hold their interest would do just as well.

## 6. Conclusions

Contemporary grammatical cognitivism expressed in the theories of Langacker and Jackendoff shares a great deal of assumptions and views concerning the cognitive organization of language. These common assumptions are: (1) meaning is conceptualization; (2) there is difference between real world and conceptualized world; (3) there is no direct correspondence between these two worlds; (4) the cognitive theory of language describes only the organization of this conceptualized world; (5) the cognitive operations used by humans to organize and structure linguistic information are

the same as those used to structure non-linguistic information; (6) human beings have an inborn capacity for internal organization of information which is expressed by these operations; (7) we begin constructing our mental universe of experience registered in basic domains (or primitives, or basic cognitive categories), arriving at an ever higher level of conceptual organization by means of innately specified cognitive operations; (8) polysemy is a fundamental way of meaning creation; (9) the distinction between pragmatics and semantics is negligible; (10) lexical and encyclopedic meaning are inseparable; (11) there are continuous cognitive spaces and specific cognitive operations in and by which words pick out focal values. Furthermore, we found that the categories of cognitive notions described in one way or another are also similar. The shared concepts are (I will try to avoid the specific terms used by each of the authors): boundedness degrees, scales and scopes, perspectives, vantage points, directionality, magnitude, countability, scene-arrangement, type/token, figure/ground, trajector/landmark, part-whole relations.

The main difference between Chomsky on the one hand and Jackendoff and Langacker on the other is their treatment of the relation between: (1) syntax and semantics and (2) between grammatical and lexical notions. But perhaps the main discrepancy between these theoreticians lies in the way in which they choose to respond to the question: what in a word is a rule of mental grammar supposed to be?

Like the term 'knowledge', the term 'rule' has many uses in ordinary language. Is a linguistic rule like any of these? For example, are linguistic rules like rules of law (e.g. traffic laws)? Or are linguistic rules like rules of a game? But players of a game consciously learn its rules and can consciously invoke them. By contrast, speakers of English can hardly cite the rules of English: linguistic rules are essentially unconscious. On the other hand, if one breaks a rule of law, further laws spell out the consequences. By contrast, if a speaker break a rule of grammar, the violation may provoke notice, but beyond that, the speaker just communicates effectively.

We might try to see the rules of grammar like the laws of physics: formal description of the behavior of speakers, with no implications for how this behavior is actually implemented. Just as the planets do not solve internalized differential equations in order to know where to go next, we might want to say that speakers do not invoke internalized formation rules and constraints in order to construct and understand sentences. Physicists who have developed insightful formal descriptions of physical behavior always go on to ask what mechanism is responsible for it: if the planets do not compute their trajectories, then what makes the trajectories come out the way they do? The same question should be asked about rules of grammar. If they are in the mind, then what is in the mind, such that speakers observe these regularities? But the main difference between the rules of grammar and the rules of physics is that the former differ from one language to another, and above all: one can break the rules of grammar and one cannot break laws of physics!

According to Chomsky, the rules of grammar are indeed like rules of physics; according to Langacker there is a risk to suppose that the rules of grammar exist at all; it is likely that there is not such thing as rules of grammar. Jackendoff suggests that the proper way to understand the rules of grammar is to situate them in the metaphysical domain between the conscious mind and physical neurons: in the functional mind.

The rules of grammar for a language are a general characterization of the state-space available to its users. The lexical rules characterize possible lexical items of the language, and the phrase rules characterize their combinatorial possibilities. What makes elements of a language rules rather than basic elements is that they contain typed variables (i. e. open places) – that is, they describe patterns of linguistic elements.

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# PART II

RESEARCH INTO TEACHING AND  
LEARNING OF LANGUAGE FORMS



*Jakub Bielak*

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APPLYING COGNITIVE  
GRAMMAR IN THE CLASSROOM:  
TEACHING ENGLISH POSSESSIVES

ABSTRACT

The end of the last and the beginning of the present century have witnessed a rapid development of Cognitive Grammar. Recently, a number of suggestions have been made that this (theoretical) model of language analysis and description may be relevant to the field of foreign language pedagogy. For example, it has been claimed that Cognitive Grammar may be a valuable tool in the hands of applied linguists concerned with the preparation of pedagogical/reference grammars. In view of these trends and suggestions, this paper presents a study aimed at testing the applicability of Cognitive Grammar analyses of grammatical phenomena for teaching grammar in the foreign language classroom. In particular, the study tested the effect of explicit grammar instruction employing some elements of the Cognitive Grammar analysis of English possessives on learners' ability to use these elements accurately. The subjects of the study were a number of upper-intermediate and advanced learners of English, who were divided into two groups and whose ability to accurately use two English genitives (the so-called Saxon genitive and *of*-genitive) was pre-tested. One group was given novel instructional treatment based on the Cognitive Grammar description of the '-s' possessive. The other group was exposed to treatment informed by the standard descriptive grammar view of the possessives. To compare the effects of both types of instruction, two posttests were administered. The results, conclusions and implications of the study are discussed. The description of actual pedagogic practice based on Cognitive Grammar is one of the contributions of this paper.

## 1. Introduction

One of the questions foreign language teachers recognizing the importance of grammar instruction have to answer as part of their everyday teaching practice is: 'What grammar should we teach?' This question is customarily split into two separate questions: 'Which grammar points should be taught?' and 'What kind of grammar should teaching be based on?' (cf. Ellis 2006: 86). According to Ellis (2006: 87) descriptive

grammars detailing form-meaning relationships are currently favored by the majority of teachers as the basis of their grammar instruction.

However, numerous researchers (e.g. Turewicz 2000; Thu 2005; Król-Markefka, this volume) are of the opinion that grammars of this sort, along with more practically oriented reference and practice books exemplified by the popular *Oxford Practice Grammar* by John Eastwood (1999) which are based on them, often do not live up to teachers' and learners' expectations and may be responsible for many learning problems. They are frequently accused of offering vague and confusing explanations of 'uses' of grammatical elements, and of being rife with contradictions between apparently unrelated, arbitrary grammar rules. Obviously, this is contrary to what their users expect of them. What they look forward to are clear and enlightening presentations of grammar points, which may be achieved by, among other things, offering some overarching principles uniting the apparently unrelated 'uses' of a grammatical element. Also, quite obviously, grammar presentation displaying the above imperfections will necessarily have at least some deleterious effect upon the process of language acquisition. In general, users of reference and 'practical' grammars expect lucid explanations of grammatical elements' meanings and functions, which are often lacking in the available works.

What follows from the above is that the decision which specific reference grammar to use, or an answer to the question 'What kind of grammar should teaching be based on?', is in many instances an open and difficult issue. One of the features of a descriptive grammar which may bear on its quality and usefulness in foreign language teaching, and thereby on the answer to the above question, are the grammar's theoretical underpinnings.

A reference grammar may be quite eclectic with respect to which theoretical developments in language study it draws upon, but it may also be informed by a single theoretical-linguistic paradigm. One such framework, which has been developing rapidly since the end of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, is Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991, 1999; Taylor 2002) – one of the major currents within Cognitive Linguistics. Recently, there have occurred a number of suggestions that this (theoretical) model of language analysis and description (CG) may be relevant to the field of foreign language pedagogy. For example, Turewicz (2000) argues in a largely theoretical fashion that CG may be a valuable tool in the hands of applied linguists concerned with the preparation of pedagogical/reference grammars intended for teacher education. Turewicz also repeatedly states that CG descriptions of grammatical phenomena may be extremely useful for foreign language pedagogy in general, a view also expressed by Król-Markefka (this volume), who in her discussion of teaching English articles to Polish learners proposes that pedagogical rules on the use of this grammar point be based on its CG analysis. Another example of a voice supporting the employment of CG insights into language structure in language teaching is the doctoral dissertation by Thu (2005), which offers some empirical evidence for the usefulness of CG analyses of English articles in the foreign language classroom. As can be seen from the above review, there exist both theoretically- and empirically-oriented commendations of the application of CG in foreign language pedagogy.

In view of the above suggestions and in view of the recent emergence of Cognitive Linguistics in general, and CG in particular, as some of the leading linguistic theories, this paper is intended as a contribution to the ongoing discussion of the applicability of CG analyses of grammatical phenomena in the field of language pedagogy. In particular, the paper reports a study that tested the effect of explicit grammar instruction employing the CG analysis of the English possessive element '-s' on advanced learners' ability to use English possessives accurately.<sup>1</sup> By doing so, the paper also aims to provide an example of actual teaching practice based on CG, which was designed as an inherent part of the study. In addition, the effect of CG instructional treatment on learners' accuracy in using English genitives is compared with that of treatment based on what may be called traditional reference grammars.

The above themes are developed in several steps. A brief discussion of the choice of the target grammar and instructional treatment is followed by the presentation of the problems associated with the traditional reference grammar presentation of English possessives and by the CG description of the same grammatical elements. In the second part of the paper the study proper is described through the presentation and discussion of its design, findings, and conclusions.

## 2. Choice of target grammar and instructional treatment

The choice of the two English possessives, 'of' and '-s', as the focus of the study's instructional treatment was motivated by practical, pedagogic and theoretical factors. A practical consideration prompted by the time limitation under which the study was conducted was the relative conceptual simplicity of the CG description of '-s'; its choice, compared with much more complex grammatical elements such as tenses, enabled the design of a desired time-compact treatment. From the pedagogic point of view, using the two English possessives, which is partly governed by their discourse functions, was predicted to cause learner problems since discourse considerations do not figure prominently, if at all, in (Polish) school syllabuses. From the point of view of foreign language acquisition theory, and in particular on the basis of a contrastive analysis of English and Polish, using the two genitives was predicted to be difficult for Polish learners as Polish has only one grammatical element, the genitive case, corresponding to the two English possessives. The above two predictions were borne out by the results of the pretest, in which a considerable number of errors was recorded and which confirmed that the chosen area of English grammar had been correctly diagnosed as in need of pedagogic intervention.

Out of the existing options for grammar teaching (Pawlak 2004: 9), a *focus on forms* (Long 1991) in the form of *explicit inductive (indirect) teaching* was selected for the study's instructional treatment for a number of reasons. Focus-on-forms instruction was deemed more appropriate than a *focus on form* because the implementation of the latter was predicted to be more time-consuming, which was to be avoided given the fact that the study's implementation was incorporated into time-constrained regular

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<sup>1</sup> The two English possessive constructions – noun phrases containing the '-s' genitive and the so called 'of-' genitive may be in some contexts confused and thereby wrongly used.

university classes. In comparison with a focus on forms, a focus on form seems to be beset by more problems (cf. Pawlak 2004: 13-14), the solutions to which generally result in more time-consuming classroom activities.<sup>2</sup> Explicit (consciousness-raising) instruction was selected for the treatment since the study's subjects were university students of English, who were expected to benefit from it doubly: first, as language learners; and second, as prospective teachers and other language professionals expected to have a profound conscious (explicit) understanding of English. The inductive approach to grammar teaching was used due to its multiple advantages, one of which was especially relevant for the study. It is that indirect teaching tends to be more motivating than deductive options, an important consideration in its own right, but especially relevant here for preventing the subjects' sense of boredom, which may have resulted from the fact that as student of English they may have been exposed to some teaching of the focused forms before. In sum, the relative shortness, explicitness and the motivation-inducing quality of explicit inductive teaching prompted its selection as the study's treatment.

### 3. English possessives in descriptive and cognitive grammars

The presentation of what may be called a traditional description of English possessives is based on two standard intermediate- and advanced-level practical grammars: John Eastwood's (1999) *Oxford Practice Grammar* and Elzbieta Mańczak-Wohlfeld et al.'s (2005) *A Practical Grammar of English*, which are in turn based on standard reference grammars. They have been selected because they seem to be representative of grammar reference materials used by and for tertiary level learners of English in the Polish educational context, where the reported study took place.<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to the use of the two genitives, and in particular when the choice of one of them is at issue, the two books jointly give the following as two major rules:

- (a) The '-s' genitive is (normally, usually) used if the possessor noun is animate, e.g. 'my friend's house', 'the dog's food'.
- (b) The 'of'-genitive is (normally, usually) used if the possessor noun is inanimate, e.g. 'the leg of the table', 'the result of the match'.

In addition, the following exceptions to these general principles are identified:

- (c) The '-s' genitive is used if the possessor noun is inanimate but personified, e.g. 'the ship's funnel', 'the country's beauty'.
- (d) The '-s' genitive is used if the possessor noun is inanimate but "of special interest to human activity", e.g. 'the science's development', 'the brain's power'.
- (e) Both genitives may be used if the possessor noun refers to a (human) organization or to a place (especially if it is inhabited by people), e.g. 'London's

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<sup>2</sup> This is confirmed by Pawlak's (2004: 14) suggestion that a focus on form be accompanied by some focus on forms.

<sup>3</sup> The former book is used by practical grammar teachers at Adam Mickiewicz University's School of English in Kalisz and is also on the students' reading list, the latter has been published in Poland and is by self-declaration intended for university students of English.

museums' or 'the museums of London', 'the company's future' or 'the future of the company'.

These major rules and exceptions are followed by some other exceptional uses which are not directly relevant for the reported study and will therefore not be of concern here.<sup>4</sup>

These standard reference grammar rules concerning the use of the two genitives pose a number of problems for both teachers and learners that are often ascribed to traditional reference grammars. First, they are characterized by a considerable degree of vagueness and imprecision that may easily lead to the reader's confusion and frustration. For example, the formulation "nouns of special interest to human activity" is bound to be perceived by a reflective reader/learner as obscure as it clearly allows multiple interpretations depending on how one understands "human activity" and especially "special interest".<sup>5</sup> Also, some of the rules are explicitly hedged by such lexical items as 'normally' and 'usually'; however, no reference to nor characterization of 'abnormal' or 'unusual' cases is offered, so once again the thoughtful reader is left wondering what the rules leave unspecified. This is especially true of the rule governing the use of the 'of'-genitive – in contrast to the guidelines on the use of '-s', and in spite of the qualification by a hedge, no exceptions to this principle are offered whatsoever. Second, and what may be even more frustrating to readers, when the rules are considered in total, some contradictions among them become apparent. For instance, Eastwood's (1999: 220) section on choosing between the two genitives begins as follows:

Compare these structures:

THE POSSESSIVE FORM

*The boy's name*

*The boy's names*

*The men's names*

PHRASE WITH OF

*The name of the boy*

*The names of the boys*

*The names of the men*

Although this is followed by the statement that sometimes either of the possessives may be used, given the fact that there are no clues as to when such a free choice is allowed, the quoted part will be taken by many readers as contradicting the rules according to which animate nouns are used with the '-s' genitive and inanimate ones with 'of'. Third, the rules on the use of English possessives seem to be arbitrary in the sense that no general principles uniting the apparently unrelated rules are given. Although some sort of an overarching pattern may be discerned in the '-s' possessive's

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<sup>4</sup> These are, for example, the '-s' genitive used to express value ('fifteen dollars' worth of flowers') and time ('yesterday's news').

<sup>5</sup> The rule referring to nouns "of special interest to human activity" can be traced back to Quirk et al. (1972: 199-201), who curiously also include the above formulation in inverted commas, presumably because they are aware of its vagueness.

association with animateness, two things are still uncertain: first, why animateness should be so closely associated with '-s'; and second, why there are exceptions to this principle. One consequence of this rule arbitrariness is that being relatively large in number, the rules constitute a considerable burden on the learner's memory. To sum up, the possessive rules offered by the two reference works, which are representative of standard reference grammars, are problematic from the point of view of their pedagogic utility because they are characterized by a high degree of vagueness, confusion, contradiction and arbitrariness.

Lists of arbitrary and sometimes contradictory rules governing the use of a grammatical element and the associated obscurity result in the general problem with traditional reference grammars that especially high-level learners face. It is aptly described by Turewicz (2000: 31): "Simply, an advanced student of English, such as a prospective teacher of English, usually knows that there are rules and exceptions, and s/he refers to grammar books not to get further confirmation of this fact but to understand why it is so". At a more basic level, this problem stems from two related facts. The first one is that standard descriptive grammars make no reference to discourse functions of grammatical elements, thus neglecting the contribution of pragmatic factors to their proper use.<sup>6</sup> The second one is that they do not attempt to elucidate and exploit the conceptual import of grammatical phenomena. The facts are related because a grammatical item's discourse function may be a direct consequence of its conceptual content. Because CG's two flagship claims are that the characterization of a grammatical element should focus on its conceptual content and that it should incorporate pragmatic factors affecting its use, CG analyses are hypothesized to be a legitimate and, in comparison with traditional descriptions, possibly superior base of pedagogically oriented descriptive grammars. Before the CG description of English possessives is presented, the view of the two possessives as topic- and focus-assigning devices will be discussed as an intermediate step between the traditional and CG portrayals of these elements.

Similarly to standard reference grammars, Deane (1987: 66) admits that the two English possessives, '-s' and 'of', seem to be interchangeable.<sup>7</sup> He submits, however, that on close inspection they are not; sometimes one is more acceptable than the other, and in other cases only one of them is acceptable. Deane (1987: 71) ascribes this to the fact that the two possessive constructions (which he terms the prenominal possessive ('-s') and the postnominal possessive ('of')) differ in their assignment of the functions of topic and focus. He captures this by means of a chart converted here to Table 1. These claims are illustrated by several examples provided by Elizabeth Riddle (after Deane 1987: 72), two of which are reported here. The first one is the following information on a public poster:

- (1) A meeting of Overeaters Anonymous will take place at the home of Agnes Levy, 184 Elm St., on...

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<sup>6</sup> This claim is borne out by the results of the pretest, which are discussed later in the paper.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that Deane's characterization of the possessives discussed here is regarded by Ronald Langacker (1999), the creator of CG and of the CG description of English possessives discussed further in the paper, as complementary and compatible with his own.

In stark contradiction to the traditional rule of inanimateness, ‘the home of Agnes Levy’ is more appropriate than ‘Agnes Levy’s home’ because Agnes Levy (the possessor) is the focused information here (readers of a public poster are not expected to know her), while the use of ‘-s’ would wrongly imply that Agnes Levy is topical information. The second example is in the form of a dialogue:

- (2) Susan: How are you doing with your rental properties?  
 Jane: Oh, pretty good. I’ve got the shop all fixed up now, but several of the house’s windows still need to be replaced.

The ‘-s’ possessive is used in ‘the house’s windows’ since the house “instantiates the general topic of discussion (rental properties)” (Deane 1987: 72). Again, the example contradicts the traditional descriptive rule allowing ‘-s’ only with animate possessors.

	Possessor	Possessed Noun
Prenominal Possessive (‘-s’)	Relatively topical	Relatively in focus
Postnominal Possessive (‘of’)	Relatively in focus	Relatively topical

Table 1. Discourse functions assigned by the English possessive constructions (adapted from Deane 1987: 71).

The properties of English possessives depicted in Table 1 may be regarded as a direct consequence of their conceptual import neatly captured by CG. With regard to the economy of the present paper, a CG description of only one possessive, ‘-s’, will be presented here.<sup>8</sup> For its characterization Langacker (1991: 170-171) evokes an idealized cognitive model (Lakoff 1987) which he calls *the reference point model*. In the model, depicted schematically in Figure 1, the conceptualizer (C) (the speaker, the listener) achieves mental contact with, or turns and attracts attention to, the target of conception (T). This contact is not achieved directly, however. The conceptualizer traces a mental path to a relatively non-salient entity, the target, through a relatively salient element, the reference point (R). The (salient) reference point serving to establish mental contact with the target constitutes the possessor, and the (non-salient) target constitutes the possessee. The target is to be located in the abstract region called the reference point’s dominion (D), to which the reference point affords direct mental (conceptual) access. The ‘-s’ genitive can only be attached to the possessor (reference point) noun and the whole noun phrase designates the entity coded by the possessee (target) noun. The crux of this CG view of the ‘-s’ possessive, which was exploited in the reported study’s instructional treatment, is that ‘-s’ attaches to these possessors which are *salient reference points* allowing the establishment of mental contact with other

<sup>8</sup> For the same reason of time-saving economy, the instructional treatment which relied on CG and was an integral part of this study focused on the CG description of only the ‘-s’ possessive, to the exclusion of the ‘of’-genitive. This was deemed appropriate since the two elements are mutually exclusive in the focused area of use, so knowing the factors requiring the use of one of them (-s) is tantamount to knowing that when such factors do not obtain, the other one is appropriate.

less salient entities that are conceptually related or 'close' to them (they are in their dominions) and can thereby become their possesses.

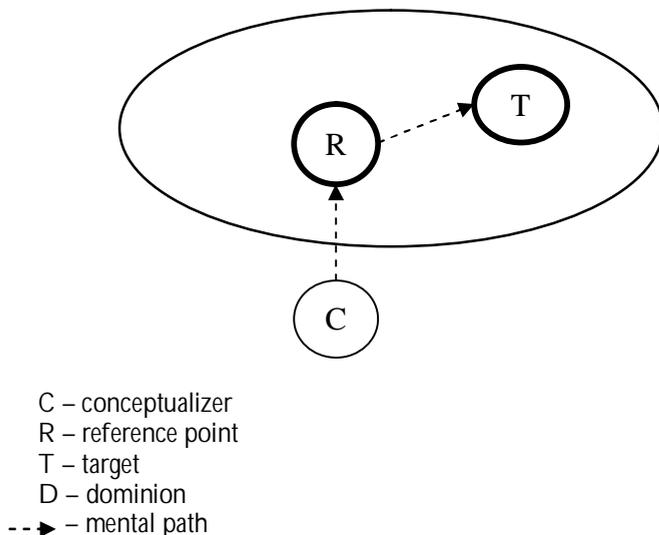


Figure 1. The reference point model (adapted from Langacker 1999: 174).

To realize the affinity of Langacker's analysis to that of Deane's, one has to notice the topical nature of reference points. Here is how Deane (1987: 71) characterizes the notions *topic* and *focus*:

A NP is topical to the extent that is central but backgrounded in discourse.<sup>9</sup> The topic tends to be what the discourse is about; (...) and the topic often expresses old information. The focus represents information about the topic. It typically occurs later in the sentence, (...), and it is foregrounded, often because it represents new (or noteworthy) information about the topic.

Clearly, the reference point is central and backgrounded in the sense that it is necessary to conceive of the target but is not the 'final' object of conception; and the target occurs 'later in the sentence' (the possessee follows the possessor with '-s') and is foregrounded in that it is the ultimate goal of conception. What confirms this affinity between reference points and topics (and targets and foci) is the fact that in CG topics at various levels of organization (e.g. sentential, discursual) are supposed to be reference points of some kind (Langacker 1991: 314).

Out of the two compatible views of English possessives presented above, the CG description was selected rather than Deane's as the basis of the study's instructional treatment because it was deemed to be better suited for pedagogical purposes. Specifically, given the inherent difficulty of characterizing the notions of topic and

<sup>9</sup> It seems obvious that the intended form of this sentence is: "A NP is topical to the extent that it is central but backgrounded in discourse".

focus<sup>10</sup>, which may be exacerbated by trying to do this with a view to pedagogic utility, the conceptually frugal CG analysis of '-s' was thought to be pedagogically superior. Incidentally, this consideration constitutes another argument for applying CG in foreign language pedagogy.

#### 4. Design of the study

The subjects of the study were 58 first- and second-year university students of English. Because they studied in different years and because the majority of the subjects (36) were freshmen who came to university from different educational backgrounds and thus naturally differed with respect to their levels of advancement, it has to be assumed that the whole group were a mix of upper-intermediate and advanced learners of English. They were randomly divided into two groups. The first one will be called a *traditional group*, which reflects the fact that the instructional treatment it received was informed by traditional reference grammars; the second one will be named a *cognitive group*, which draws attention to the CG basis of the treatment it received. Care was taken to include similar numbers of students into both groups and to ensure similar percentages of first- and second-year students in both of them. Because of unexpected student absences in the course of the study, which extended over five weeks and was incorporated into four normally scheduled university classes, the final number of students was 21 in the cognitive group and 37 in the traditional group.

The study required the administration of three tests. A pretest was given one week prior to instructional treatment to establish the initial accuracy with which the subjects in the two groups used the two English genitives. Posttest 1 and posttest 2 were intended to reflect the influence of the two sorts of instructional treatment on the subjects' ability to use the possessives accurately and were given one and three weeks after the treatment respectively.

To ensure the reliability of the findings, three distinct tests had to be administered displaying comparable levels of difficulty and including the same tasks types. Towards this goal, the following procedure was applied. Three tests (A, B and C) were devised each containing 20 questions worth 1 point each (Appendix 1).<sup>11</sup> One half of each test (10 points to be scored) was a translation task involving the translation of parts of texts from Polish into English where the use of one of the target grammatical features (either '-s' or 'of') was predicted. The other half (another 10 points to be scored) was a multiple choice test requiring the subjects to choose one of the two genitives, which occurred in a number of English texts. The cognitive and traditional groups were each divided into three subgroups which can be referred to as Cognitive 1, Traditional 1, Cognitive 2, etc. For the pretest, Cognitive 1 and Traditional 1 took Test A; Cognitive 2 and Traditional 2 took Test B; while Cognitive 3 and Traditional 3

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<sup>10</sup> Deane (1987: 71) acknowledges this difficulty when he says that the terms *topic* and *focus* "are often subject to some confusion and various similar or equivalent terms have been employed (theme/rheme; topic/comment; etc.)".

<sup>11</sup> Since the three test were very similar to one another and for reasons of economy, only test A sample questions are included in the Appendix.

took Test C. On each subsequent test members of a given subgroup took a test that they had not taken before, as specified in Table 2. This procedure ensured the same task types and the same levels of difficulty of the pretest and the two posttests for the totalities of the cognitive and traditional groups, as well as for the totality of the two groups together.

	Pretest	Posttest 1	Posttest 2
Cognitive 1 Traditional 1	Test A	Test B	Test C
Cognitive 2 Traditional 2	Test B	Test C	Test A
Cognitive 3 Traditional 3	Test C	Test A	Test B

Table 2. The distribution of study tests.

As can be seen from the above, the two parts of every test tested two different kinds of knowledge: productive (translation) and receptive (multiple choice); this was intended to minimize/exclude the skewing of results induced by test type.

Although the two kinds of instructional treatment given to the cognitive and traditional groups, which can be called CG treatment and traditional treatment, were different in essence, they were designed in such a way as to be based on the same language data and to be otherwise as similar as possible - all this to minimize the number of variables in the study. In both cases the treatment was approximately 45 minutes long and incorporated, similarly to all the tests, into regular university classes. It was aided by the distribution among the subjects of specially prepared handouts containing a number of examples of noun phrases including the target grammatical elements, and a number of blank spaces where the subjects were supposed to write down the rules discovered in its course (Appendix 2).<sup>12</sup> The language data in both handouts consisted mostly of examples drawn from the two reference grammars on which the traditional treatment was based, i.e. Eastwood (1999) and Mańczak-Wohlfeld et al. (2005).

The purpose of what has been called traditional treatment, which took the form of explicit inductive teaching, was the subjects' (re-)discovery of the standard reference grammar rules governing the use of the two genitives. First, to make the subjects aware of the wide range of meanings expressed by English possessives, a number of example noun phrases containing '-s' and 'of' were elicited and their meanings noted. They included some obvious examples expressing ownership, kinship and part-whole relations ('Ann's car', 'John's son', 'the roof of the house') and some less prototypical ones such as 'use' in 'Jack's office' (Jack only uses the office, he is not the owner). The next step was the introduction of the terms *possessor (noun phrase)* and *possessee (noun phrase)* in order to facilitate easy reference to the elements of noun phrases containing the possessives in the subsequent part of the treatment. Following this, the students

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<sup>12</sup> The handouts used with the cognitive and traditional groups contained exactly the same examples; they differed only with respect to the arrangement of this material. Therefore, for reasons of economy only the cognitive handout is included in the Appendix.

were asked to complete the handout's point 1 (Appendix 2) with some of the discussed examples and their meanings and to make a note on the terms *possessor* and *possessee*. Next, the subjects were instructed to analyze and discuss in pairs and small groups the examples of noun phrases with the -s genitive in the handout's point 2a) ('my friend's house', 'Claire's idea', 'Daniel's brother', etc.) and to try to come up with a rule governing the use of this possessive, also by comparing the examples with the examples of noun phrases containing *of* in the handout's point 3. After several minutes the instructor (the present author) successfully elicited the rule specifying that -s is usually used with animate possessor nouns (Rule a. in Section 3 above) and the subjects were asked to write the rule down in the handout.<sup>13</sup> Next, the subjects focused on the examples in 2b) ('the ship's funnel', 'the country's beauty', etc.), while their attention was turned to the fact that '-s' is used in them in spite of the fact that the possessor is not animate. This resulted in the discovery of the rule allowing the -s genitive with inanimate but personified possessors (Rule c.). Another step, involving reflection on the examples in point 3 ('the side of the house', 'the result of the match', etc.), led to the establishment of the by now obvious rule that the 'of'-genitive is normally used when the possessor noun is inanimate (Rule b.). In the last important step the subjects discussed the paired examples in point 4 ('the problems of the nation' and 'the nation's problems', 'the smog of Cardiff' and 'Cardiff's smog', 'the intentions of the government' and 'the government's intentions', etc.) and formulated the rule that both possessive constructions may be used when the possessor refers to a place (especially one where people live), an organization (where people are members), etc. (Rule e.). The explicit traditional treatment sketched above made the subjects aware of the major descriptive rules on the use of English possessives, with the exception of the rule referring to "special interest to human activity", which was deemed too vague to be translated into pedagogic practice.

Similarly to the traditional treatment, the CG treatment was in the form of explicit inductive teaching geared towards the subjects' discovering the major principles regulating the use of possessives. This treatment was initiated by the introductory steps of the traditional treatment that made the subjects aware of the wide range of meanings conveyed by possessives and introduced the terms *possessor* and *possessee*. Next, the subjects' attention was turned to the following four examples in the handout's point 2: 'my friend's house', 'Claire's idea', 'the dog's food', 'the ship's funnel'. This was followed by the following question asked by the instructor: 'When we say these phrases, where do we want to focus attention? In other words, to which element, the possessor or the possessee, does the speaker want to draw the listener's attention?' Answers varied, and when the initial answer was 'the possessor' the following question was asked: 'When we say the sentence "Let's talk about my friend's house", do we mean that we want to talk about our friend or about his house?' At this point the students generally agreed that the suggested topic of the conversation was not the friend but the house, or the possessee. Following this, another question was

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the procedure of asking the subjects a question followed by pair/group discussion followed by elicitation/class discussion followed by writing down a handout rule was employed throughout both types of treatment and this will not be restated in the remainder of the treatment's description.

asked: 'Given the fact that we want to turn the listener's attention to the possessee, why do we have the possessor nouns in these phrases?, why is the possessor mentioned?' The subjects were generally at a loss to provide a reasonable answer. In reaction to this, the instructor elicited the general meanings of the possessor and possessee nouns in the four examples and put them on the blackboard:

	<u>Possessor</u>	<u>Possessee</u>
<i>my friend's house</i>	person	thing
<i>Claire's idea</i>	person	abstraction
<i>the dog's food</i>	animal	thing
<i>the ship's funnel</i>	whole	part

This question followed: 'Which of the two elements is normally more salient?' With more or less prompts from the instructor, the students generally conceded that normally a person is more salient perceptually and cognitively than a thing and than an abstraction, and that a whole is more salient than a part.<sup>14</sup> At this point, it was proposed that the '-s' genitive is used with these possessors which are salient *reference points* and that we direct attention to them in order to redirect it to some other, less salient elements which are somehow 'close', 'related to' the reference points. This statement was designed as a 'student friendly', pedagogically exploitable rendition of the CG description of '-s'.

To make the somewhat abstract and no doubt novel concept of a reference point more accessible to the students, the following pedagogic procedure was used. The subjects were asked to imagine that they were looking at a nighttime sky on a cloudless night. A schematic depiction of their field of vision shown in Figure 2 was put on the blackboard. They were told to assume they had often admired this view and that they could always clearly see the three large stars in more or less the same spots of the field of vision. These stars had gained a high level of individuation and recognizability for them, and because of this they had even devised a system of names to refer to them; the stars were named with numbers 1, 2 and 3 going from the left to the right of the scene. The remaining small stars had not achieved a comparable level of individuation and recognizability because they were too numerous, not always visible, and lacked any major individualizing features such as occupying easily recognizable locations, and therefore the students had not devised any names for them. These details were intended to convey the following simple message: the large stars were both perceptually and cognitively salient for the subjects, while the other stars were not. Subsequently, the students were asked to assume that for some reason they wanted to refer verbally to one of the small stars, namely the one indicated by the red arrow in Figure 3, and asked how they would do it. At his point, it was jointly established that probably the best way to unequivocally refer to the star in question was not

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<sup>14</sup> This was achieved by asking such auxiliary questions as: 'If you enter a room where you see a person or an animal and some furniture of a standard sort, what do you focus attention on first?' (animates are more salient than things) and 'You've just talked to a friend. Are you going to report it with: 'I've just talked to my friend/Jerry' or with 'I've just talked to my friend's/Jerry's face?' (wholes are more salient than their parts).

to do it directly but by saying something like: 'Can you see star 3 (on the right)? Now, directly below it there is a small star, please have a look at it'. The students were shown the configuration in Figure 4 and agreed that this is how the speaker turns the listener's attention to the intended star: star number 3, being much more salient, serves as a *reference point* facilitating the establishment of perceptual (visual) and mental contact with the small one. It was also suggested that the situation might be quite similar to the situation in the noun phrases discussed earlier. To compare it with Figure 4, the subjects were given slips of paper with the schematic representation of the reference point model proposed by Langacker (see Figure 1), and were asked whether it could be legitimately said that all the possessors in all the examples of the handout's point 2 were, under normal circumstances, salient reference points helping to direct attention to other, initially less salient possessives. They generally answered in the affirmative. At this point, the general rule governing the use of '-s' was said to be something along the following lines: *The -s genitive (possessive) is used when the possessor is a salient reference point (where salient means that something is easy to perceive, familiar, etc.).*

Figure 2

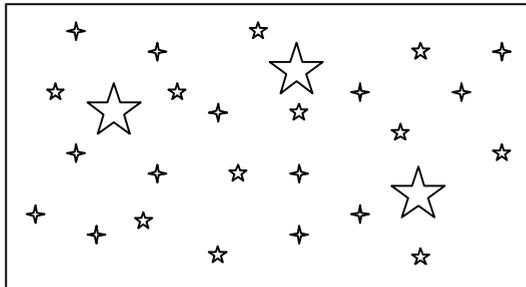


Figure 3

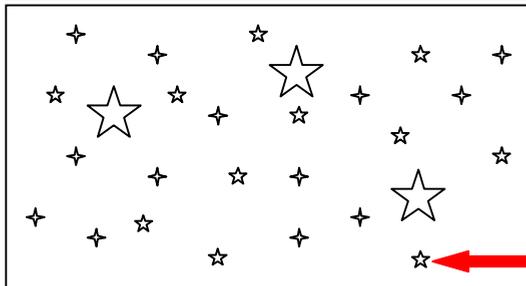
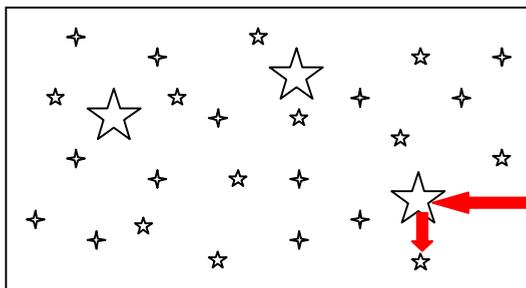


Figure 4



Following the establishment of this major rule, the subjects were asked to compare the examples in the left hand column in 4a) ('the smog of Cardiff', 'the future of

the company', etc.) with those in the right hand column ('Cardiff's smog', 'the company's future', etc.) and set the task of coming up with situations in which the two different genitives were likely to be used. They offered lot of suggestions that led to the conclusion that the following or a similar example well illustrated the point. *The phrase 'the company's future' will be used when we are talking about a given company, we focus on a number of issues all related to the functioning of the company and then we want to refer to its future (the company is a salient reference point, its future is the target of conception). The phrase 'the future of the company' will be used when we talk about the future in general, or the future of things other than the company (e.g. our own or the country's) and then we want to focus on the future of the company (the company is not a salient reference point here).*

## 5. Results and discussion

As can be seen from Figure 5, which shows the accuracy percentages for all the tests for both the traditional and cognitive groups, the CG treatment appears to have contributed to an increase in accuracy with which the subjects used the two genitives in monitored production and reception task and this beneficial effect was durable. We can see that the cognitive learners were 5.71% more accurate on posttest 1 in comparison with the pretest and that they were 7.38% more accurate on posttest 2, which means the initial improvement was not only maintained but that it actually kept increasing on each subsequent posttest. This contrasts sharply with the results of the traditional group whose members, despite displaying pretest accuracy levels very similar to the cognitive group (they scored only 0.63% lower), showed considerable deterioration on each posttest in comparison with the pretest. They deteriorated by 8.51% on posttest 1, and by 6.21% on posttest 2. This reflects the deleterious effect on their performance of the traditional treatment, which ignores important aspects of the use of English possessives. More precisely, the drop may be explained by the fact that the majority of questions were so designed as to test the subjects' ability to appropriately choose between the two English possessives when the extralinguistic context, coded by the often lengthy linguistic context, had a bearing on the choice, in other words, when the discourse functions and the conceptual content of English possessives, neglected by standard reference grammars, came into play. Although somewhat unexpected, the slight posttest 1-posttest 2 gain in the traditional group may have been caused by the fact that the time lapse between the treatment and posttest 2 resulted in more learners relying on their 'feel' when taking the test, rather than on their explicit knowledge.

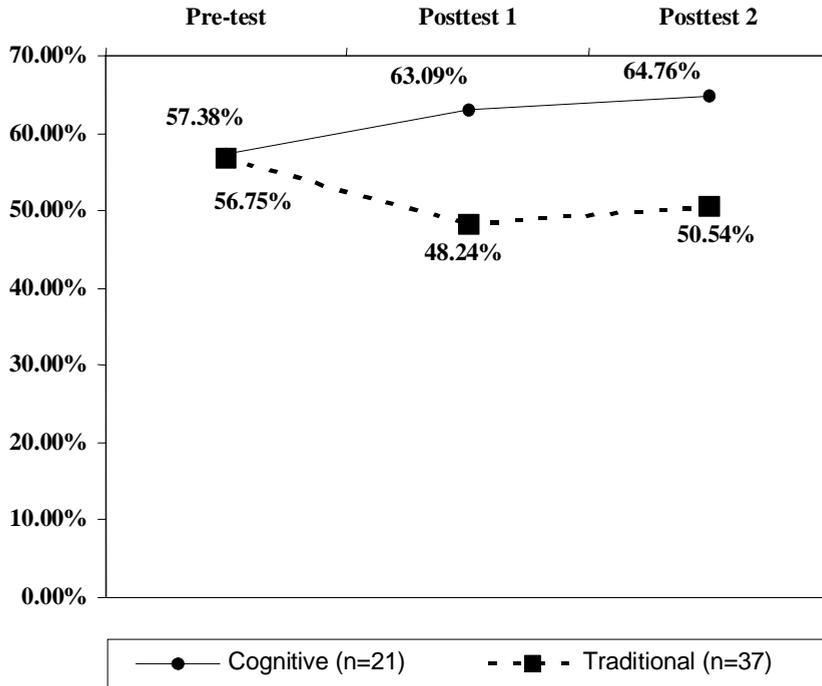


Figure 5. Accuracy percentages for the tests.

Although the results indicate that using explicit inductive teaching of the '-s' genitive based on CG resulted in more accurate use of English possessives, the treatment was not unproblematic. A major problem, illustrated in Table 3, is the fact that the treatment appears not to have been equally effective for all the students, with some of them maintaining or even increasing the initial gains and others dropping to or below earlier levels of accuracy. In fact, only 9 students showed consistent improvement in the two posttests in comparison with the pretest. The percentages in Table 3 seem to suggest that some subjects did not benefit much from the cognitive treatment. This may indeed be the case, which would indicate that a score of individual and contextual factors may have influenced the ultimate effectiveness of the treatment. Another possible explanation is that although care was taken to ensure the same levels of difficulty for tests A, B and C, they may have differed slightly in this respect due to the inclusion of different language data in every test, which may have resulted in the accuracy drops displayed by some subjects. However, this problem loses significance when one focuses on accuracy levels of the whole cognitive group (Figure 5), and this is why it is still possible to regard the results of the study as shedding favorable light on grammar teaching based on CG.

	Pretest			Posttest 1			Posttest 2		
	Test A	Test B	Test C	Test A	Test B	Test C	Test A	Test B	Test C
Student 1	55				60				60
Student 2	75				75				75
Student 3	45				35				60
Student 4	75				70				80
Student 5	80				65				85
Student 6	45				80				55
Student 7	60				75				70
Student 8	10				80				70
Student 9		55				65	50		
Student 10		50				55	60		
Student 11		80				75	65		
Student 12		60				45	25		
Student 13		75				65	65		
Student 14		55				55	65		
Student 15		75				45	45		
Student 16			55	70				65	
Student 17			45	65				65	
Student 18			30	70				80	
Student 19			65	55				75	
Student 20			65	60				60	
Student 21			65	60				85	

Table 3. Accuracy percentages for the 21 cognitive group subjects.

Although the improvement displayed by the cognitive group is not staggering, one has to bear in mind the inherent characteristics of the study that may have prevented the achievement of better results. First, the subjects were exposed to only a single 45 minute-long session of instructional treatment; longer and more frequent treatment may have resulted in their better performance. Second, only explicit inductive teaching was used in the treatment to the exclusion of all other options in grammar teaching. The employment of other options, e.g. of implicit output oriented teaching, which places more emphasis on the development of procedural rather than declarative knowledge, may substantially boost the subjects' performance. And third, the results may reflect the influence of previous standard reference grammar teaching of the target elements, to which the subjects may have been previously and repeatedly exposed (their performance may, in other words, display some fossilized errors). Had it not been for these factors, which should be variously controlled in subsequent research, the cognitive subjects may have indeed shown higher accuracy levels in the posttests.

## 6. Conclusions and implications

The research findings discussed above indicate that the employment of explicit inductive instruction based on CG resulted in more accurate use of English possessives on the part of the subjects who were exposed to this kind of treatment and no such ef-

fect, but rather a considerable deterioration in performance, on the part of the traditional group. Moreover, the gains in the cognitive group turned out to be durable. What has to be emphasized is that the increase in accuracy was achieved at a relatively low price in terms of valuable classroom time since the single treatment session took only 40-45 minutes.

Despite the benefits that transpire from the study, grammar teaching based on CG should be treated with caution before more research is done on its usefulness in foreign language pedagogy. As has been seen, a major problem with treatment of this kind is that it may not be equally beneficial for all learners. To further explore this problem, future research should test the effects of more varieties of this kind of teaching on learners' performance in various types of production and reception. For instance, learners' accuracy in spontaneous speech, rather than in monitored production and reception, should be tested. Some further examples are testing the effects of exposing learners to more extensive CG treatment, and to CG treatment combining more options in grammar teaching. Also, researchers could focus on the results of CG-based teaching of grammatical elements other than English possessives. Only more research conforming to the above and similar suggestions can lead to a fuller understanding of the possible benefits of employing CG in the service of foreign language pedagogy.

It should be noted that translating CG, which is a highly abstract linguistic theory with its own metalanguage that is bound to constitute an obstacle for learners of English, into pedagogically oriented explanations remains a challenge. This paper, which provides an example of actual teaching practice based on CG analysis of a grammatical element, can be regarded as a contribution to facing this challenge.

Since the study involved a perhaps indirect element of comparison of the effects on learner performance of the traditional and cognitive treatment (standard reference grammars and CG), some conclusions regarding this issue are in order. The first one is that the traditional treatment, in contrast to the cognitive one, ignores the fact that meaning-making is a dynamic process exploiting the conceptual import of language elements and informed by the context of language communication. For this reason, the second conclusion is that CG may be a superior theoretical base of a reference grammar at least when it comes to describing some grammar points. It has to be admitted, however, that different kinds of descriptive grammars, including standard reference works, may be appropriate for teaching different grammatical items.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Test A, sample questions

1. *Proszę dokończyć przerwana pracę tłumacza i przetłumaczyć podkreślone części tekstów z języka polskiego na język angielski. Tłumaczenia należy wpisać nad wykrępowaniem. Tekst w nawiasie, pisany kursywą, to informacja dotycząca kontekstu lub notatka tłumacza.*

---

*(Informacja na słupie ogłoszeniowym)*

Spotkanie Anonimowych Alkoholików odbędzie się w mieszkaniu Pauliny Lewińskiej, na 184 Elm St., w poniedziałek 12 stycznia.

\* \* \*

*(Public poster)*

A meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous .....  
....., 184 Elm St., on Monday 12 January.

---

*(Początek internetowej notki biograficznej)*

BRINKLEY, JOHN ROMULUS (1885-1942). John Romulus (zmienione na John Richard) Brinkley, kontrowersyjny szarlatan medyczny, prezenter radiowy i polityk, jedyny syn Johna i Candice (Burnett) Brinkley, urodził się w pobliżu Beta w hrabstwie Jackson, w stanie Karolina Południowa, dn. 8 lipca 1885.

\* \* \*

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*(The initial part of Internet biographical information)*

BRINKLEY, JOHN ROMULUS (1885-1942). John Romulus (changed to John Richard) Brinkley, controversial medical charlatan, broadcaster, and .....

.....

---

*(Tekst zaproszenia)*

ZAPROSZENIE

Na co: Urodziny  
Do kogo: Amy Lindsey  
Kiedy: W Sobotę o godz. 18:00  
Gdzie: W Mieszkanu Amy

\* \* \*

*(Invitation note)*

INVITATION

What: .....  
Who: .....  
When: .....  
Where: .....

---

*(Fragmentsy recenzji prasowej samochodu)*

Hyundai Elantra zawsze zbierał od nas pozytywne opinie, zwłaszcza po znaczącym liftingu jaki przeszedł w roku 2001, który zwiększył przestrzeń wewnątrz auta i jego wymiary zewnętrzne, a także dodał sporo elementów standardowego wyposażenia, i wszystko to bez znaczącej podwyżki ceny.

(...)

Elantra posiada także wady; ABS jest dostępny tylko w drogich pakietach, a silnik samochodu nie jest tak silny i wyrafinowany jak u liderów tej klasy.

\* \* \*

*(Excerpts from a press review of a car)*

The Hyundai Elantra has always been a winner in our opinion, especially after it got a substantial overhaul in 2001, adding interior space and exterior size, along with a full load of standard equipment, without a substantial boost in the price.

(...)

The Elantra is not without faults; ABS is available only in expensive packages and ..... is not as powerful and sophisticated as in class leaders.

---

*II. Proszę wybrać i zakreślić kółkiem jedną z dwóch podkreślonych i oddzielonych znakiem "/" części zdania, która lepiej, poprawniej uzupełnia tekst. Opcje odrzuconą należy przekreślić. Tekst w nawiasie, pisany kursywą, to informacja dotycząca kontekstu.*

---

*(A part of an Internet website called "Country Profiles")*

*(Headline):* Country profile: France

A key player on the world stage and a country at the political heart of Europe, France sent shockwaves through European Union capitals when voters rejected the proposed EU constitution in a referendum in May 2005.

Decades earlier, France had been one of the founding fathers of European integration as the continent sought to rebuild after the devastation of World War II.

France's colonial past / The colonial past of France is a major contributing factor in the presence of a richly diverse multicultural population. It is home to more than five million people of Arab and African descent.

(...)

---

*(Excerpts from a scholarly article about assassination)*

*(Article title):* Time to kill? State sponsored assassination and international law

(...)

First, the use of assassinations as a foreign policy tool seems to conflict with the U.S. logic in enacting Executive Order 12.333. Strategically, hegemonic empires like the ancient Romans had an aversion to assassinations in *inter-state relations*. The U.S. itself has previously enacted Executive Orders against the use of assassinations with such logic in mind.

(...)

A further issue to emerge since the ancient Romans is that, since 1945, there has been a general ban on the use of force by the U.N. Charter. The international community has also witnessed the rise of *human rights law* in peacetime and *international humanitarian law* during wartime. Notions of proportionality and mitigating civilian casualties now influence the legality of assassination and create factors that were not questioned by the ancient Romans. Therefore, a new age counter argument to the Roman's logic in the delegitimation of international assassinations is that stated by Ann-Marie Slaughter, "Political assassinations *may* be a more humane approach to resolving conflict than conventional warfare". An example illustrating this claim is Julius Caesar's domestic assassination / the domestic assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C.

---

*(Conversation)*

A: As far as I can remember you bought an old house and a shop two months ago and you intend to rent them?

B: Yeah.

A: So, how are you doing with your rental properties?

B: Oh, pretty good. I've got the shop all fixed up now, but several of the house's windows / the windows of the house still need to be replaced.

---

*(A manual accompanying a build-your-own-dog-house kit):*

*(Headline):* Build Your Own Dog House

*(Smaller headline):* Installing the house's roof frame / the roof frame of the house

1. File board no. 1

2. Fit board no. 1 into frame no. 1

(...)

---

---

APPENDIX 2

Cognitive student handout

English possessives: '-s', 'of'

1. The range of meanings expressed by English possessives. Examples .....

2. The -s genitive (possessive):

a)

*my friend's house*

*Claire's idea*

*the dog's food*

*Daniel's brother*

*the dog's owner*

*the policeman's uniform*

*the women's changing room*

*the Parkers' car*

*the family's money*

*the cat's name*

*our neighbor's garden*

b)

*the ship's funnel*

*the country's beauty*

*the sun's power*

*Poland's fields and forests*

3. The of-genitive:

*the side of the house*

*the result of the match*

*the day of the meeting*

*the bank of the river*

*the surface of the counter*

4. Both genitives:

*the problems of the nation*

*the smog of Cardiff*

*the atmosphere of the earth*

*the future of the company*

*the intentions of the government*

*the nation's problems*

*Cardiff's smog*

*the earth's atmosphere*

*the company's future*

*the government's intentions*



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*Agnieszka Król-Markefka*

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HOW DO POLISH LEARNERS USE  
ENGLISH ARTICLES?  
A DIAGNOSTIC STUDY<sup>1</sup>

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the ways in which Polish intermediate and upper-intermediate ESL students use English articles. The author presents the results of a diagnostic study in which 170 subjects were tested on accuracy in using the article system in translation, fill-in-the-blank and grammatical judgment tasks. Students' choices of articles have been interpreted along with the justifications explicitly provided by the subjects, showing that most students were able to supply correct articles 'by feel', especially in frequently-occurring noun and prepositional phrases. In ambiguous cases, students often referred to their explicit knowledge of rules, making both correct and incorrect choices. It seems that failures to provide the correct article in situations when students consulted their metalinguistic knowledge can be ascribed to over- and undergeneralizations of basic rules, reckless application of minor sub-rules and evident misconceptions about the function and the meaning of articles. The author suggests that some of the common problems Polish students have with the adequate use of articles can be partially attributed to the pedagogical rules and their presentation, which frequently misguide learners and thus are of little help when the necessity for their conscious application arises.

## 1. Introduction

The fact that articles are one of the most complex structures in English is widely acknowledged by linguists, SLA researchers, teachers and learners themselves (Arabski 1990a). Frequently, in the face of difficulty in grasping the function articles, students, as well as their teachers, are prone to believe that lexical learning (i.e. remembering the whole phrase or utterance) is the best way to master this structure. Since the benchmark for effective learning is the use 'by feel', rules are discarded as unhelpful and unnecessary. Still, even on very communicatively-focused courses (especially at more

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my deep gratitude to the head teacher, teachers and students of Jagiellońskie Centrum Językowe in Kraków for their participation in this project.

advanced levels) it is common to devote some attention to rules and their application. As a result, Polish students' knowledge of articles typically consists of a certain number of ready-made formulas memorised through communicative practice and a set of explicit rules governing the usage of articles.

This article aims to present some data illustrating the way in which Polish students use English articles. In particular, I shall focus on learners' ability to apply the body of (both implicit and explicit) knowledge concerning articles. I would like to investigate the following issues:

- (1) What rules concerning the use of English articles do learners know explicitly?
- (2) Do students apply the rules they know appropriately?
- (3) Which rules are applied properly (i.e. lead to most accurate choices)?
- (4) What are the most frequent errors in the application of rules?
- (5) In what cases are students more likely to choose an article 'by feel' rather than rely on rules?
- (6) In what cases does the use 'by feel' lead to the correct choice of the article and in what cases to the incorrect (unacceptable) choice?

## 2. Theoretical background assumptions

The distinction made by learners between learning based on rule application and unintentional memorisation of phrases mirrors the dispute among SLA researchers on the existence of interface between explicit and implicit learning of languages. While some researchers (Krashen 1981) posit that there can be no transfer of verbalizable metalinguistic knowledge into the learner's (implicit) L2 system (non-interface position), others argue that there is a direct transition of knowledge from the explicit to the implicit system (strong interface position). According to the explanations based on the cognitive skill acquisition theory (Anderson 1983; McLaughlin 1990) declarative metalinguistic knowledge becomes gradually automatised as the learner proceeds from controlled, conscious rule application to more independent, automatic use.

Although recently the pervasiveness of the cognitive skill acquisition process in SLA has been questioned and language production is no longer believed to be based solely on the application of rules (Dakowska 1993), using metalinguistic knowledge is acknowledged as facilitative in advancing L2 proficiency (Lightbown, Spada and White 1993; Doughty and Williams 1998a; see also Norris and Ortega 2000). The major theoretical problem is that even if the positive effects of explicit teaching are observable, we can hardly give account of the mechanisms that underlie the changes in the interlanguage. As pointed out by N. Ellis (2005), observable progress in accuracy and fluency may not be indicative of explicit knowledge being transferred into the implicit system, but only as a sign that as a result of practice the rules are retrieved and applied more easily. Also, some psycho- and neurolinguists (notably Paradis 1994) suggest that if conscious rule application contributes to L2 development, it may only be due to the fact that the controlled output produced when rules are applied gives the learner opportunities to memorise formulas and thus enriches the implicit knowledge of the language.

In my opinion, all of the above-mentioned views on the role of metalinguistic knowledge can be called *product-oriented*, which means that they consider explicit learning of rules as helpful only to the extent that it aids the development of the implicit L2 system. Since the ultimate goal of teaching is defined in terms of learners' being able to perform "highly complex tasks with natural fluency", the students' ability to consult metalingual information is not perceived as a skill normally used in communication (Dakowska 1993).

However, I think we can also look at the role of metalinguistic knowledge from a *process-oriented* perspective. According to this approach, the ability to employ one's explicit knowledge of rules would not be treated only as a means to achieve the desired goal, i.e. to develop the implicit L2 system used automatically, but as one of the skills used actively in second language production. I hypothesise that the effectiveness of explicit linguistic knowledge does not have to be judged only on the basis of its influence on the implicit system: equally important is its impact upon the actual L2 learner performance. If a student recalls a rule during language production in order to be more accurate, clear or precise, he or she can be judged an effective L2 speaker/writer even if he or she cannot apply the rule automatically. Most, if not all, foreign language students remain learners for life, never reaching the stage at which they have the implicit knowledge of all L2 usage<sup>2</sup>. Rather, we can say that various students reach different stages of proficiency, at which their implicit and explicit knowledge is sufficient for their communicative needs. At none of these stages can we speak about a student fully acquiring the foreign language. At the same time, at each of the stages the process of learning continues, involving the application of implicit and, frequently, also explicit linguistic knowledge. Therefore, I suggest that second language proficiency does not have to be measured only by reference to the degree to which a student uses L2 automatically, but also by his/her ability to use explicit knowledge effectively. Taken from the process-oriented perspective, the efficiency of grammatical rules would lie in their capability to help the learner in those situations in which the implicit system is not sufficient, for instance in situations when accuracy or precision is important (e.g. in writing), when a self-repair is needed, or, simply, as put by N. Ellis (2005: 327) "when you try to say something but don't know how". In other words, the issue of whether, and by means of what mental mechanisms, the application of rules leads to acquisition does not have to be the sole factor determining the effectiveness of overt grammatical instruction.

On the surface, taking into account the usefulness of rules during the learning process may seem to sanction the traditional teaching of grammar based on rule presentation and application. In reality, however, incorporating the process-oriented view into the teaching of grammar places high demands on the rules, which should allow for more learner independence and autonomy in their application. The diagnostic study described below also gives some indication of whether the rules for the article use that are usually quoted in pedagogical materials are capable of giving students reliable guidance when their application is required.

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<sup>2</sup> I think that it is also true for L1 competence.

### 3. Diagnostic study

#### 3.1. Subjects and design

The study comprised two separate testing procedures. Altogether one hundred and seventy subjects at Threshold (B1) and Vantage (B2) level<sup>3</sup> (aged 25-27) were tested. The students' learning experience varied: several students had just retaken English after a few-year break, whereas a number of subjects had spent some time in an English-speaking country. On average, they had been learning English for 4-7 years. Because of that variety, the sample was regarded as representative for the population of young adults learning English at the university. Except for two students, all the subjects stated that they had received some instruction on how to use articles.

The first part of the study (TEST 1) consisted of three tasks (Appendix 1) and was taken by 66 students. In Task 1, the students were asked to translate a short text into English (translation below, noun phrases in bold). They were not told that the focus of the study is on articles. After the translation had been completed, the subjects were given a retrospection sheet, in which they were to report on whether they consciously thought about the choice of articles in each of the noun phrases and, if so, what rules they drew upon to make a decision. Finally, in Task 3, the subjects were to quote any rules concerning the use of articles they remembered.

At about 7 p.m. I arrived to the party. The guests' cars were parked around the house. I knocked at the door. After a while, a/some women opened (the door). When I entered the hall, I saw the quests sitting by the table in the dining room. The man was standing by the window, taking to the host. I wanted to talk to him, but a woman came to me with a glass of champagne and asked me to go to the kitchen.

The kitchen was dark. When I turned on the light I saw the man who I was speaking to yesterday at the airport. The gun and the suitcase were on the table.

The second part of the study, (TEST 2 – see Appendix 2) had two versions. Half of the 104 students taking TEST 2 did version A and the other half version B. Both versions consisted of tasks in which the students were to judge the appropriateness and fill in the missing articles. All the sentences were quoted from or based on John Hawkins' (1978) study entitled *Definiteness and indefiniteness: A study in reference and grammaticality prediction*. Because the sentences were taken out of context, there was a possibility to add a comment or describe a situation in which the article chosen would be appropriate. Also, the subjects were asked to provide the rule of use that seemed valid in each of the items (Appendix 3) or, if they were unable to apply any rule, to state whether they did it 'by feel' or did not know the rule.

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<sup>3</sup> According to *Common European framework of reference for languages*

## 3.2. TEST 1: Results and observations

The following observations were made on the basis of the results obtained on TEST 1:

- (1) SS were most accurate in using articles (usually 'the') in prepositional phrases; a great majority of the subjects were able to use the appropriate article automatically in frequently occurring expressions, such as (Table 1):

	'the' used + rule quoted	'the' used 'by feel'	'a' used + rule quoted	'a' used 'by feel'	No article used + rule quoted	No article used 'by feel'
at __ party	6	39	1	14	1	3
around __ house	10	47	0	1	1	6
at __ door	8	52	0	1	0	7
to __ hall	7	40	2	5	0	10
by __ table	4	48	1	7	0	3
in __ dining room	7	30	1	7	1	10
by __ window	9	40	1	4	0	7
to __ kitchen	10	47	1	0	0	9
turn on __ light	5	40	0	7	0	5
at __ airport	8	46	0	3	0	5
on __ table	6	42	2	5	0	3

Table 1. The use of articles in prepositional phrases (number of SS).

- (2) the majority of correct justifications for the use of the definite article related to things unique in the context, i.e. things of which there was only one example in the surroundings; usually, students explained that the objects are specific and definite ('konkretne, określone')

	'the' used + rule quoted	'the' used 'by feel'	'a' used + rule quoted	'a' used 'by feel'	no article used + rule quoted	No article used 'by feel'
around __ house	10	47	0	1	1	6
at __ door	8	52	0	1	0	7
by __ window	9	40	1	4	0	7
with __ host	12	26	4	1	1	17
to __ kitchen	10	47	1	0	0	9

Table 2. The use of articles in NPs denoting referents unique in the context (number of SS).

- (3) Also the use of the indefinite article in the sentence: 'Podeszła do mnie kobieta z kieliszkiem szampana...' ('A woman with a glass of champagne came

to me...') was relatively easy. Out of the 32 students who used the indefinite article before 'woman', 13 were capable of justifying their choice by saying that the woman is mentioned for the first time and/or indefinite ('jakaś = some'); and out of 40 students who wrote 'with a glass of champagne', 9 were able to provide the same rule. Two students justified the use of 'the' by saying that the woman is definite and specific ('konkretna').

	'the' used + rule quoted	'the' used 'by feel'	'a' used + rule quoted	'a' used 'by feel'	No article used + rule quoted	No article used 'by feel'
__ woman	2	7	13	19	1	12
__ glass of wine	1	7	9	31	2	15

Table 3. The use of articles for the indefinite reference (number of SS).

- (4) The majority of wrong justifications or misapplied rules related to the nouns in plural: 46 SS omitted 'the' in 'the guests' cars' and 56 in 'the guests'; in each of the two cases, 8 students explicitly stated that there should be no article before nouns in plural.

	'the' used + rule quoted	'the' used 'by feel'	'a' used + rule quoted	'a' used 'by feel'	No article used + rule quoted	No article used 'by feel'
__ guests' cars	0	15	0	2	8	38
__ guests	2	9	0	3	8	48

Table 4. The use of articles before referents in plural (number of SS).

- (5) The cases where the nouns were definite, but they were neither unique in the immediate situational context ('mężczyzna') nor mentioned earlier in the text ('walizka i pistolet') were the most problematic items. In Polish, definiteness of the referents was marked by the word order:

	'the' used + rule quoted	'the' used 'by feel'	'a' used + rule quoted	'a' used 'by feel'	no article used + rule quoted	no article used 'by feel'
__ man	5	14	10	22	0	11
__ suitcase	5	19	7	17	0	12
__ gun	5	16	7	16	0	17

Table 5. The most problematic NPs (number of SS).

In the sentence 'Mężczyzna stał przy oknie' ('The man was standing by the window') in which the Polish word order implied a definite man, out of 15 students who supplied explicit justification for their use of the article,

10 used 'a', claiming that the man is not definite ('jakiś = some'), not known before, or that he is mentioned for the first time (in fact, some students used the introductory phrase 'There was a man by the window', which stresses the man's indefinite status). Only 5 students stated that the man is known or that he must have been mentioned before.

In the sentence 'Walizka i pistolet były na stole' ('The suitcase and the gun were on the table') out of 12 students who provided justification for the article before 'walizka' i 'pistolet', 7 students used 'a' claiming that the referents are indefinite, mentioned for the first time; and 5 students used 'the' because they judged the referents definite ('known before, must have been mentioned earlier, the speaker knows the gun and the suitcase').

- (6) Also, the sentence: 'Zobaczyłem człowieka, z którym wczoraj rozmawiałem na lotnisku' ('I saw the man who I was speaking to yesterday at the airport') seemed problematic: 38 the students used 'a' and 5 of them justified their choice by saying that he is not familiar to the speaker and that he is mentioned for the first time; on the other hand, half of the 18 students who used 'the' justified their choice by stating that the man is definite and familiar. This significant overuse of the indefinite article may perhaps be attributed to the linear translation the subjects were likely to do: they could have automatically written the beginning of the sentence ('I saw a man...') before they found out that there is a definite description following the noun.

	'the' used + rule quoted	'the' used 'by feel'	'a' used + rule quoted	'a' used 'by feel'	No article used + rule quoted	No article used 'by feel'
__ man	9	9	5	33	0	9

Table 6. The use of articles with a definite description (number of SS).

- 7) Asked about the rules they know (Task 3), the students<sup>4</sup> most often quoted the following principles:
- 'a' is used when we mention a given thing for the first time (19 SS); 'the' is used to speak about a thing that has already been mentioned (20 SS);
  - 'a' means 'some', 'one of...', 'average' ('jakiś', 'jeden z', 'przeciętny') (10 SS); 'the' means 'specific', 'specified' ('konkretny') (28 SS);
  - 'the' is used when there is only one such example in the surroundings (12 SS);
  - articles are not used before nouns in plural (6 SS).

<sup>4</sup> From among 67 students who took the test, 17 subjects either did not give any answer to that question or stated that they do not know any rules.

### 3.3. TEST 2: Results and observations

The analysis of students' choices of articles, together with their judgments and justifications allows for making the following observations of how students used the structure:

- (1) The distinction used most frequently in explicit justifications is the one between things that are specified ('konkretny') and unspecified ('any', 'some = jakiś'). This guiding principle allows students to choose the right article in a number of noun phrases, such as:
  - 'A day (×)<sup>5</sup> of my wedding was a happiest day in my life'.
  - 'The man (√)<sup>6</sup> in jeans is my cousin George'.
  - 'The man (√) that you should go and see is my friend Bill Smith'.
  - '\_\_\_\_\_ film (the)<sup>7</sup> was really good – thanks for recommending it'.
  - 'There is a book on *the table* (√). Can you give it to me?'
- (2) The reference to the distinction between 'specified/specific' and 'some' ('konkretny/jakiś') leads sometimes to fallacious justifications of the use of 'the'. It is usually the case in those indefinite noun phrases in which the referent is specific (and often known to the speaker), which makes it more likely to be described as 'specific = konkretny' rather than 'some = jakiś'.
  - 'Fred was discussing \_\_\_\_\_ (the\*)<sup>8</sup> *interesting book* in his class'.
  - 'Fred bought the book from Heffner's, and was quite angry when \_\_\_\_\_ *page* (the\*) fell out'.
  - 'He discovered *a moon* (×)\* orbiting around Pluto'.
  - 'There is *the book* (√)\* on the table. Can you give it to me?'
- (3) Students use the distinction 'specified' vs. 'some' as an overriding principle, which results in using articles (either 'a' or 'the') in those noun phrases in which articles are not conventionally used:
  - 'Soon after we had taken off, the pilot welcomed us on \_\_\_\_\_ *board* (the)\*'.
  - 'He was found guilty and went to *∅ prison* (×)\* for two years'.
- (4) Rarely do students' justifications take account of the pragmatic distinction between reference to entities known and unknown to the speaker or hearer. Moreover, the majority of explanations based on this distinction lead to misguided article choices. For instance, the italicized noun phrase in: 'I remember *the house* very well. It had large windows and overlooked the river and the mountains' was judged ungrammatical by four students, who stated that 'the house' is mentioned for the first time; three subjects would choose 'a', arguing that the referent is indefinite or unknown ('jakiś', 'nieokreślony', 'nieznany'); almost all the students who accepted the sentence as grammatical (20 out of 21) justified their choice by saying that the house is specific

<sup>5</sup> Symbol (×) indicates that students did not find the article acceptable.

<sup>6</sup> Symbol (√) indicates that students judged the article as acceptable.

<sup>7</sup> The article in brackets is the one that was chosen most frequently.

<sup>8</sup> An asterisk (\*) means that the choice was not acceptable.

- (‘konkretny’); only one student wrote ‘I know which house is being referred to’, which can be judged as a partially adequate explanation.
- Also, in the sentence ‘Soon after we had taken off, \_\_\_\_\_ *pilot* (a)\* welcomed us on board’, the most common justification (that ‘the pilot’ is unknown) led to the fallacious use of the infinite article.
- In two other sentences: ‘Don’t break *the glass* (√)’ and ‘Beware of *the dog* (√)’ the students tended to justify the use of ‘the’ by saying that the referents are familiar (‘znane’), which was not an entirely adequate explanation.
- (5) Sometimes, students evoke other rules they remember; probably they do so when the conscious choice of the article is not facilitated by reference to the ‘specified’ vs. ‘some’ criterion. The most frequently cited principles are the following:
- a) use ‘a’ when a thing is mentioned for the first time:
    - ‘Soon after we had taken off, \_\_\_\_\_ *pilot* (a)\* welcomed us on board’.
    - ‘I smell Ø *mouse* (a)\*’.
    - (First sentence of a story) ‘I remember the house very well. It had large windows and overlooked *the river* (×)\* and *the mountains* (×)\*’.
  - b) use “a” before jobs and professions:
    - (a doctor upon entering the operating theatre): ‘I wonder who the *anesthetist* (×)\* is today?’
    - ‘Soon after we had taken off, \_\_\_\_\_ *pilot* (a)\* welcomed us on board’.
  - c) there is no article before nouns in plural (overgeneralization):
    - ‘After the accident, some journalists went to the hospital to interview \_\_\_\_\_ *victims* (-)\*’.
    - ‘*The cats* (-)\* – especially tigers and pumas – are particularly fierce predators’.
- (6) Students rarely use explanations referring to the countability of nouns, even in those cases in which this criterion had bearing upon the choice of the most appropriate article:
- ‘A *mineral water* (√), please (‘some, indefinite)’.
  - ‘I smell Ø *mouse* (‘some’ or ‘specific)’.
  - ‘Your shirt is dirty! And look, you have \_\_\_\_\_ *egg* (the) on your tie!’ (‘specific’)
- (7) Most often, the students correctly chose the article ‘by feel’ in the following sentences:
- ‘The Earth is *the third planet* (√) from *the sun* (√)’.
  - ‘There is the book on *the table* (√). Can you give it to me?’
  - ‘A *mineral water* (√), please’.
  - ‘Don’t break *the glass* (√)’.
  - ‘A man who studies *a law* (×) does not have to become *the lawyer*’. (×)
  - (First sentence of a story): ‘I remember the house very well. It had large windows and overlooked *the river* (√) and *the mountains* (√)’.
  - ‘I go to work by *a train*’ (×).

- 'The man drove past our house in a car. *The dog* (∇) was barking furiously'.
- '\_\_\_\_ *film* (the) was really good – thanks for recommending it'.
- 'Bill is amazed by \_\_\_\_ *fact* (the) that there is so much life on earth'.
- 'They've just got \_\_\_\_ *taxi* (a) from the station'.
- 'Did you recognize \_\_\_\_ *old man* (the)?'

Probably, the students' correct choices of articles 'by feel' were due to the memorization of frequently-occurring noun phrases.

(8) The most frequent misguided uses 'by feel' occurred in the following instances:

- 'Mary's gone to buy some wine in *a car* (∇)\* she has just bought'.
- 'He was found guilty and went to ∅ *prison* (the, a)\* for two years'.
- 'Soon after we had taken off, \_\_\_\_ *pilot* (a)\* welcomed us on \_\_\_\_ *board* (the)\*'.
- 'Fred was discussing \_\_\_\_ (the, -)\* *interesting book* in his class'.
- 'After \_\_\_\_ *accident* (an)\*, some journalists went to hospital to interview \_\_\_\_ *victims* (-)\*'.
- 'Fred bought a/the book from Heffner's, and was quite angry when \_\_\_\_ *page* (the)\* fell out'.
- 'She was in \_\_\_\_ *bed* (-)\* when I found her. She was playing hide-and-peek'.

It can be supposed that the mistakes in the use of articles 'by feel' can also be attributed to the application of ready-made, well entrenched chunks of language. However, the chunks remembered by students are sometimes at odds with what is most appropriate in different contexts.

(9) Only in a few cases did students choose the answer 'POSSIBLE' and gave examples of situations in which the article would be acceptable. As a consequence, the overwhelming majority of the students did not accept sentences that, though unconventional, were grammatical in some specific contexts, e.g.:

- 'I'm *the teacher*' (×)
- 'I smell ∅ *mouse*' (×)

This observation seems to suggest that the students either do not perceive articles as structures whose usage is dependent on the context, or they are so much used to typical textbook examples that they reject less common sentences as unacceptable.

#### 4. Discussion

One of the conclusions that can be inferred from the outcomes of the study (both tests) is that Polish students can, in the majority of cases, use English articles accurately without recourse to their overt metalinguistic knowledge. However, the data obtained do not allow for making any statements about the learning processes that had

led to the correct, automatic use of articles in certain phrases. One possibility is that students proceduralized the declarative knowledge of rules they had been taught. Alternatively, the correct use of articles could have resulted from the application of the implicit knowledge developed through communicative use.

The fact that correct articles were chosen 'by feel', usually in frequently-occurring noun and prepositional phrases such as 'at the airport' or 'in the kitchen', points out that students used their knowledge of ready-made formulas rather than any system of rules. This observation implies a limited role of automatized explicit knowledge in students' performance in the cases under analysis. At the same time, it can be suggested that, even if the subjects used their implicit knowledge, it was not based on the abstract system of rules extracted from the input but on the body of memorized exemplars. This conclusion is further corroborated by the analysis of items in which the choice of articles 'by feel' had led to mistakes, i.e. in noun phrases in which either definite or indefinite articles were likely to occur. Students were probably guided by what they most often see or hear (thus the article 'sounded better'), not noticing that the context and the meaning of the sentence required a different article.

On the other hand, the results obtained in the study suggest that the problems with the accurate use of articles can also be partially attributed to faulty application of rules. The over- or undergeneralizations made on the basis of the students' explicit knowledge indicate that learners are unaware of the primary functions of articles. The specific rules describing the instances of article usage are perceived as arbitrary and unconnected to one another; students do not seem to treat the 'uses' as various manifestations of the same overriding principle (viz. the confusion over the use of articles before names of professions). It appears that the problems with the application of explicit linguistic knowledge can be, to some extent, ascribed to the very rules, which do not illustrate the meaning and function of articles adequately, thus misguiding the learners.

The analysis of the observations made in the study allows for formulating a number of postulates concerning the changes that could be introduced into the way articles are presented to students, in order for conscious rule application to be helpful and reliable. I suggest the following changes:

- (1) Grammatical rules should first and foremost teach the meaning and the function of articles, so that students would be able to make their own, independent choices of the most appropriate articles.
- (2) It needs to be stressed that it is not the grammatical system, but the user that decides on the most appropriate choice of linguistic forms. The students should be made aware that in their decisions about grammatical devices they employ ought to be guided by the meaning they want to convey.
- (3) The rules concerning the use of articles should be based on pragmatic and functional criteria (known/unknown to the speaker/hearer; the choice of the article imposes a certain interpretation). All accompanying sub-rules which are to facilitate quick decision-making (such as mentioned for the first/second time) need to be presented as manifestations of the more general, pragmatic principles. Consequently, it is important that minor, more

- particular rules should not contradict or belie more significant, functional considerations.
- (4) Although the opposition between 'konkretny' ('specific', 'specified') and 'jakiś' ('some', 'any') may seem to conveniently capture the generalized meaning of the definite and indefinite articles, it needs to be borne in mind that it cannot function as the sole principle. With no additional explanations, students will have a distorted image of what information articles encode.
  - (5) A clear distinction has to be made between definite and specific reference.
  - (6) Noun phrases in plural (especially definite) need to occur more frequently in the rules and examples illustrating them.
  - (7) All 'special uses' (e.g. 'go to bed', 'be at church', 'have dinner', 'go by train') also need to be presented as instances conforming to the general pattern. Enumerating and explaining the differences in use between pairs of phrases (e.g. 'go to prison' vs. 'go to the prison') as particularized, 'special' meanings (and not as examples illustrating a general principle) often overburdens students' memory, which results in forgetting the information<sup>9</sup> easily and quickly.
  - (8) It is not advisable to compare or contrast articles with their alleged Polish 'equivalents' (notably word order). As can be judged from the results obtained in TEST 1, over a half of the subjects were not sensitive to the given/new information conveyed by Polish word order and its possible bearing upon the interpretation of referents' (in)definiteness. Besides, it is worth mentioning here that the opposition between theme (topic) and rheme (comment) is not tantamount with the definite-indefinite distinction. It seems, therefore, that advising students to associate sentence-initial position with the definite, and sentence-final position with the indefinite referent is likely to produce even more difficulty and confusion.

Although the suggestions presented above refer to articles, I feel that they also pertain to other structures in English (such as tense and aspect). It is evident that fulfilling the majority of claims made above requires not only reformulation of the existing rules, but a more profound change in our (i.e. teachers' and pedagogical materials writers') conception of articles and grammar in general. In my view, as long as rules of grammar are considered arbitrary, meaningless patterns, grammar teaching will preserve its bad image of an unnecessary and even acquisition-inhibiting activity.

As a solution to the problem, I propose that pedagogical rules be founded on analyses offered by cognitive linguistics (Langacker 1987, 1991; Taylor 2002). Especially the cognitive idea of grammar, which is seen as a set of schematic units symbolically representing meanings accords with the suggestions I made in this article. Within the cognitive framework, articles are seen as devices used to establish the perspective from which an event is viewed. The use of the definite article suggests the speaker's perspective, whereas the indefinite article allows for a more neutral point of view. As a result, definite articles are primarily used when the speaker wants the hearer to think about the entity mentioned as of something which is known and identifiable. In reali-

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<sup>9</sup> In their justifications, students frequently indicated that they had a vague idea about the rule, but were not capable of recalling it (e. g. 'Było coś z posiłkami/więzieniem').

ty, this usually presupposes the hearer's ability to identify the referent (though it is not a necessary condition). The indefinite article, on the other hand, does not force the hearer to take the speaker's perspective: the referent is construed as 'one of' the instances of a given type, even if it is specific and definite for the speaker. The nouns in singular that are not preceded with any article (e.g. 'to go to bed') are usually referring to the type (and not to any of its instances), which makes their meaning in the phrases in which they conventionally occur less literal and more general. Provided that this general framework is adequately 'translated' into the language of the learners, it may meaningfully explain the overwhelming majority of the sub-rules that are usually quoted, thereby showing students the real function of articles. Of course, the effectiveness of rules based on Cognitive Grammar can only be proved by their fruitful application in actual teaching.

## 5. Conclusions and final remarks

The purpose of the article was to analyze the ways in which Polish learners of English use articles in tasks in which accuracy is required. The data obtained from 170 students indicate that although in many cases articles are used correctly with no explicit focus on form, accuracy suffers in contexts in which less frequent article-noun combinations are most appropriate. The information provided by the subjects allows also to formulate a hypothesis that at least some problems with the proper use of articles can be attributed to the rules that fail to provide students with pertinent generalizations.

Viewed from the process-oriented perspective on the role of metalinguistic knowledge described in section 2 above, the mistakes made due to the faulty application of rules are to be recognized as important evidence against the usefulness of explicit linguistic knowledge in learner's performance. At the same time, according to the process-oriented approach, it is to be expected that designing pedagogical grammars that offer more reliable rules can lead to significant improvements in students' accuracy, even if learners will not be able to use the structure automatically. Therefore, I have suggested a number of postulates concerning the pedagogical rules that may help to overcome some of the most frequent difficulties and avoid the most widespread misconceptions about the use of articles. Finally, I pointed out that changes in the didactic description of the article may be guided by the analyses offered by cognitive linguistics.

Ending the article, I would like to stress the fact that the design of the study was not aimed to test the influence of the explicit knowledge of rules on the implicit L2 system. Neither did it deal with the use or the non-use of rules in (oral) communication focused on meaning. Those issues, though fundamental in the second language acquisition research, have been deemed beyond the scope of the present analysis. Rather, I tried to diagnose and suggest solutions to the problems with the accurate (not necessarily fluent) use of articles. As I indicated in section 2, I adopted the process-oriented perspective on the role of rules, according to which the difficulties in the application of rules are important, actual learner problems and as such are worth remedial treatment, even if their impact upon the implicit system is debatable.

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## APPENDIX 1

## Test 1

## Task 1:

*Proszę przetłumaczyć poniższy tekst na język angielski.*

Około siódmej przyjechałem na przyjęcie. Dookoła domu były zaparkowane samochody gości. Zapukałem do drzwi. Po chwili otworzyła jakaś kobieta. Kiedy wszedłem do holu, zobaczyłem gości siedzących przy stole w jadalni. Mężczyzna stał przy oknie i rozmawiał z gospodarzem. Chciałem nim porozmawiać, ale podeszła do mnie kobieta z kieliszkiem szampana i poprosiła, żebym poszedł do kuchni.

W kuchni było ciemno. Kiedy zapaliłem światło, zobaczyłem człowieka, z którym wczoraj rozmawiałem na lotnisku. Walizka i pistolet leżały na stole.

## Task 2:

*Proszę jeszcze raz spojrzeć na tekst i spróbować napisać, czy w trakcie tłumaczenia zastanawia(a) się Pani/Pan na wyborem przedimka (a/ an, the lub Ø) przed rzeczownikami. Jeśli tak, proszę napisać, co pomogło Pani/Panu w wyborze (która reguła, 'wyczucie'); jeżeli nie, proszę o napisanie: 'nie zastanawiałam/em się'. Jeżeli Pan/Pani nie pamięta, o czym Państwo myśleli, proszę napisać: 'nie pamiętam'.*

1. ....na przyjęcie... - \_\_\_\_\_
2. ...domu... - \_\_\_\_\_
3. ...samochody gości... - \_\_\_\_\_
4. ...drzwi... - \_\_\_\_\_
5. ...do holu... - \_\_\_\_\_
6. ...gości... - \_\_\_\_\_
7. ...przy stole... - \_\_\_\_\_
8. ...w jadalni... - \_\_\_\_\_
9. ...mężczyzna... - \_\_\_\_\_
10. ...przy oknie... - \_\_\_\_\_
11. ...gospodarzem... - \_\_\_\_\_
12. ...kobieta... - \_\_\_\_\_
13. ...z kieliszkiem... - \_\_\_\_\_
14. ...do kuchni... - \_\_\_\_\_
15. ...światło... - \_\_\_\_\_
16. ...człowieka... - \_\_\_\_\_
17. ...na lotnisku... - \_\_\_\_\_
18. ...walizka... - \_\_\_\_\_
19. ...pistolet... - \_\_\_\_\_

20. ...na stole... - \_\_\_\_\_

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Task 3:

1. Czy zna Pan/Pani jakieś reguły użycia przedimków? Jakie?

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## APPENDIX 2

### Test 2

#### VERSION A

Proszę przeczytać poniższe zdania i określić, czy przedimki 'the' 'a' lub 'Ø' (brak przedimka) są poprawnie użyte. Na arkuszu odpowiedzi (przy odpowiednim numerze przykładu) proszę zakreślić:

- *OK* jeśli Pan/Pani uważa, że zdanie jest poprawne + (ważne!) dlaczego Pani/Pan tak uważa
- *WRONG* jeśli uważa Pan/Pani, że takie zdanie nie mogłoby zostać powiedziane w języku angielskim + (ważne!) dlaczego Pan/Pani tak uważa
- *POSSIBLE* jeżeli uważa Pan/Pani, że w pewnych kontekstach zdanie mogłoby być wypowiedziane + w jakiej sytuacji takie zdanie mogłoby być użyte lub co by ono oznaczało.

*Uwaga: JEŻELI NIE ZNA PAN/PANI ŻADNEJ REGUŁY, która mogłaby uzasadnić dany przedimek, TO PROSZĘ NAPISAĆ: 'Nie znam reguły' lub 'Na wyczcucie', lub 'Tak mi się wydaje', 'Nie wiem' itp.*

- A day (1) of my wedding was a happiest (2) day in my life.
- The man (3) in jeans is my cousin George.
- The Earth (4) is the third planet (5) from the sun (6).
- There is the book (7) on the table (8). Can you give it to me?
- He was found guilty and went to Ø prison (9) for two years.
- (at the restaurant) A mineral water (10), please.
- A man (11) who studies a law (12) does not have to become the lawyer. (13)
- I'm the teacher. (14)
- He discovered a moon (15) orbiting around Pluto
- I go to work by a train (16).

Proszę uzupełnić luki 'a', 'the' lub 'Ø'. Na arkuszu odpowiedzi proszę zakreślić odpowiedni przedimek lub symbol Ø (brak przedimka). TAK JAK W PO-PRZEDNIM ZADANIU, proszę zaznaczyć, czy zna Pani/Pan jakąś regułę, która mogłaby uzasadnić wybór właściwego przedimka

- Soon after we had taken off, \_\_\_\_ pilot (17) welcomed us on \_\_\_\_ board (18).
- \_\_\_\_ film (19) was really good – thanks for recommending it.
- Your shirt is dirty!. And look, you have \_\_\_\_ egg (20) on your tie!
- She was in \_\_\_\_ bed (21) when I found her. She was playing hide-and-seek.
- Fred was discussing \_\_\_\_ (22) interesting book in his class. He is friendly with \_\_\_\_ (23) author.
- Fred bought \_\_\_\_ book (24) from Heffner's, and was quite angry when \_\_\_\_ page (25) fell out.

### VERSION B

Proszę przeczytać poniższe zdania i określić, czy przedimki 'the' 'a' lub 'Ø' (brak przedimka) są poprawnie użyte. Na arkuszu odpowiedzi (przy odpowiednim numerze przykładu) proszę zakreślić:

- *OK* jeśli Pan/Pani uważa, że zdanie jest poprawne + (ważne!) dlaczego Pani/Pan tak uważa
- *WRONG* jeśli uważa Pan/Pani, że takie zdanie nie mogłoby zostać powiedziane w języku angielskim + (ważne!) dlaczego Pan/Pani tak uważa
- *POSSIBLE* jeżeli uważa Pan/Pani, że w pewnych kontekstach zdanie mogłoby być wypowiedziane + w jakiej sytuacji takie zdanie mogłoby być użyte lub co by ono oznaczało.

Uwaga: JEŻELI NIE ZNA PAN/PANI ŻADNEJ REGUŁY, która mogłaby uzasadnić dany przedimek, TO PROSZĘ NAPISAĆ: 'Nie znam reguły' lub 'Na wycucie', lub 'Tak mi się wydaje', 'Nie wiem' itp.

- The cats (1) – especially tigers and pumas – are particularly fierce predators.
- Beware of the dog (2).
- (notice on a box) Do not break the glass (3).
- The man drove past our house in a car (4). The dog (5) was barking furiously.
- The man (6) that you should go and see is my friend Bill Smith
- You should go and see a man (7) who is a friend of mine, Bill Smith.
- Fred bought the book (8) from Heffner's. He then went and spoke to an author (9) about it.
- The teacher (10) has to have authority.
- Mary's gone to buy some wine in a car (11) she has just bought.
- I smell Ø mouse (12).
- The ponies (13) native to Scotland are the Shetland and Highland breeds.

- (a doctor upon entering the operating theatre): I wonder who the anesthetist (14) is today?
- (First sentence of a story:) I remember the house (15) very well. It had large windows and overlooked the river (16) and the mountains (17).

*Proszę uzupełnić luki 'a', 'the' lub 'Ø'. Na arkuszu odpowiedzi proszę zakreślić odpowiedni przedimek lub symbol Ø (brak przedimka). TAK JAK W POPRZEDNIM ZADANIU, proszę zaznaczyć, czy zna Pani/Pan jakąś regułę, która mogłaby uzasadnić wybór właściwego przedimka*

- Did you recognize \_\_\_\_\_ old man (18)?
- Bill is amazed by \_\_\_\_\_ fact (19) that there is so much life on earth.
- They've just got \_\_\_\_\_ taxi (20) from the station. On the way \_\_\_\_\_ driver (21) told me there was a strike.
- After \_\_\_\_\_ accident (22), some journalists went to \_\_\_\_\_ hospital (23) to interview \_\_\_\_\_ victims (24).

*SERDECZNIE DZIĘKUJĘ*

### APPENDIX 3

#### Test 2: Choice justification (sample)

1. OK. / WRONG – Why? (rule) / POSSIBLE – When?  
.....
2. OK. / WRONG – Why? (rule): / POSSIBLE – When?  
.....
3. OK. / WRONG – Why? (rule) / POSSIBLE – When?  
.....
4. OK. / WRONG – Why? (rule) / POSSIBLE – When?  
.....
5. OK. / WRONG – Why? (rule): / POSSIBLE – When?  
.....
6. OK. / WRONG – Why? (rule) / POSSIBLE – When?  
.....
7. OK. / WRONG – Why? (rule) / POSSIBLE – When?  
.....
8. OK. / WRONG – Why? (rule): / POSSIBLE – When?  
.....
9. OK. / WRONG – Why? (rule) / POSSIBLE – When?  
.....
- (...)

18. A / The / Ø - why? when? (rule):

.....  
19. A / The / Ø - why? when? (rule)

.....  
20. A / The / Ø - why? when? (rule)

.....  
21. A / The / Ø - why? when? (rule)

.....  
22. A / The / Ø - why? when? (rule)

.....  
23. A / The / Ø - why? when? (rule)

.....  
24. A / The / Ø - why? when? (rule)

.....



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*Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak*

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF  
INTERPRETATION TASKS IN  
TEACHING INVERSION TO  
ADVANCED LEARNERS OF  
ENGLISH

ABSTRACT

The view that immediate production of a language form, either mechanical or situational, contributes to its mastery faces a number of problems. Firstly, the learner may not be developmentally ready to produce the structure; secondly, a high failure rate may increase anxiety and effectively hinder learning (cf. Ellis 1997; VanPatten 2004). Founded on the psycholinguistic rationale provided by the current theories of language acquisition, an alternative approach to grammar teaching – intake facilitation – seems to aid the learner in the complex process of building their grammatical competence. While production-driven teaching forces learners to use the targeted structure in different types of exercises as early as possible, comprehension-based instruction shifts the focus onto processing of input. In this case the learner's attention is first drawn to the meaning a specific form realizes. Traditional production tasks are substituted by interpretation tasks whose aim is to induce learners to notice a grammatical feature that might otherwise be ignored. In order to measure the effectiveness of such a procedure, the author conducted an experiment in the course of which two competing approaches were used to teach inversion to groups of advanced learners of the English language. Instances of spontaneous use of the structure in the written work of the subjects together with tests results indicate that interpretation activities facilitate effective restructuring of mental grammar.

## 1. Introduction

The place of grammar instruction in foreign and second language pedagogy has been a controversial issue since the onset of second language acquisition research and many of the debates have still remained unresolved. Although it has been proved that L2 acquisition mirrors to some extent the processes involved in the mastery of L1 (Long 1983; Krashen 1985; Swain 1985; Pica 1992), it has also been acknowledged, as demonstrated by the immersion programmes in Canada, that mere exposure to the target

language does not guarantee high levels of grammatical and discourse competence. Consequently, form-focused instruction has been reinstated into the language classroom and it has been widely accepted that, without belittling the role of message conveyance, grammar teaching should become a vital part of classroom practices (e.g. White 1987; Ellis 1993; VanPatten 2004; Ellis 2006).

However, despite the common agreement concerning the need for pedagogic intervention focusing on grammar, there remain many controversies as to the role of explicit instruction, the choice of structures to be targeted, the type of intervention, its duration, timing and intensity. Numerous studies address complex processes involved in the development of grammatical competence trying to determine the effectiveness of specific procedures and techniques and, more importantly, identify those that prove to be more propitious than the commonly applied *traditional instruction* (TRI). The term TRI, which the newly-designed models are often juxtaposed to, is perceived by many as very vague and indeterminate. In an attempt to resolve the possible misunderstanding, VanPatten (2002) cites Paulston and Bruder's description of a typical language lesson in most of second/foreign language classrooms: "[A] grammar lesson should consist of grammatical rules that explain the particularities of the structural pattern to be learned plus a series of drills from mechanical level to a communicative in order to give students optimal practice in language production" (1975: 4). During a typical TRI lesson learners are provided with explicit explanation of a form or structure. The presentation stage is followed by a series of controlled output exercises proceeding from purely mechanical drills to meaningful and later, communicative ones. Engaging learners in the production of the targeted structure is perceived as the optimum way of helping them remember it.

According to many researchers, the traditional approach does not conform with recent developments in the field of second language acquisition. What is viewed as particularly problematic about TRI is the fact that it diverges from the recommendations of SLA on the important role of input for language growth and pushes learners immediately into production, disregarding the fact that output does not serve the proper data for interlanguage restructuring (cf. VanPatten 1993). For this reason, the aim of the present paper is to present and discuss the results of the experiment in the course of which two competing approaches were used to teach a grammatical structure to two groups of advanced learners of English.

## 2. Reception-based grammar instruction

The search for alternative approaches to the teaching of grammar that emphasize the importance of comprehension rather than production dates back to the late 1970s and early studies of the comprehension approach (cf. Winitz 1981). The studies proved that beginners who were exposed to structures through input without being required to produce the desired form outperformed learners whose training followed the lines of traditional production-based instruction not only in listening or reading tests but also in speaking and writing. Another example of a comprehension-based approach is Total Physical Response (TPR) (Asher 1977), a method that does not extort production of the target form especially in the early stages of learning. Rather than produce

the structure, learners are required to manifest understanding of specific commands by performing certain actions. As Asher demonstrated, the effectiveness of TPR surpassed that of production-oriented methods, the audio-lingual in particular, not only with respect to comprehension but also to production skills.

VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) in a study concerning Spanish word order rules and the use of clitic pronouns compared traditional treatment with listening practice that required learners to deal with input that was specially manipulated to promote facilitation of the targeted items. The research gave rise to the development of the *input processing model (IP)* (VanPatten 1993, 1996, 2002, 2004) whose practical application into the field of second language pedagogy, or a “pedagogical tool that is informed by the model” (Wong 2004: 35), is *processing instruction* or PI. As described by Van Patten in a number of publications (e.g. VanPatten 1993, 1996, 2002, 2004), Lee and VanPatten (1995) and Wong (2004), PI is a type of focus on form instruction whose aim is to enable learners to extract ‘richer intake’ from input. This can be achieved by engaging learners in structured input activities whose main objective remains in the application of novel strategies and the abandonment of inefficient old ones. Along the lines of PI, learners should not only be provided with explicit information about the target structure but also with advice on more efficient processing strategies. They are informed that the strategy they normally use may be inefficient or may result in incorrect interpretation of input. Lastly, they should be engaged in structured input activities where input has been manipulated, as Van Patten formulates it: “(...) it is not free flowing communicative discourse, although it is meaning-bearing” (1996: 64). Instead of producing the target structure, learners are required to interpret the meaning relying on form or sentence structure.

The development of interpretation tasks is yet another attempt to overcome the limitations of the traditional approach to grammar teaching. Designed and described by Rod Ellis (1995), interpretation tasks derive from important developments in the field of second language acquisition. Ellis refers to the acquisition model that addresses the role of formal instruction in acquiring language. The model distinguishes between explicit and implicit knowledge of L2. While the former is conscious and reportable, manifested in problem-solving activities, the latter is believed to be unconscious and observable in naturally occurring language behaviour. Ellis, an advocate of the weak-interface model, admits that explicit knowledge of L2 structures may transform into implicit L2 knowledge manifested in spontaneous communication. However, he points out that the findings of many research projects indicate that output practice does not enable learners to overcome the constraints of the natural order of acquisition (Schumann 1978; Pienemann 1984; Ellis 1989; Pienemann 1989). What Ellis considers particularly important about the model is the fact that it accounts for the existence of an indirect relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge. The conscious knowledge of language rules enables learners to notice important linguistic features in the input that otherwise might go unattended to.

Both top-down and bottom-up strategies are used to derive the message from the input. As Pawlak (2006: 293) states it: “Although (...) such activities may resemble regular listening and reading comprehension tasks, they go beyond top-down, predominantly semantic processing, inducing students to attend to specific linguistic fea-

tures and, therefore, forcing them to engage in bottom up, grammatical processing of the input data". It is the bottom-up processing – paying attention to problematic forms – that, according to Ellis, is a necessary condition of L2 acquisition. A fair amount of explicit knowledge about a specific structure will help the learner engage in bottom-up processing and successfully derive intake – the portion of input available for incorporation into the interlanguage. Unfortunately, the limited attentional resources humans are equipped with filter the information reaching the brain and, consequently, not all language learners are exposed to becomes acquired (cf. Schmidt 1990; VanPatten 1993). Because of natural limitations, learners are able to attend only to some portion of the data that reach them and acquisition regards only some of the features contained in the input; the claim that can be corroborated by a number of studies on first and second language acquisition (e.g. Færch and Kasper 1986; Klein 1986; Sharwood Smith 1986). Being attacked by many stimuli humans, in the course of evolution, managed to develop effective filters to avoid or minimize the danger of cognitive overload. Although all stimuli are perceived, only the high-priority ones win our focal attention. It has to be noted that "attention is effortful (...) and involves a limited capacity to deal with stimuli" (VanPatten 1996: 16), which means that only a limited amount of incoming data can be attended to at a given moment, especially if only one channel (or modality) is used. Apart from noticing important linguistic properties, explicit knowledge enables learners to compare the input they receive to their own output. In the course of cognitive comparison they are likely to discover what remains to be learnt: they will "notice the gap" (Schmidt and Frota 1986: 310) between the input and the language they produce and test the hypotheses they make about different language structures (Ellis 1995: 89-90).

The model Ellis refers to consists of a number of processes responsible for the incorporation of grammatical features into the developing system. These are as follows (1995: 90-91):

- *Interpretation*: learners comprehend input paying attention to linguistic features. Intake is derived in the course of cognitive comparison and noticing.
- *Integration*: learners incorporate intake into the interlanguage. However, only the features they are developmentally ready to incorporate will be accommodated. Incorporation of new linguistic features often entails restructuring of the already existing system.
- *Production*: although production largely depends on implicit knowledge, the explicit scope is used for monitoring. Production leads to mastery over forms that already function in the developing system.

What transpires from the model is the assumption that learners are more likely to benefit from interpretation-based grammar teaching than production of linguistic forms. As Ellis (1995: 91) puts it:

Although the model also affords other roles for grammar teaching (e.g., consciousness raising to develop learners' explicit knowledge and production practice to help learners use already learned features more accurately), it suggests that teachers might profitably try to focus learners' attention on noticing and understanding specific grammatical features in input, as it is by this means that the acquisition of new features gets started.

The practical application of the above theoretical considerations is the development of tasks that facilitate the implementation of the following three goals: first of all, they help learners identify the meaning a grammatical form realizes. Many grammatical features may go unnoticed since learners are often able to interpret the message without analyzing these features: "(...) on hearing the sentence: 'I'd like three bottles please', a learner may be able to understand that *bottles* is plural in meaning without noticing the -s morpheme understanding its function" (Ellis 1995: 94). Secondly, interpretation tasks are meant to facilitate noticing. In order to achieve this aim, targeted forms in the input must be enhanced (Sharwood-Smith 1993) in such a way that learners are "induced to notice a grammatical feature that otherwise they might ignore" (Ellis 1995: 94). Lastly, interpretation tasks draw learners attention to errors they make with the aim to enable them to notice the gap between the way a given form functions in the input and the way they express similar meaning while communicating.

Ellis recommends implementing the above operations in a sequence of activities proceeding from comprehending input that has been manipulated to enable learners to attend to the meaning of a specific form, followed by tasks that promote noticing of its characteristic properties, and finally followed by activities in the course of which learners analyze their own output. He also offers a set of general principles that should be observed while designing interpretation tasks (1995: 98-99):

- (1) Learners should be required to process the target structure, not to produce it.
- (2) An interpretation activity consists of a stimulus to which learners must make some kind of response.
- (3) The stimulus can take the form of spoken or written input.
- (4) The response can take various forms (e.g. indicate true-false, check a box, select the correct picture, draw a diagram, perform an action) but in each case the response will be either completely nonverbal or minimally verbal.
- (5) The activities in the task can be sequenced to require first attention to meaning, then noticing the form and function of the grammatical structure, and finally error identification.
- (6) As a result of completing the task, the learners should have arrived at an understanding of how the target form is used to perform a particular function or functions in communication (i.e. they must have undertaken a form-function mapping).
- (7) Learners can benefit from the opportunity to negotiate the input they hear or read.
- (8) Interpretation tasks should require learners to make a personal response (i.e. relate the input to their own lives) as well as a referential response.
- (9) As a result of completing the task, learners should have been made aware of common learner errors involving the target structure as well as correct usage.
- (10) Interpretation grammar teaching requires the provision of immediate and explicit feedback on the correctness of the students' responses.

### 3. Procedures of data collection and analysis

In an attempt to check the effectiveness of interpretation tasks as opposed to traditional instruction, the present author designed two sets of teaching materials with the aim to teach chosen types of inversion to 24 students of the first year of the English department. The study aimed to explore the effect of reception-based techniques and procedures on the acquisition of a structure that occupies a low place on the grammar priority list of teachers and materials developers. Being a marker of sophisticated formal written style, inverted structures the present study concerned are usually introduced at the advanced level when learners develop specific demands to express greater subtleties of meaning. They learn to choose a more marked word order pattern to make prominent the constituent that they consider particularly important. Inverting allows the creation of a special meaning effect. As Dorgeloh (1997: 117) explains:

(...) almost all inverted structures bear a component of emotivity. Since most of them have a CWO [canonical word order] counterpart, they involve the breaking of expectations about the use of an unmarked sentence pattern and, accordingly, concerning "normal" discourse conditions. There has to be something newsworthy about the use of an inversion to justify this departure from the norm. This may be a topic change, entitled by an instruction to produce a change in focus, or the particular prominence of a discourse item, requiring an instruction which attracts special attention to it.

Out of the many types of inversion the present investigation concerned the SAI type (subject-auxiliary-inversion) where the subject follows the first auxiliary of the verb phrase. Four types of SAI can be distinguished (cf. Dorgeloh 1997:19-29):

- *pro-inversion*, where a pro-form introduces a subject that appears in sentence-final position. This refers to sentences introduced by 'so', 'such', 'thus', 'nor' and 'neither';
- *corr-inversion*, which covers inversion in correlative constructions, such as, among others, 'such...as', 'more'/'-er'/'less...than', 'no sooner...than', 'not only...but';
- *add-inversion*, which concerns the appearance of some pro-forms (e. g. 'nor') as additive adverbs: '[...] they do not come to its meetings, nor are they informed of its decisions';
- *neg-inversion* – cases where SAI is obligatory after negative and restrictive adverbs such as 'only', 'scarcely', 'hardly', 'never', 'little', 'less' as well as preposing after a negative direct object as in 'Not a word did he say'.

Apart from the SAI type, the tests and treatment materials included inverted conditional sentences.

Specifically, the study reported in the present paper sought to address the following research questions:

- (1) Does the mode of instruction have an effect on the students' developing systems?
- (2) How does the mode affect controlled practice and spontaneous use?
- (3) Is the effect durable, as measured on immediate and delayed posttests?

Out of the two sets of treatment materials, one was designed following the lines of Ellis's recommendations (1995: 98-99), whereas the other consisted of production-based activities corresponding to the former with respect to vocabulary and number of tokens. The treatment in both groups, the *traditional* (TRG) and the *interpretation tasks group* (ITG), consisted of one ninety-minute session during which the learners were engaged in production or reception based exercises, respectively, accompanied by explicit instruction. Only some of the interpretation activities were especially designed for the purpose of the study, since most were adapted from commonly used sources such as *Grammar and Vocabulary for Cambridge Advanced and Proficiency* by Richard Side and Guy Wellman or *Advanced Language Practice* by Michael Vince.

While the TG group was immediately engaged in production activities involving rewriting, paraphrasing, completing or finishing sentences, the IT group was confronted with a set of inverted sentences graphically manipulated so that the changes concerning word order were made conspicuous. The students were asked to comment on the effect the writer was hoping to achieve by placing bold typed words at the beginning. Next, they compared two advertisements for a car, one containing inverted sentences, the other only sentences with canonical order and discussed the appeal of either of them. Another exercise consisted in deciding on the relative emotive value of the sentences, which was done by matching the exemplars with faces showing either a high or a low level of dissatisfaction. Moreover, the students commented on appropriacy of a set of inverted sentences presented in different contexts. This was followed by a sequence of matching exercises in the course of which students joined halves of sentences or decided on their accuracy. Finally, the learners were asked to identify erroneously formulated sentences and all the mistakes were commented upon by the students or/and the teacher. The subjects were not expected to provide a reformulation of incorrect sentences, however, not infrequently did they come up with correct versions. When the modifications were unsuccessful or the subjects failed to identify errors, the teacher rephrased the inaccurate utterance.

As many practitioners attest, the fact that a structure is introduced and practiced does not guarantee that learners will use it spontaneously. They often have considerable difficulty employing the structure in controlled practice, not to mention unplanned discourse. Similar problems were experienced by the subjects of the present study who, being students of the English department, must have been exposed to the targeted structure before and might even have been introduced to it in the course of classroom procedures. However, the inspection of their written work over a period of four weeks showed no instances of the types of inversion that were to become the target of the treatment although a number of possible contexts had been identified. What is understood as *possible context* is the presence of a negative adverb or adverbial phrase that, if placed at the beginning of a clause, would necessitate a change of word order, as is exemplified in such utterances as 'He hardly ever cooked meals for his family' instead of 'Hardly ever did he cook for his family'. Another feature counted as a possible context is enumerating of a number of aspects or items, as in 'He could sing and dance very well' that could be rendered as 'Not only could he dance but he could sing as well, or the appearance of some conditional forms that can become inverted: 'Had he not... ', 'Should you see him... ', 'Were you to come... '.

Apart from the analysis of their written work, the students were asked to write a pretest, an immediate posttest and a delayed posttest. Two versions of the test, designated as A and B, were devised to avoid the creation of the *practice effect* by administering the same measure as a pretest and posttest. The two versions differed with respect to their content and vocabulary, but they followed exactly the same format and contained very similar contexts for the use of the structure in question. Despite the efforts of the researcher, there was no guarantee that the two versions represented exactly the same level of difficulty and, as a result, the following scheme was adopted: half of the subjects completed test A as a pretest, test B as the immediate posttest, and then again, test A as the delayed posttest. The other half completed test B as a pretest, test A as an immediate posttest, and test B as a delayed posttest.

Each test consisted of two parts: the first was a comprehension test that required the students to mark each occurrence of the inverted structure of the above mentioned types while listening to the text read by the researcher; the second part consisted in joining pairs of sentences. This seemingly easy task necessitated considerable changes of the original structures if the provided words were to be incorporated into the novel sentences. However, only in some of the test items was inversion obligatory. In the remaining cases, it was possible to produce a correct sentence including the prompt without altering canonical word order and all such occurrences have been noted. The results of the comprehension tasks were calculated as the percentage of detection of inverted structures against the total number of occurrences of the form in the read text. The score of the production test was calculated in the following way:

- two points were awarded for a correctly formulated inverted sentence;
- one point was given when inversion was used but there was a *single* inaccuracy in its form (e.g. 'than' instead of 'when' was used in sentences like 'Barely had he sat down when...'), or there was a problem with tense or aspect;
- no points were given where no inversion was supplied or inaccuracies in form doubled with tense or aspect problems.

#### 4. Results

A 2-tailed paired samples *t*-test and a 2-tailed independent samples *t*-test were used to analyze the collected data. Figure 1 below shows the percentages of correct responses obtained by the subjects on the production tests. As can be seen, the scores of the traditional instruction group (TR group) on the pretest were considerably higher than those of the interpretation tasks group (IT group). However, the initial advantage of the traditional group was not maintained on the test following the treatment since the IT group managed to improve their scores by 32.31%, while the TR group improved only by 11.36%. The growing tendency seems to be more pronounced in the case of the IT group with the values reaching statistical significance ( $t = -5.72$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). The rising trend was later manifested on the delayed posttest, however, not equally conspicuous because the values rose only by 5.33%. The performance of the TR group also improved as a result of the treatment; however, the gains were not as substantial as those of the IT group ( $t = -1.58$ ,  $p = 0.146$ ). Nevertheless, the values obtained in the pretest (52.27%) and those gained at the delayed posttest (65.45%) imply that the treatment that focuses on production may cause

important changes of the interlanguage system: the data obtained as a result of the comparison of the pretest and the delayed posttest scores neared statistical significance ( $t = -1.82, p = 0.097$ ).

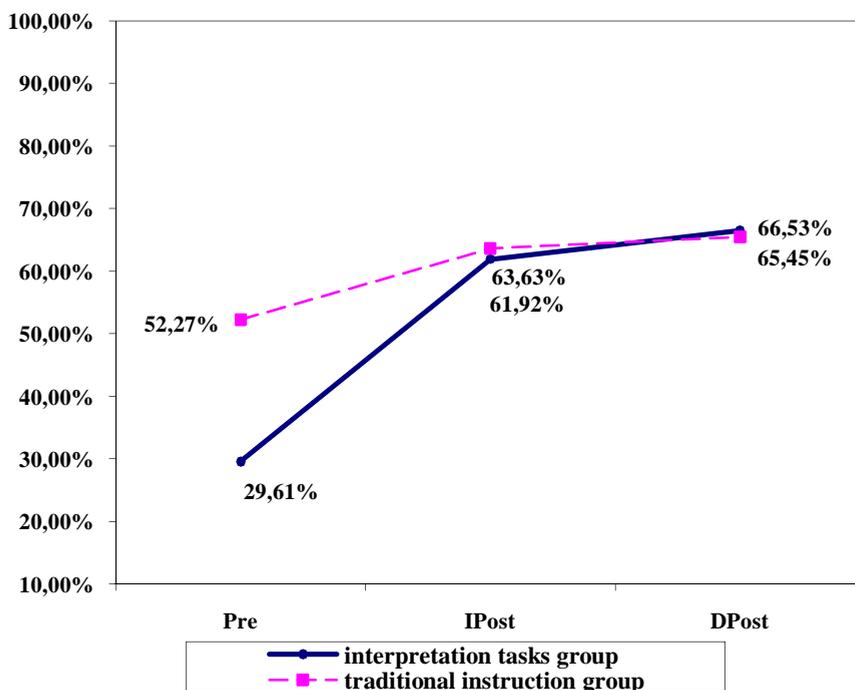


Figure 1. Accuracy percentages for the use of inversion on the production test.

group	Pretest Mean	Posttest 1 Mean	Posttest 2 Mean	2-tailed paired samples <i>t</i> -test
IT	29.61	61.92	66.53	Pre-Post 1 $t = -5.72, p < .0001$ Post 1-Post 2 $t = -1.56, p = 0.145$ Pre-Post 2 $t = -5.80, p < .0001$
TR	52.27	63.63	65.45	Pre-Post1 $t = -1.58, p = 0.146$ Post 1-Post 2 $t = -0.45, p = 0.664$ Pre-Post 2 $t = -1.82, p = 0.097$
2-tailed independent samples <i>t</i> -test	$t = -2.05$ $p = 0.0527$	$t = 0.21$ $p = 0.834$	$t = 0.15$ $p = 0.882$	

Table 1. Accuracy percentages for the use of inversion on the production test (significant values are in bold).

The results of the reception tests (Figure 2) seem to be less conclusive and more difficult to interpret. It does come as a surprise that the traditional group, whose main concern during the treatment was production of the targeted form, outperformed the IT group on all three tests. The members of the traditional group became more proficient in the identification and interpretation of inverted forms in the comprehension task they were confronted with, the fact that was manifested by the gain of 10.99% ( $t = -2.31, p < .05$ ), which is in fact 7.15% higher than that observed in the other group. The performance of the IT group also improved ( $t = -0.53, p = 0.06$ ), however, the pretest-posttest gain of 3.84% cannot be called a significant change. It is not surprising perhaps that the initial gain failed to be carried over entirely into the delayed posttest, with the accuracy percentage decreasing by 7.36% from posttest 1 to posttest 2 in the TR group and by 2.84% in the IT group. As can be seen, the results obtained by the subjects in both groups are very high, above 80%, on all three tests implying that the task posed by the researcher was comparatively easy and did not constitute a real challenge to the learners. The fact that the traditional group did better on the reception tests can be ascribed to their overall higher level of proficiency, as indicated on the production pretest where the average score they obtained was 22.66% higher than that of the IT group.

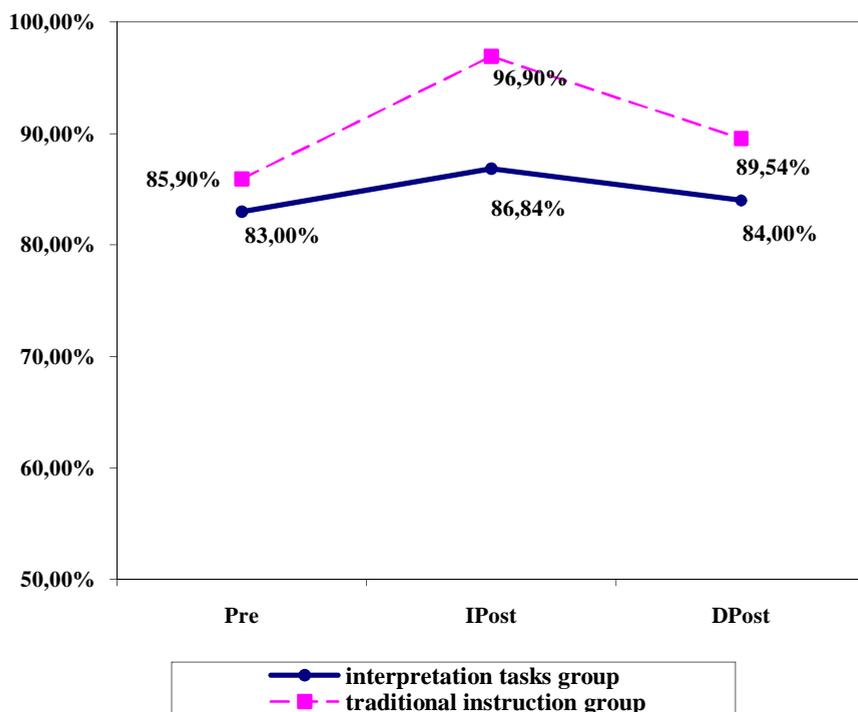


Figure 2. Accuracy percentages for the use of inversion on the reception test.

group	Pretest Mean	Posttest 1 Mean	Posttest 2 Mean	2-tailed paired samples <i>t</i> -test
IT	83.00	86.84	84.60	Pre-Post 1 <i>t</i> = -0.53, <i>p</i> = 0.60 Post 1-Post 2 <i>t</i> = 0.40, <i>p</i> = 0.70 Pre-Post 2 <i>t</i> = -0.15, <i>p</i> = 0.88
TR	85.91	96.90	89.57	Pre-Post 1 <i>t</i> = -2.31, <i>p</i> < .05 Post 1-Post 2 <i>t</i> = 1.49, <i>p</i> = 0.17 Pre-Post 2 <i>t</i> = -0.85, <i>p</i> = 0.417
2-tailed independent samples <i>t</i> -test	<i>t</i> = -0.40 <i>p</i> = 0.695	<i>t</i> = -1.97 <i>p</i> = 0.061	<i>t</i> = -0.76 <i>p</i> = 0.455	

Table 2. The effect of the instructional treatment on the subjects' use of inversion on the reception test (significant values are bolded).

In order to establish the effect of the treatment on the participants' spontaneous use, the procedure of inspection of the subjects' written work was repeated after the experiment. While the initial examination showed no instances of inverted structures in the essays and reports composed by the students, the second trial showed the emergence of both correct as well as incorrect inverted sentences. The statistical analysis was not applied here because of the fact that the structure in question appeared very rarely, rare were the possible contexts both before and after the treatment. The inspection prior to the treatment in the TR group revealed that despite the existence of 7 possible contexts, inversion was not used in any of the works. Similarly, although 22 possible contexts were identified, inverted sentences did not appear even once in the works presented by the members of the IT group. The examination of essays and reports collected after the treatment showed a slight increase in the number of inverted structures. In the TR group for 53 possible contexts, inversion was correctly used 18 times, incorrectly 23 times. In the IT group the change was not that conspicuous since, for 24 contexts, students successfully employed inversion only 5 times. Another 5 attempts were judged as incorrect because there appeared to be inaccuracies in both tense use and word order. This time the traditional group showed greater impact of instruction on their production: inversion was employed very frequently with a high success rate as compared to that of the interpretation tasks group.

## 5. Conclusions

The conspicuous increase in accuracy scores manifested on the immediate posttest and the delayed posttest on production in the IT group shows the beneficial effects of the experimental treatment devised by Ellis (1995) in the form of interpretation tasks. The considerably worse group, as indicated on the pretest, managed to catch up with the other and the growing tendency was maintained on the delayed posttest. Teaching

that focuses learners' attention on the structure without requiring to produce it, better complies with natural processes involved in learning a foreign language. Input manipulation appears to have more beneficial effect on the development of the interlanguage than the analysis of output. Being involved in interpretation tasks learners attend to specific grammatical forms, decode their meaning and compare them to the forms they produce while communicating with others. Nevertheless, it cannot be guaranteed that processing of input results in interlanguage restructuring or ensures high levels of fluency. The findings of the experiment imply that both approaches, the traditional and comprehension-based, affected the learners' performance. The subjects in both groups appeared to benefit from the pedagogic intervention, although the extent of improvement depended also on the learners' overall proficiency level as well as the type of tasks they were required to engage. It seems legitimate to say that a combination of the two approaches, reception- and production-based ones, constitutes the most advantageous solution to the problem of grammar instruction in the language classroom. More longitudinal studies employing both qualitative and quantitative methods are needed to establish the effectiveness of the novel approach over time.

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COMPARING THE EFFECT OF  
FOCUS ON FORM AND FOCUS ON  
FORMS IN TEACHING ENGLISH  
THIRD CONDITIONAL

ABSTRACT

Although there is a broad consensus that form-focused instruction is beneficial, controversies remain as to the choice of linguistic features that should be taught, the selection of instructional procedures and the place of the structural component in the curriculum. The decisions made in such areas are closely related to the influential distinction that Long (1991) made between a *focus on forms* and a *focus on form*, with the former referring to systematic teaching of preselected grammatical items and the latter describing intervention in which attention to the code is embedded in communicative activities and arises in response to learner need. According to leading SLA theorists and researchers, the focus on forms approach is ineffective and should be replaced with a focus on form within the framework of task-based instruction, a claim that is not supported by ample empirical evidence due to the absence of comparative studies. The aim of the study reported in this paper was to address this gap by exploring the relative effectiveness of the two approaches in teaching the English third conditional to Polish senior high school students. Both types of intervention were equally effective in helping the subjects gain greater control over the target feature, as evidenced by the fact that the experimental groups outperformed the controlled group on a discrete-point test and a dictogloss task, both right after the treatment and one month later. Such findings call into question the claim that the structural syllabus and the PPP procedure should be abandoned, but they also testify to the value of planned focus on form. For this reason, it is suggested in the conclusion to the article that focus on form and focus on forms should be combined in classroom practice and some tentative suggestions are offered as to how this goal can be attained.

## 1. Introduction

As Ellis (2006a: 101-102) writes in his recent overview of formal instruction, "Grammar has held and continues to hold a central place in language teaching. The zero

grammar approach was flirted with but never really took hold (...) There is ample evidence to demonstrate that teaching grammar works". While this stance is embraced by the majority of theorists, researchers and methodologists, and it finds reflection in the teaching materials brought out by major publishing houses, Ellis admits that several important issues continue to generate considerable controversy. The most fundamental of these are connected with the *what*, *how*, and *when* of form-focused instruction, or the choice of TL forms to be taught, the selection of the most beneficial instructional techniques and procedures as well as the design of grammar-based lessons and the overall place of the structural component in the curriculum (cf. Doughty and Williams 1998c; Pawlak 2004; Ellis 2005; Williams 2005; Ellis 2006a; Pawlak 2006a). The decisions ultimately made in these areas are to large extent a function of whether one is in favor of what Long (1991) called a *focus on forms*, as exemplified by the structural syllabus and the PPP sequence, or, rather, opts for what he termed a *focus on form*, where attention to linguistic features occurs in the course of genuine communication and instruction is based on a task-based syllabus. Interestingly, whereas most applied linguists strongly recommend the latter option, cautioning against a reversion to traditional grammar teaching (e.g. Doughty 2001; Ellis 2003; Williams 2005; Willis and Willis 2007; Willis, this volume), most teachers, particularly those working in foreign language contexts such as the one in Poland, have never really abandoned the preselection and systematic teaching of language forms, a practice that is encouraged by most available coursebooks (cf. Pawlak 2006b; Pawlak and Drożdżal-Szelest, this volume).

A key question that arises at this point then is whether practitioners who choose to cling to the old, putatively less effective ways of teaching are dismally failing to take into account the latest theoretical developments and research findings and, thus, depriving their students of high-quality instruction by not doing enough to develop their communicative competence. Or perhaps, as has been pointed out by some scholars (e.g. Sheen 2003, 2005; Swan 2005) and as the present author has argued elsewhere (Pawlak 2004, 2005, 2006a), some of the proposals falling under the rubric of focus on form and task-based teaching are incompatible with the inherent limitations of foreign language settings and not necessarily more effective than the instructional options which have turned out to be successful for so many learners. Yet another possibility is that the two approaches should be combined in some way to produce the best learning outcomes (cf. Pawlak 2006a). Although, depending on their theoretical allegiances and teaching experience, scholars would be tempted to venture diverse answers to such questions, there is a need to hold such claims to empirical scrutiny by carrying out studies comparing the relative effectiveness of focus on form and focus on forms in particular local contexts (cf. Sheen 2003, 2005, this volume). Since such research is extremely rare, it lacks sufficient methodological rigor and it has not thus far been attempted in the Polish context, the present paper reports the findings of a study which sought to explore the value of the two approaches in teaching past counterfactual conditional sentences in English. The discussion of the results subsequently provides a basis for a tentative proposal on how a focus on forms and a focus on form can be reconciled in teaching grammar. In order to set the scene for the research project and its implications, however, the article starts with a brief description of the approaches in question as well as the language form targeted for instruction.

## 2. *Focus on form* and *focus on forms* in theory, research and classroom practice

While Long's (1991) distinction between a *focus on form* and a *focus on forms* has become extremely influential in recent years and has motivated numerous research projects, it has also been subject to different interpretations and modifications, which has resulted in confusion as to what kind of instruction is being referred to in a particular study. For this reason, the point of departure in any empirical investigation comparing the effectiveness of the two options has to involve providing a clear and precise explanation of how the two concepts are understood. In his seminal paper Long characterized a *focus on form* as pedagogic intervention which "(...) overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (1991: 45-46). This initial definition was subsequently couched in more practical terms by Long and Robinson (1998: 23) who explain that "Focus on form refers to how attentional resources are allocated (...) during an otherwise meaning-focused classroom lesson, focus on form often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features – by the teacher and/or one or more students – triggered by perceived problems with comprehension and production". Thus, to be regarded as focus on form, instruction should minimally have the following three features: (1) primary emphasis on message conveyance, (2) a brief and unobtrusive diversion from genuine communication to focus on a linguistic feature, and (3) a problem-oriented nature of the shift of attention to the code (cf. Williams 2005: 672). This means in practice that teachers should abandon the structural syllabus, eschew planning grammar lessons, and only react to errors as their learners are struggling to get across or comprehend intended meanings.

Partly because the value of such treatment is difficult to investigate empirically and partly because its implementation poses serious problems to language teachers who are in no position to sufficiently prepare the intervention, the concept has recently been modified by eliminating the requirement for the *incidental nature* of engagement with TL features. The possibility of planning the instruction in response to persistent learning problems is acknowledged by Long and Robinson (1998) who, when providing examples of operationalization of focus on form, suggest, among other things, increasing the frequency of the features taught in texts, which clearly necessitates pre-selection. Doughty and Williams (1998b) go even further in admitting that both *planned* and *incidental*, or what they refer to as *proactive* and *reactive* approaches, "(...) are effective, depending on the classroom circumstances (...)", allowing not only for *integrated* but also *sequential* focus on form, where TL features are presented and reflected upon in separation from communicative activities, and proposing a taxonomy containing both *implicit* and *explicit* instructional options. Ellis (Ellis 2001a; Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen 2002), in turn, makes a three-way distinction between *focus on forms*, *planned focus on form* and *incidental focus on form*, with the latter being further subdivided into *reactive* (i.e. error treatment) and *preemptive* (i.e. teacher- or student-generated engagement with the code before an error occurs). He also makes the crucial point that whereas the incidental approach is by its very nature *extensive*, with different forms being subjected to scattershot treatment, planned intervention is *intensive*, in that one or several forms are repeatedly emphasized. Given Polish students' scant in and out-

of-class exposure, curricular requirements, the limited duration of the study and the complexity of the target form, it was the planned variant of focus on form that was employed in the research project described in this paper (see below for details).

Although this issue is seldom elaborated on in discussions of form-focused instruction, it is also not entirely clear what kind of instruction the focus on forms approach involves, except that the negative connotations of the concept are typically emphasized. To quote Doughty and Williams (1998a: 3), for example, "To be clear, it should be borne in mind that the traditional notion of *formS* always entails isolation or extraction of linguistic features from context or from communicative activity" (emphasis original). Long and Robinson, in turn, argue that the focus on forms approach is based on a *synthetic syllabus* (Wilkins 1976) in which TL features are taught one by one in a decontextualized manner, and such practices "(...) either largely ignore language learning processes or tacitly assume a discredited behaviorist model" (1998: 16). A similar characterization is offered by Ellis (2001a: 14) who writes: "The underlying assumption is that language learning is a process of accumulating distinct entities. In such an approach, learners are required to treat the language primarily as an 'object' to be studied and practiced bit by bit to function as students rather than users of the language".

The main problem with such descriptions is that they do a disservice to the way focus on forms is conceptualized in most teaching materials and in the work of such scholars as Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1997), DeKeyser (1998), Hedge (2000), Johnson (2001) or Sheen (2003), to name but a few. The fact that the communicative element is neglected in many classrooms is the corollary of teacher belief systems, lack of time or local circumstances rather than inherent characteristics of focus on forms which, in its current interpretations, also places a premium on meaning and message exchange. However, as Sheen (2005: 282) points out, "it assumes that given the great difficulty of learning the grammar and vocabulary of a foreign language, these can be learned effectively neither incidentally as a by-product of communicative activity nor simply by means of problem-solving activities". For this reason, it draws upon the tenets of Skill-Building Theory, according to which declarative representation has to be gradually transformed into procedural knowledge by means of practice (DeKeyser 1998, 2001; Johnson 2001), or, as neurolinguists would postulate (Paradis 2004), such practice leads to the emergence of parallel implicit representation. In classroom reality, this entails following the PPP sequence, where a specific structure is presented by a variety of means, practiced in controlled written and oral exercises, and, ultimately, employed in communicative tasks, some of which mirror those used in planned or incidental focus on form. This is exactly how the focus of forms approach was operationalized for the purposes of the present study and what transpired in the treatment sessions (see below for details).

Given the importance attached to the distinction and the flurry of empirical activity it has instigated, it may come as a surprise that there has been virtually no research comparing the effectiveness of the two approaches, with researchers preferring to investigate the value of specific instructional options. Consequently, the claims that focus on form is superior to focus on forms is premature, particularly in light of the fact that the available findings suggest that the latter works and is not necessarily less

effective. Sheen (2003, 2005, this volume), for example, argues that the evidence quoted in support of focus on form is unconvincing because of terminological confusion, serious problems in research methodology as well as absence of true comparative studies. Moreover, numerous past and present studies demonstrate that focus on forms instruction does assist learners in reaching high levels of accuracy and fluency in the target language (von Elek and Oskarsson 1973; Palmer 1992; Kupferberg and Olshtain 1996; Ammar and Lightbown 2005; Housen, Pierrard and Vandaele 2005; Spada, Lightbown and White 2005). Additionally, the synthesis and meta-analysis of the findings of investigations of form-focused instruction led Norris and Ortega (2001: 202) to conclude that "(...) instruction that incorporates a focus on form integrated in meaning is as effective as instruction that involved the focus on forms", although they chose to include VanPatten's (2002) processing instruction, which does entail explanation of discrete grammar points, in the former category. Perhaps the only study to date that has specifically sought to compare the effectiveness of the approaches in question has been carried out by Sheen (2005) and focused on the acquisition of English interrogative forms and adverb placement. Using such measures as an aural written comprehension test, a grammaticality judgment test and an oral interview, he showed that the focus on forms treatment was more effective than focus on form in aiding learners to gain greater control over the targeted features. All of this suggests that the putative superiority of task-based instruction in which linguistic features are addressed only in response to problems experienced by learners should not be uncritically accepted but, rather, subjected to careful examination in specific contexts, a goal that the study reported below set out to accomplish.

As was noted in the introduction to this paper, all the disputations concerning the value of focus on form and focus on forms do not seem to have much of an effect on actual teaching as it is conducted in foreign language contexts, where the impact of CLT itself has often been marginal (Fotos 2002, 2005). Taking the Polish situation as an example, this is perhaps due as much to inadequate dissemination of cutting-edge ideas in teacher training course as to their inadequacy to the specificity of foreign language instruction and their still marginal presence in teaching materials. As a result, practitioners continue to rely on a structural syllabus and the PPP typical of the focus on forms approach but, what is truly disconcerting, frequently fail to sufficiently emphasize the free production stage. Such a situation provides another argument for taking stock of the value of the two approaches and proposing ways in which they might complement each other since this could enhance the effectiveness of language instruction. This is one more reason why studies comparing the value of focus on form and focus on forms applied to different structures, students and local contexts should be undertaken.

### 3. Issues in learning and teaching English third conditional

Most EFL and ESL textbooks and grammar practice books typically introduce three types of conditional sentences, namely the *third*, *second* and *third conditional*, often referred to as the *future*, *present* and *past conditional*, expressing *real*, *unreal* and *past unreal conditions* (cf. Berent 1985; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999; Norris 2003).

Many coursebooks also familiarize learners with the *zero conditional*, known as *generic factual* and used to express general truths, and, those for somewhat more advanced students, might also include a section on *mixed conditionals*. Although such an approach is pedagogically motivated, it has come in for criticism because the three types represent only a fraction of the 70 conditional tense-modal patterns that Hwang (1979) identified as naturally occurring in writing and speech. Of these seven most frequent include *generic factual*, *future (predictive)*, *present hypothetical or counterfactual*, *explicit inference factual or future with weakened result*, *present or future hypothetical or present counterfactual*, *past counterfactual* and *future with weakened result* (cf. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999). A study by Fulcher (1991) illuminated that the most often taught types 1, 2 and 3 account for only about one fifth of these seven categories, which has prompted claims that introducing several simplified and unrepresentative forms is bound to hinder learners' ability to process and produce most acceptable types of conditional sentences (Maule 1988). Still, as Ur (1989: 70) argues in defense of teaching the three types, "In these constructions, my students, left to their own devices, come up with ungrammatical sentences, or with meanings different from what they intended (...) if I simply expose them to the wide variety of conditional sentences available, (...) I risk confusing them rather than helping them". It is for this reason that the three conditional forms are viewed as so vital and continue to receive so much attention in teaching materials and in language classrooms.

The choice of the third conditional, also known as past unreal or past counterfactual, as the target of intervention in the present study was motivated by the desire to introduce a new linguistic feature rather than aid learners in gaining greater control over one they have already partly acquired. By doing so, the author hoped to minimize the likelihood of the form having been intensively practiced in oral and written exercises so ubiquitous in grammar teaching in Polish schools, as this would have made it impossible to unambiguously ascribe any potential gains to focus on form rather than focus on forms or a combination of the two. Since the third conditional is a complex structure which is taught to learners representing intermediate or upper-intermediate, or B1 and B2, levels, it appears late in the syllabus, definitely after learners have been introduced to the past perfect and the perfect infinitive. Therefore, it was hypothesized that most of the subjects would be unfamiliar with the structure at the time of the experiment, an assumption that proved to be only partly warranted. An issue that needs to be addressed at this point are the reasons for the learning difficulty of the past counterfactual conditional and the challenges involved in teaching it.

According to Norris (2003: 1), "Conditionals are linguistically and cognitively complex structures that express a variety of meanings, are realized through a variety of forms, and are used for a variety of discourse functions". This comment is particularly relevant in the case of the third conditional, the mastery of which is only possible when the learner has acquired such complex constructions as the past perfect tense, modal auxiliaries and perfect infinitives, the concept and mechanics of the backshifting of tenses, negation, and irregular past participial forms (cf. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999; Chou 2000). What adds to this difficulty, the structure can be used to express various meanings, some of which depend on the position of the 'if-clause', its use may signal different discourse functions, and, equally importantly, the

processing and expressing of past unreal meanings is cognitively challenging (cf. Ford and Thompson 1986; Ford 1997; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999). Another factor that explains the considerable learning challenge is the fact that past counterfactual conditional sentences account for only about 3% of conditional forms used, which makes it very hard to acquire them incidentally from communicative input and justifies using carefully planned instructional intervention. Given all of these complexities, it is perhaps not surprising, as Berent (1985) found in a study involving speakers of 20 different L1s, that past counterfactual conditionals are the most difficult to produce of the three basic types. Still, they proved to be the easiest to understand, a result which Berent (1985) explains in terms of markedness but which could also be accounted for by the fact that unreal situations are quite unambiguous and the claim that comprehension of TL features may not be subject to developmental constraints (Buczowska and Weist 1991).

It also makes sense to consider the issue of learning difficulty of the third conditional in terms of subconscious and largely automatic *implicit knowledge*, which underlies spontaneous L2 performance, and conscious and mostly controlled *explicit knowledge*, the application of which requires ample planning and execution time (Ellis 2004). According to Ellis (2006b), in the case of the former, the ease or difficulty of a particular feature hinges on its *frequency, saliency, functional value, regularity* and *processability*. Adopting such criteria, it becomes clear that the third conditional is difficult to acquire because (1) it rarely occurs in natural spoken and written discourse, (2) its functional value is limited as similar propositions can be expressed by means of combinations of past tenses, and (3) its spontaneous production calls for highly complex processing operations as specified in Pienemann's (1999) Processability Theory. In addition, although the feature is superficially regular in its form, the possibility of using different modal verbs, changing the sequence of clauses, inverting the constituents in the 'if-clause' as well as the need to use various irregular past participles can all be a source of confusion for the learner. Clearly, all such problems are not compensated for by the saliency of the structure, not least because, even if it is noticed, learners may be unable to process it. As regards explicit knowledge, Ellis (2006b) argues that the learning challenge depends on *conceptual clarity* of the structure and the extent to which its explanation requires the use of sophisticated *metalanguage*. On both of these criteria, the past counterfactual conditional is clearly a difficult linguistic feature as it is both formally and functionally complex, and extensive use of highly technical metalanguage seems to be inevitable when introducing it.

Taking all of this into account, it is obvious that teaching the third conditional can only be attempted with learners who have reached the requisite level of proficiency in the target language, are cognitively capable of comprehending the dependence of one circumstance on the occurrence of another, and have acquired type 1 and 2 conditional sentences. Even then, however, many learners will need adequate time to develop and consistently apply conscious knowledge of the feature, and there will be such who will never be able to deploy it in fluent performance. In the light of such realities, it is clear that it would be naive to expect that in a situation of limited access to the target language outside the classroom students can ever be able to acquire the third conditional solely through message conveyance or reactive focus on form, as envi-

saged in Long's (1991) original formulation. Thus, as stated in the preceding section, a decision was made to compare the effect of planned rather than incidental focus on form with the focus on forms approach, thus eliminating the danger that the students taught by means of the former would be at a serious disadvantage from the very outset.

#### 4. Design of the study

The study reported below was conducted during regularly scheduled English lessons and took the form of a *quasi experiment* involving three intact third-grade senior high school classes, randomly designated as the *experimental focus on form group* (FonF group), the *experimental focus on forms group* (FonFs group) and the *control group*. The first two of these were taught by the present author, which ensured the provision of the required kind of treatment whereas the third was taught by his colleague who had consented to participate in the research project. The main aim of the study was to explore the short- and long-term effect of a focus on form and a focus on forms treatment on the acquisition of the past counterfactual conditional in terms of both explicit and implicit knowledge as well as learners' awareness of form-function mappings and their ability to monitor their production of the feature. The following sections describe the subjects of the study, its timetable, the treatment, the testing materials and the types of analysis employed.

##### 4.1. Subjects

The subjects of the study were 102 Polish senior high school students attending three parallel third-grade classes, consisting of 33 (FonF group), 35 (FonFs group) and 34 (control group) individuals. The analysis of school documentation, the learners' responses to a background questionnaire and an interview with the other teacher showed that the groups were akin in all important respects. This is evidenced by the fact that the grade point averages in English at the end of the previous semester were similar, equaling 3.88 on a 0-6 scale in the FonF group, 3.74 in the FonFs group and 3.81 in the control group, the average duration of English study amounted to 4.2, 3.8 and 4.3 years, and 31.3%, 28.5% and 25.9% of the students in the three groups reporting having regular contact with the target language outside school. All the three classes had three hours of English a week, they were following the same coursebook, they were taught using a structural syllabus and the PPP procedure being allowed opportunities for communication, and there did not appear to be major differences between the students in terms of motivation, engagement and interest in the subject. Although, on the whole, each of the three classes could be described as representing an intermediate or B1 level, these were mixed-level groups, with some students representing much higher or much lower proficiency.

##### 4.2. Timetable

The experiment was carried out over the period of nine weeks and consisted of a pretest, eight treatment sessions and two posttests, as well as the administration of a

background and final questionnaire. The pretest took place on the same day in the three groups in week 1 and was followed by eight treatment sessions in the FonF and FonFs groups in weeks 2-4. Then, in week 5, the participants took the first pretest and a month later, in week 9, the second posttest was administered with a view to determining whether the gains in performance were durable. As for the questionnaires, the background one was intended to provide information about the subjects and they were asked to fill it out prior to the experiment, whereas the final one aimed to explore the extent to which the participants had worked on the target structure in their own time during the study and it was administered right after the delayed posttest.

### 4.3. Treatment

The eight treatment sessions took place on the same day in the two experimental groups, with each lasting approximately 30 minutes and the remainder of the lesson being devoted to work with regular coursebook material (practicing lexical items, reading and listening tasks, etc.). At the same time, the students in the control group continued to cover successive units in their coursebooks and, as the analysis of the audio recordings of the lessons showed, no attempt was made to teach the third conditional.

The intervention in the FonF group involved using the techniques of *input flooding* (i.e. exposing students to spoken and written texts seeded with instances of the third conditional), *input enhancement* (i.e. providing them with texts in which the target structure was visually enhanced by means of different font type, italics and bolding), *various comprehension tasks* related to the texts read or heard requiring the processing or use of the target forms (e.g. matching, completion, putting sentences in a chronological sequence, questions), *focused communication tasks* (i.e. such necessitating the use of past unreal forms for their successful completion), and different types of *explicit* (e.g. overtly correcting an erroneous utterance and asking the student to repeat the correct version) and *implicit* (e.g. using a clarification request to give the learner a chance to attend to the form and self-correct) *corrective feedback* in the course of communicative activities (i.e. discussing the contents of a text or the outcomes of a task). Understandably, the intervention was largely input-based at the beginning and only in the fifth segment did communicative tasks begin to appear together with more covert types of correction. Brief metalinguistic explanations were also supplied on several occasions but this only happened in response to learners' queries as they were struggling to understand the texts, do comprehension activities or create their own utterances during communicative tasks. Still, since such situations arose in response to learner problems and the shift of attention to the code was at all times integrated within meaningful activity, rule provision did not compromise the primary focus on meaning and the sessions did retain their focus on form character.

The first two lessons in the FonFs group were devoted to explicitly presenting the form, meaning and use of the third conditional as it was used in written and spoken passages as well as asking the students to identify the targeted form in such texts. The teacher supplied rules, examples and paradigms, used a combination of English and Polish when providing the explanations and did not shy away from making cross-lingual comparisons. In the next three sessions, the past counterfactual conditional

was intensively practiced by means of traditional exercises such as paraphrasing, sentence completion or translation, or what Ellis (1997) calls *text-manipulation* activities, and errors involving the use of the form were *immediately and overtly corrected*. The last three sessions were dedicated to performing *text-creation activities* (Ellis 1997) in which the students were instructed to use the target feature in a more communicative way by, for example, commenting on a picture-based story or a reading text. As the present author made plain elsewhere (cf. Pawlak 2006a), such activities bear a lot of resemblance to focused communication tasks, the only difference being that in the latter the pedagogical goals are concealed from learners, a requirement that is frequently impossible to meet in practice. To summarize, the treatment applied in the FonFs group broadly followed the PPP sequence, with the caveat that the three stages were extended over a series of lessons and the free production phase was sufficiently emphasized.

#### 4.4. Testing materials, scoring and analysis

The testing instruments used to evaluate the subjects' mastery of the third conditional were identical in the three groups and included a discrete-point grammar test and a dictogloss task. The test was intended as a measure of explicit knowledge and the students' ability to deploy the structure in text-manipulation activities such as matching and putting verbs in parentheses in the correct form, sentence completion and paraphrasing (see Appendix 1). Three versions of this instrument were designed, with roughly one third of the participants in each group completing version A on the pretest, the second third version B and the last third version C, and then each third taking the remaining two versions on posttests 1 and 2. Adopting such a scheme eliminated the danger of the practice effect and diminished the likelihood of different difficulty levels of the three tests unduly influencing the results. The test contained a total of 20 items, each of which could be accorded from 0 to 2 points, which means that the maximum score on each version was 40. An item received 2 points when it was entirely correct in terms of the form, meaning and use of the conditional, 1 point when all the required constituents were in place but there was a minor problem with their form (e.g. the use of 'has' instead of 'have' in a perfect infinitive or the wrong form of the participle) or a slightly different meaning was conveyed, and 0 points when there was no response, the structure was not the conditional type 3 or an entirely different idea was expressed. The means and standard deviations for each test were calculated and the statistical significance of within-group and between-group differences was assessed by means of *paired* and *independent samples t-tests*, respectively.

Since it is difficult to design a communicative task that would necessitate spontaneous use of past counterfactual conditionals for its successful completion, a decision was made to use instead a *dictogloss task* as a measure of the subjects' implicit knowledge, their awareness of form-function mappings and ability to monitor their output. In this procedure, learners listen to a text containing multiple exemplars of the target structure read twice at normal speed, jot down familiar words and phrases and, subsequently, work in pairs or small groups to collaboratively reconstruct it from their shared responses. As Swain (1998: 69) explains, the resulting *metatalk* or *collaborative*

*dialogue* (Swain, this volume) taking place in the context of making meaning “may well serve the function of deepening the students’ awareness of forms and rules, and the relationship of the forms and rules to the meaning they are trying to express; it may also serve the function of helping students to understand the relationship between meanings, forms and functions in a highly context-sensitive manner”. In addition to being a tool for collaborative construction of knowledge, however, a dictogloss task provides insights into learners’ ability to produce the target form somewhat more spontaneously and it has been used for this purpose in other studies (e.g. Williams and Evans 1998). Although due to its preoccupation with hypothesis-testing, the activity does not constitute a perfect measure of implicit knowledge, it does ensure the use of the TL feature in a more meaningful, context-embedded and natural manner than would be the case in a task in which third conditional sentences would have to be produced on the basis of cues of some kind.

Three different dictogloss activities were designed for the pretest and the posttests, with each passage containing seven instances of the target form (see Appendix 2). The interaction of five pairs of participants in each group, the same on each test, was audio taped, transcribed and subjected to a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The former involved counting the number of accurate uses of the targeted structure in each pair and calculating the means for each group for each test, with accurate use being defined as such that was entirely correct or contained a minor mistake (e.g. incorrect form of the past participle). In order to measure the subjects’ awareness of the feature, numerical analysis also entailed tabulating the numbers of *language related episodes* (LREs), defined as stretches of interaction in which the participants talked about the third conditional, discussed its use, self- or other-corrected (cf. Swain 1998), as well as the instances in which *correct solutions* were reached. Since some of the data obtained were not normally distributed, the levels of statistical significance on the dictogloss were established using the *Wilcoxon matched pairs signed ranks test* for within-group comparisons and the *Mann-Whitney test* for between-group comparisons. As regards qualitative analysis, it involved exploring the nature of the LREs, the learners’ reliance on Polish and formulae, and the type of L2 knowledge drawn upon in producing conditional sentences.

## 5. Findings and discussion

As illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 1, which present the mean scores, standard deviations and levels of statistical significance on the discrete-point test, the different treatments in the FonF and FonFs group turned out to have a similar effect on the students’ explicit knowledge of the past unreal conditional and their ability to deploy it in controlled exercises. This is because, even though the FonF group slightly outperformed the FonFs group on the posttests, the differences were small, standing at 0.79 on posttest 1 and 1.25 on posttest 2, with none of them reaching statistical significance. At the same time, however, it must be stressed that, irrespective of its nature, the intervention resulted in considerably greater accuracy of use of the targeted structure in the two experimental groups and the gains were for the most part maintained one month after the treatment. This is visible in the fact that the pretest-posttest 1 increase

in the average score equaled 14.81 points in the FonF group and 13.63 points in the FonFs group, the means then dropped by only 1.45 and 1.91, and the pretest-posttest 2 gains still amounted to 13.36 and 11.72, continuing to reach statistical significance. By contrast, no such improvement was observed in the control group, where the mean did increase by one point from the pretest to posttest 1, but the difference was not statistically significant and it dropped almost to the pretest level on posttest 2. Such findings unambiguously demonstrate that formal instruction does make a difference when it comes to the development and proceduralization of explicit knowledge but also indicate that it is of less significance whether the focus on form or the focus on forms approach is adopted, at least when it comes to the teaching of such a complex structure as the past counterfactual conditional.

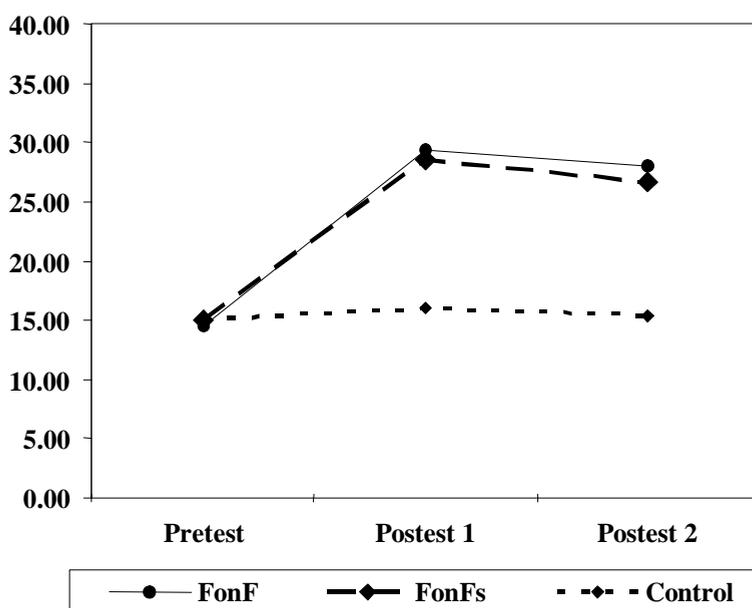


Figure 1. The mean scores for the FonF (n = 34), FonFs (n = 36) and control group (n = 35) on the test.

Group	Pretest		Posttest 1		Posttest 2		Significance (two-tailed paired samples <i>t</i> -test)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
FonF	14.58	12.77	29.39	9.71	27.94	11.72	Pre → Post 1: $t = 7.45, p < .01$ Post 1 → Post 2: $t = 1.64, p = .11$ n.s. Pre → Post 2: $t = 6.84, p < .01$
FonFs	14.97	13.50	28.60	9.62	26.69	10.18	Pre → Post 1: $t = 7.20, p < .01$ Post 1 → Post 2: $t = 2.00, p = .06$ n.s. Pre → Post 2: $t = 6.78, p < .01$
Control	15.03	12.14	16.03	11.86	15.44	12.06	Pre → Post 1: $t = 1.48, p = .01$ Post 1 → Post 2: $t = 0.52, p = .61$ n.s. Pre → Post 2: $t = 0.32, p = .75$ n.s.
Significance (2-tailed independent samples <i>t</i> -test)	FonF-FonFs: $t = 0.12, p = .90$ n.s. FonF-Control: $t = 0.15, p = .88$ n.s. FonFs-Control: $t = 0.02, p = .99$ n.s.		FonF-FonFs: $t = 0.34, p = .74$ n.s. FonF-Control: $t = 5.04, p < .01$ FonFs-Control: $t = 4.84, p < .01$		FonF-FonFs: $t = 0.47, p = .64$ n.s. FonF-Control: $t = 4.30, p < .01$ FonFs-Control: $t = 4.19, p < .01$		

Table 1. The mean scores, standard deviations and levels of statistical significance on the test for the FonF ( $n = 34$ ), FonFs ( $n = 36$ ) and control group ( $n = 35$ ).

While the positive effect of the treatment is perhaps not surprising and it is consistent with the outcomes of many recent studies of form-focused instruction, some of the findings reported above were somewhat unexpected and need to be commented upon. In the first place, it does come as a surprise that the FonF group did overall better than the FonFs group on a highly structured test although the students had never practiced the targeted feature in the kind of controlled exercises it contained. One explanation could obviously be that the improvement can be attributed to the intensive FonF treatment which had enabled the subjects to attend to the form in the input, process it and become capable of deploying it in a range of different contexts. Given the relatively short duration of the treatment, its focus on integration of form and meaning, the complexity of the third conditional and lack of communicative exposure to the feature outside the classroom, however, such an interpretation would be overly simplistic and naive. Rather, at least part of the gain in all likelihood resulted from the fact that, as the responses to the final questionnaire showed, 55% the subjects had practiced the conditional in their own time during the experiment

using a variety of grammar practice books. Moreover, 64% of the FonFs students admitted doing additional exercises involving the target feature as well, and even 15% of the control subjects reported doing so, which may have resulted from sheer curiosity or out-of school tuition and may explain the slight improvement on posttest 1. What should also be noted are the relatively high pretest scores in all the three groups, a result that clearly shows that some students must have been exposed the third conditional outside school and developed explicit knowledge of the structure. The fact that there were subjects in all the three groups who scored 30 points or more out of a total of 40 before the treatment and continued to perform in this range on the posttests could have affected the findings obtained and shows how careful we should be in making assumptions about our learners' command of structures we have not yet introduced. The final issue worth emphasizing is the extent of variation in the performance of the subjects in the three groups, as is visible in the high values of standard deviation, which testifies to the problems involved in teaching grammar in mixed-level classes. On a somewhat more optimistic note, it seems that the provision of form-focused instruction can contribute to some degree to diminishing such disparities since the SD levels in both experimental groups dropped visibly on posttest 1 (by 3.06 in FonF and 3.88 in FonFs) while their values remained relatively stable in the control group.

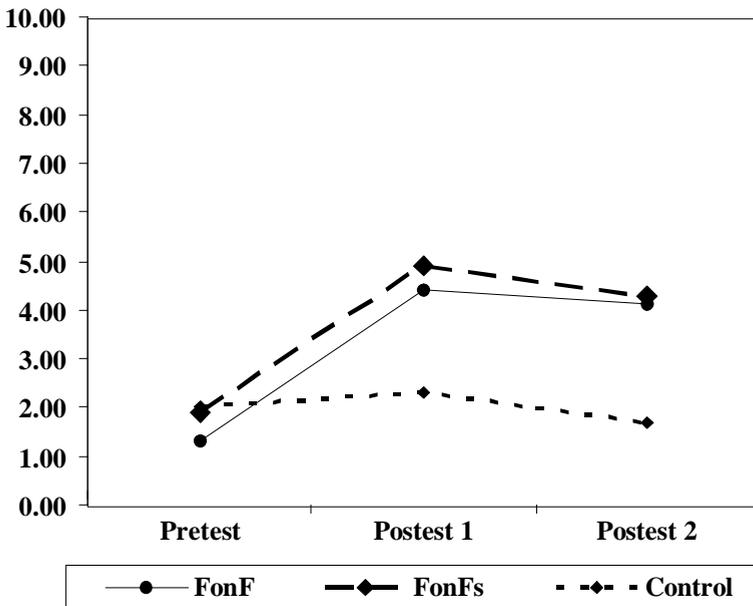


Figure 2. The mean numbers of accurate instances of the third conditional produced by the FonF, FonFs and control group subjects (n = 20 in all cases) in the dictogloss task.

Group	Pretest		Posttest 1		Posttest 2		Significance (two-tailed Wilcoxon test)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
FonF	1.30	1.19	4.40	1.80	4.10	1.81	Pre → Post 1: $W = 0, p < .01$ Post 1 → Post 2: $W = 29, p = .50$ n.s. Pre → Post 2: $W = 0, p < .01$
FonFs	1.90	1.3	4.90	1.76	4.30	1.79	Pre → Post 1: $W = 1.20, p < .01$ Post 1 → Post 2: $W = 26.5, p = .31$ n.s. Pre → Post 2: $W = 3.5, p = .01$
Control	2.00	1.90	2.30	1.85	1.70	1.68	Pre → Post 1: $W = 9.5, p = .58$ n.s. Post 1 → Post 2: $W = 22, p = .22$ n.s. Pre → Post 2: $W = 11, p = .44$
Significance (two-tailed Mann- Whitney test)	FonF-FonFs: $U = 63.5, p = .36$ n.s. FonF-Control: $U = 56.5, p = .68$ n.s. FonFs-Control: $U = 50.5, p = .97$ n.s.		FonF-FonFs: $U = 57.5, p = .63$ n.s. FonF-Control: $U = 5.04, p = .04$ FonFs-Control: $U = 16.5, p = .01$		FonF-FonFs: $U = 63, p = .85$ n.s. FonF-Control: $U = 17, p = .01$ FonFs-Control: $U = 15.5, p < .01$		

Table 2. The means, standard deviations and levels of statistical significance for third conditional sentences produced on the dictogloss task by the FonF, FonFs and control group (n = 20 in all cases).

The treatment also had a beneficial effect on the experimental subjects' ability to use the targeted feature in a somewhat more spontaneous manner, as evidenced in their performance on the dictogloss. As can be seen from the graphical representation of the results in Figure 2 and the data included in Table 2, the mean in the FonF group increased by 3.1 on posttest 1 in comparison with the pretest, with the gain being maintained almost in its entirety on posttest 2 and a highly statistically significant pretest-posttest 2 difference of 2.9. An almost identical pattern could be observed among the FonFs group students where the initial improvement stood at 3.0 points, the posttest 1-posttest 2 drop was slight and equaled only 0.6, and a highly statistically significant pretest-posttest 2 gain amounted to 2.4 points. By contrast, the mean in the control group increased by only 0.3 points on posttest 1 and on posttest 2 it was 0.3 lower than on the pretest, with none of the differences reaching statistical significance. Such findings speak once again to the effectiveness of form-focused instruction but, as was the case with the test, neither the FonF nor the FonFs approach proved to be superior. Given the emphasis placed on meaning and mes-

sage conveyance in the FonF group and the rather code-centered character of the intervention in the FonFs group, what came as a surprise is the fact that the former did not do considerably better on a task intended as a measure of implicit knowledge. At the same time, however, it should be remembered that, stimulating conscious reflection on TL use, a dictogloss is not a typical communicative activity and, thus, the interaction it generates may not constitute a fully accurate reflection of such knowledge. In fact, since the learners had ample time to plan their utterances, they could have drawn on their explicit representation to produce the targeted form, a possibility which is acknowledged by researchers (Yuan and Ellis 2003; DeKeyser and Juffs 2005) and which was confirmed by the halting and deliberate production of some students. If this is the case, also here at least part of the improvement can be attributed to the controlled practice in the FonFs group and the fact that the students in both groups had practiced the structure formally in their own time. On a somewhat different tack, we should keep in mind that part of the treatment in the FonFs group did provide opportunities for communicative use of the third conditional. This could have contributed to the development of implicit representation at least in the case of some of the subjects and resulted in more frequent use of the feature in the dictogloss task. Also worth noting is the fact that, as indicated by the standard deviation values, there was much less variation in the production of the feature than on the test and instruction did not seem to affect such disparities in any significant way.

Group	Pretest			Posttest 1			Posttest 2		
	FonF	FonFs	Control	FonF	FonFs	Control	FonF	FonFs	Control
LREs produced	13	14	14	51 <sup>1S</sup>	48 <sup>1S</sup>	23	44 <sup>1S</sup>	49 <sup>1S</sup>	15
Correct solutions	7	4	7	30 <sup>1S</sup>	33 <sup>1S</sup>	16	27 <sup>1S</sup>	29 <sup>1S</sup>	5 <sup>2</sup>

\* The number in the upper index indicates the presence of a statistically significant difference between successive tests with  $p < .05$ , with its level assessed by means of the two-tailed Wilcoxon test; 1 stands for the comparison with the pretest and 2 with posttest 1. The letters S in the upper index indicate the existence of a statistically significant difference between the FonF group and FonFs group, the FonF group and the control group, or the FonFs group and the control group, as assessed with the help of the two-tailed Mann-Whitney test.

Table 3. The numbers of LREs and correct solutions produced in the FonF, FonFs and control group ( $n = 20$  in all cases) on the dictogloss task.

When it comes to the occurrence of language related episodes in the interaction of the pairs on the dictogloss task, the findings largely mirror those for the test and free production of the third conditional. As illustrated in Table 3, although the students in the three groups were almost equally likely to discuss the use of the structure and correct their own or their peers' errors, there was a dramatic and statistically significant increase in the incidence of such cases in the FonF group and the FonFs group on posttest 1 (51 vs. 13 and 48 vs. 14, respectively), and a much smaller and insignificant one in the control group (14 vs. 23). In addition, while the tendency to engage in metatalk in the experimental groups remained high on posttest 2, with the

occurrence of such instances far exceeding the pretest numbers (by 31 in the FonF group and 35 in the FonFs group), a drop to the level nearly equaling that at the beginning at the experiment took place in the control group. An almost identical pattern could be observed for the incidence of correct solutions reached, as when the learners eventually managed to come up with the correct use of the third conditional in an LRE. While the number of such cases remained relatively stable in the control group throughout the experiment, it increased by 27 in the FonF group and 29 in the FonFs on posttest 1, and then it dropped by only 3 and 4, respectively, with the pretest-posttest 1 and pretest-posttest 2 differences reaching a statistically significant value. All of this shows that, regardless of its nature, the instructional treatment resulted in the subjects' greater awareness of the targeted structure, their propensity to test hypotheses about its form, meaning and use, and readiness to monitor their output. Although, due to the type of intervention, these phenomena could be expected to occur more frequently in the FonFs group, the findings are perhaps not surprising if we consider the FonF students' willingness to engage in formal practice of the targeted form outside school. It should also be noted that Polish was frequently used in the LREs produced and, on quite a few occasions, the students seemed to be relying on memorized chunks.

While the findings are unambiguous in demonstrating the beneficial effect of instruction and comparable effectiveness of the FonF and FonFs approaches in teaching third conditional forms, it is necessary to point to some weaknesses of the study and the ways in which it could be improved upon. In the first place, the intervention was intensive but short and there is no guarantee that its impact extended beyond the month after which posttest 2 was administered. Although difficult logistically, a treatment spanning a longer period of time, accompanied by interim measures of the subjects' command of the targeted feature and posttests administered a few months after the intervention, would surely offer valuable information not only about the durability of the improvement but also the developmental stages in the acquisition of the past unreal conditional. Another problem is connected with the choice of the task employed as a measure of implicit knowledge since performance on a dictogloss provides only sketchy and not always valid and reliable evidence in this respect. Difficult as it is to design focused communication tasks in which the use of the third conditional would be required, activities of this kind should be included in future research projects, and it might also be a good idea to experiment with timed grammatical judgment tests or elicited oral imitation tasks that have been shown to be good measures of implicit knowledge (cf. Ellis 2006; Erlam 2006). It is also unfortunate that the present study did not include an instrument that would gauge the effect of the intervention on the students' comprehension of the targeted feature, particularly in view of the fact that such processing is believed to be unconstrained by developmental sequences, the third conditional is apparently easier to understand than to produce, and instruction may affect comprehension and production of TL features in different ways (see Mystkowska-Wiertelak, this volume). Finally, when designing the test, more attention should have been given to the position of the 'if-clause', the requirement to produce the main or the subordinate clause, and the balance between regular and irregular

past participles since such variables may influence learners' performance (cf. Berent 1985; Chou 2000).

## 6. Conclusions and implications

Despite the limitations discussed above, the results of the study clearly demonstrate that both focus on form and focus on forms proved to be equally effective in helping the subjects gain greater control over the past counterfactual conditional in terms of explicit and, to a lesser degree, implicit knowledge as well as in enhancing their awareness of this complex feature. Such findings cast serious doubt on the proposals advocated by many leading applied linguists that the structural syllabus and the PPP model with their preselection and systematic coverage of grammatical items should be abandoned in favor of a task-based approach, where attention to the code is at all times integrated with meaning and it is motivated solely by learners' problems with comprehension and production. They show that gradual progression from rule presentation, through text-manipulation activities, to free production, which is the kind of instruction advocated by the adherents of Skill-Learning Theory (DeKeyser 1998; Johnson 2001) and often implemented in foreign language contexts, is effective, contributing to the ability not only to manipulate TL forms in controlled exercises but also to use them accurately in relatively spontaneous speech. It should be admitted of course that the focus on form approach also proved to be extremely beneficial, particularly if we take into account the complexity of the target structure and the type of testing instruments used. We should keep in mind, however, that the improvement could have been partly aided by the students' formally practicing the structure at home. Moreover, the intervention was planned in advance, and it is dubious whether incidental focus on form would have produced similar results. On the other hand, the focus on forms treatment accorded sufficient importance to the production phase of the PPP and supplied opportunities for communicative use of the feature, and it was extended over several lessons, something that perhaps does not happen very often in the classroom.

The main implication of such findings is that focus on form and focus on forms should be combined in classroom practice rather than continue to be viewed as mutually exclusive, which is line with the appeal made by Fotos (2005: 668) that "(...) it is time to take the position that a combination of grammar instruction and the use of communicative activities provide an optimum situation for effective L2 learning". A question that immediately arises at this point concerns the nature of such a combination since the adherents of focus on form would likely claim that they have been calling all along for integration of meaning and form. Taking into account the realities of foreign language contexts such as the one in Poland, it seems necessary to base language instruction, especially at beginner or intermediate levels, on a structural syllabus in which grammatical items are systematically introduced and practiced within the PPP framework. This is because, due to scant in- and out-of-class exposure, limiting grammar instruction to the problems experienced by learners is unlikely to lead to the acquisition of many structures, particularly if the intervention were to be incidental and fully embedded in communicative activities. Equally importantly, as the foregoing

discussion has illuminated, many students choose to familiarize themselves with relevant rules and formally practice the features taught in the belief this will help them gain greater control over them. It would surely be illogical and perhaps even deleterious to shy away from providing them with such opportunities in the classroom. Of course, this does not mean that focus on form cannot be applied in lessons which aim to enhance students' communicative skills, as when they discuss texts, express their opinions or work on communicative tasks. Additionally, a task-based syllabus could also be adopted in teaching advanced learners who have been acquainted with most grammatical structures (cf. Pawlak 2004, 2005, 2006a).

It should also be made clear that the recommendation that the focus on forms approach be adopted with lower levels should not be taken to mean that current teaching practice does not require modifications and that the use of FonF activities such as the ones employed in this study cannot enhance its effectiveness. For one thing, it is necessary to stop viewing grammar instruction in terms of single lessons and realize that the teaching of a particular feature must involve a sequence of classes, as was the case with the treatment applied in the experiment described above. Secondly, the free production phase of the PPP should be emphasized much more than is currently the case and this is definitely the stage at which activities characteristic of planned focus on form such as input flood, input enhancement, focused communication tasks or different types of corrective feedback can beneficially be drawn upon. Such activities are also instrumental during review classes which do not have to revolve around controlled exercises but, rather, help learners develop implicit knowledge of the structures taught, thus becoming an important step in the instructional sequence. Finally, students' attention should be occasionally directed at the structures introduced in unfocused communication tasks, where both preemptive and reactive focus on form would be instrumental in dealing with a range of language forms in response to learner need.

Even though such guidelines are sound given the specificity of the Polish context and the results of the current investigation, there is clearly a need for further studies comparing the value of focus on form and focus on forms approaches, including action research projects conducted by teachers in their own classrooms and local circumstances. In particular, the effectiveness of instruction targeting various grammatical structures should be explored, other combinations of FonF techniques should be investigated and longitudinal studies should be designed with a view to determining the value of incidental focus on form or perhaps even comparing the merits of the PPP with different variants of task-based instruction. Only by accumulating empirical evidence of this kind can we ultimately verify the recommendations offered by theorists and researchers and propose solutions that may enhance the quality of form-focused instruction in our schools. For now, however, we should accept that it does not make sense to abandon instructional practices that have been working for years and replace them with such whose value is yet to be conclusively demonstrated, which of course does not preclude the possibility of using innovative ideas to improve upon the old ways.

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APPENDIX 1

Version A of the discrete-point test

*Uzupełnij zdania 1-6 ich zakończeniami a-f. Czasowniki podane w nawiasach wstaw w odpowiedniej formie:*

1. If he had gone to that party yesterday .....
  2. I would have stayed at the seaside .....
  3. If Betty had told me about her problem last week .....
  4. Robert would not have broken his leg last Sunday .....
  5. Jake wouldn't have had an accident .....
  6. If they had gone to London last summer .....
- 
- a) they (see) \_\_\_\_\_ Buckingham Palace.
  - b) if he (not, climb) \_\_\_\_\_ that tree.
  - c) he (meet) \_\_\_\_\_ his sister.
  - d) if I (have) \_\_\_\_\_ enough money with me.
  - e) I (help) \_\_\_\_\_ her to solve it.
  - f) if he (drive) \_\_\_\_\_ more slowly on that day.

*Uzupełnij poniższe zdania. Wszystkie one odnoszą się do przeszłości:*

1. If Ted had phoned me yesterday .....
2. She would have passed the exam if .....
3. If Betty had not gone on that trip .....
4. My brother would have won that contest if .....
5. If they had done their homework yesterday .....
6. I wouldn't have waited for you if .....

*Skomentuj podane zdania rozpoczynając swój komentarz wyrazem 'if':*

1. He was late because he got up at ten o'clock. if .....
2. Frank didn't come because he was sick. If .....
3. Monica had to hurry and that's why she took a taxi. If .....
4. Betty shouted at Brian because she was angry with him. If .....
5. My brother went home early because his wife phoned. If .....
6. Everybody looked at her because she wore a beautiful dress. If .....
7. My parents bought a car and drove to Warsaw. If .....
8. I said something stupid and she started to cry. If .....

## APPENDIX 2

### A dictogloss task used on the pretest

A few days ago John went to the cinema. Now he knows that if he hadn't done it, so many terrible things wouldn't have happened to him. When he left home, a car almost hit him. If he had not jumped away he would have died. When he was in front of the cinema, he met Robert and they decided to have a cup of coffee at a small café. If they had not gone there, they would not have seen a young man who died of a heart attack. And if Robert had not had a mobile phone, they would not have called for help. When they left the café, it began to rain very hard and they got wet. If John had taken an umbrella, it would not have happened. The film he saw was terrible. If he had known about it, he would have gone to a different one. When he woke up the next day home he had a high temperature. He would not have caught a flu if he had stayed at home that day.



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*Ronald Sheen*

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE  
VALIDITY OF THE PRINCIPLES OF  
INCIDENTAL LEARNING AND  
DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCES

ABSTRACT

The history of classroom second and foreign language learning (SFLL) is characterised by theoretically-motivated innovations based on an assumed similarity between first and second language acquisition which have not lived up to expectations. Contemporary SLA advocacy, however, continues in this vein assuming that exposure to language in the classroom will result in incidental learning which, if allowed to continue, will result in learners passing through developmental sequences on the way to advanced acquisition. The currently-favoured option, the task-based syllabus, for example, is founded partly on these principles. Nevertheless, in spite of its having been practised for over a decade, there are no longitudinal classroom studies which support its underlying claims or demonstrate it to be the most effective teaching option. In fact, there is substantial evidence derived both from immersion, normal classroom and fossilisation studies which cast doubt on extended reliance on the fruits of incidental learning. One specific hypothesis concerning incidental learning and putative subsequent developmental sequences claims that the acquisition of interrogatives demonstrates its validity. The research study reported on herein, however, demonstrates that learners of ESL in strong CLT classrooms spend eight years at school showing no development from forms first acquired after their first year. The implications of these findings are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

A feature of the recent history of classroom second and foreign language learning (SFLL) is that of the influence of theory-driven ideas on proposals for teaching options. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a variety of innovations have emanated from these such as audiolingualism, comprehension-based teaching, immersion programs, strong communicative language teaching (SCLT – see Howatt 1984: 287-8, for the origin of this term), extensive reading and, latterly, the task-based syllabus with a *focus on form* as a means of improving grammatical competence (Long and Crookes

1992). Though these innovations have varied in form, they have shared the underlying assumption that SFLL is comparable in some degree to the then and now current perception of first language acquisition. With the exception of audiolingualism, this has resulted in the underlying assumption that students need primarily to be exposed to meaningful language to facilitate incidental learning (used henceforth as meaning without pedagogical guidance) and continuing acquisition (Lightbown 2000, 2002).

Though these ideas have captured the imagination of many applied linguists and teachers, their implementation has not met with the predicted success (see below). Nevertheless, one still finds theory-driven ideas monopolizing the applied linguistic advocacy of classroom SFLL teaching options (see, as examples, Long 1991; Long and Crookes 1992; Doughty and Williams 1998a; Lightbown 1998, 2000; Long 2000; Doughty 2001; Lightbown 2002).

It is the position of this paper that this applied linguistic process of advocacy has flourished largely because it has not been subjected to the necessary critical scrutiny before the implementation of new teaching options – at the stage when the discussion of new ideas is largely limited to applied linguistic circles. In fact, most published critical evaluations have been made post-implementation and have then, in some cases, contributed to the abandonment and/or modification of innovations (see, for example, Von Elek and Oskarsson 1973; Gregg 1984; Gathercole 1988; Long 1988; Swan 1988; Pennycook 1990; Bruton 2002; Swan 2005). An exception to this is Sheen (1993, 1994) which strongly criticized the advocacy of the doctrinaire task-based syllabus as advocated in Long and Crookes (1992) before it appeared in published teaching materials. However, the fact that the task-based syllabus has flourished and now become the most popular innovation of the last decade is possibly indicative of the fact that unless a critical stance is supported by mainstream applied linguists, it will have little to no effect.

The claim that the various innovations of the last sixty years have been unsuccessful may appear a harsh judgment on a field in which so many scholars and practitioners have devoted their efforts to seeking a means of improving SFLL. However, the claim is given credibility by research into the fate of most innovations in the field whether it be in education, in general, or SFLL, in particular. In fact, most of them have proven to be failures (Adams and Chen 1981; Brumfit 1981; Fullan 1982). In fact, Markee (1993: 231), given the high risk of failure, argues that "(...) innovations should be resisted rather than promoted because their adoption may be more harmful than beneficial". Valette (1991: 325), even argues, with supportive test scores, that the innovations of the previous twenty five years had resulted in the worsening of the proficiency standards of seniors graduating from college. There is, therefore, little reason to feel optimistic about the chances of success of approaches largely based on theoretical argument being currently advocated such as the doctrinaire task-based syllabus.

It is with this sobering evidence in mind that we now turn to two important features of the current theory of SLA which underlies much of contemporary applied linguistic advocacy. These two underlying principles are *incidental learning* and *developmental sequences*.

## 2. Incidental learning and developmental sequences

The assumed similarity between SFLL and first language acquisition is used to justify the assumption that exposure *alone* to understood language facilitates incidental learning and passage through developmental sequences on the way to improved acquisition. These two processes are thus assumed to be part of a *built-in syllabus* (Corder 1967) which results in learners' reaching various non-native-like stages on the way to achieving near-native like production (Ellis 1988).

These assumptions resulted in the many morpheme studies of the 1970's and early 1980's (see Ellis 1988, 1994, for a review) along with the efforts to submit them to scrutiny casting doubt on the validity of the findings (Hatch 1983). Furthermore, though the substantial research on developmental sequences (see Ellis 1994: 73-117, for a thorough review) produced intriguing findings in terms of a theory of SLA, it needs to be noted that most of these studies were short-term in nature and based more on case-study type research rather than on longitudinal studies of classroom learning. In fact, there is no longitudinal classroom research demonstrating incidental learning alone enabling whole groups of classroom learners to pass through developmental sequences on their way to accurate acquisition (Lightbown 1998).<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, applied linguists have continued to advocate some degree of non-interference in the learning process (Newmark 1966; Corder 1967; Felix 1981; Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982; Prabhu 1987; Lightbown 2000; Long 2000; Lightbown 2002). Such proposals have, however, not been supported by positive evidence derived from appropriate long-term classroom studies. Furthermore, they have not addressed the counter-evidence produced by studies on the Canadian French Immersion Programmes (Spilka 1976; Hammerly 1989) and extensive research on fossilization (Selinker 1984). However, it is significant that Swain, one of the architects of Canadian immersion programmes, takes such findings seriously enough to conclude: "The research related to the French proficiency of immersion students makes clear that an input-rich, communicatively oriented classroom does not provide all that is needed for the development of target-like proficiency" (1998: 65).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is worthy of note that the implementation of SCLT in Quebec in 1984 provided, at least to my knowledge, the only example of such a vast student population being subjected to an approach which officially prohibited the teaching of grammar. Unfortunately, though the Concordia team, led by Lightbown, has collected many recordings of the oral production of Quebec students during this period, it has produced no concrete evidence of the competency levels reached by those students. The only published evidence that I am aware of is in Sheen (1999, 2003, 2004 and 2005) and this, unfortunately, is limited in nature. It is, indeed, a tragedy that we lost such a golden opportunity to make detailed records of what students achieved during this period.

<sup>2</sup> She also adds, however: "It also makes clear that teaching grammar lessons out of context, as paradigms to be rehearsed and memorized, is also insufficient". This latter remark is something of a double red herring for it faithfully characterises none of the teaching of grammar in comparative studies such as (Von Elek and Oskarsson 1973; Palmer 1992; Kupferberg and Olshtain 1996; Sheen 1996; White 2001; Erlam 2003; Sheen 2003). Further, as the grammar is taught in communicative classrooms and applied in communicative contexts, the use of 'out of context' fails to accurately represent present-day explicit teaching of grammar. However, this is an issue beyond the scope of this article.

A specific example of the assumption of the validity of incidental learning leading to the passage through developmental sequences is Spada and Lightbown (2002: 125).<sup>3</sup> They take third-person 'wh'-questions and argue that learners initially produce forms entailing fronting with no auxiliary verb such as 'What the dog playing' and later pass on to a stage in which they produce correct forms. This is a strong claim for it assumes the natural acquisition of a feature of grammar which has proven to be extremely difficult for most learners (see below). It is perhaps for this reason that the two authors provide no supportive empirical evidence derived from actual classroom oral production resulting solely from incidental learning. They further omit to refer to comparative research they both carried out on the acquisition of third-person interrogatives (Spada and Lightbown 1993) which did not produce any evidence to support their claim.

### 3. Absence of supportive empirical evidence

Despite the lack of evidence supporting the principles of incidental learning and developmental sequences in terms of accurate acquisition, these two principles have proven to be both plausible and seductive to the field of applied linguistics possibly because they have been advocated by prominent applied linguists (Long 1991; Long and Crookes 1992; Lightbown 2000; Long 2000; Lightbown 2002, for example) and perhaps also because we would prefer learning to result from universal natural processes rather than by means of explicit grammar teaching. This possibly explains why advocacies based on the validity of these principles have captured the imagination of the profession but have not been subjected to the careful scrutiny to which all proposals for classroom reform should be put.

This said, it needs to be emphasised here that in both SCLT and immersion classrooms, for example, learners acquire substantial rudimentary vocabulary and the ability to express a variety of grammatical meanings albeit inaccurately (see, for example, respectively, Lightbown 1991 and Hammerly 1989). What is argued and demonstrated in this article is that should this rudimentary ability be left without 'pedagogical guidance', rather than developing into a more accurate ability, it will become a candidate for fossilisation.

Those wishing to challenge and legitimately reject this position, including reviewers of this article, can only do so by providing verifiable empirical evidence derived from classroom studies demonstrating that learners exposed *only* to understood

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<sup>3</sup> It needs to be made abundantly clear that though this article faithfully represents Lightbown's position on the two principles under scrutiny, it is not being suggested that she advocates a teaching approach based solely thereon. She readily admits that she has now changed her mind (Lightbown 2002) and accepts the need for some form-focused instruction. However, she still appears to believe that some grammatical features can be left to incidental learning in spite of the lack of supportive empirical evidence. Unfortunately, she has so far not specified which features can be left to the latter and which need form-focussed instruction. On the other hand, it is the position of this author that in the interests of efficacy and efficiency the learning of ALL grammatical features needs to include form-focused instruction should the curriculum require learners to produce language accurately.

language progress from the initial inaccurate syntactic forms they acquire. They will be hard put to do so. None of the published research of its two major advocates, Long and Lightbown, contains any such longitudinal evidence. On the other hand, Lightbown's published work does reveal some counter-evidence, albeit implicit in nature. Lightbown et al. (2002), a six-year longitudinal study on the limitations of a comprehension-based language programme, provides no evidence of either incidental learning resulting in accurate oral production or of learners' passing through developmental stages. More specifically and as already mentioned, Lightbown and Spada (1993), an empirical research study on the acquisition of interrogative forms thanks only to incidental learning, provides no evidence of learners progressing from their initially-acquired inaccurate third-person forms.

Further, in response to criticism of the lack of empirical evidence to support Lightbown (2000: 439) where she maintains that "Classroom research has provided additional support for the conclusion that some features are acquired incidentally - without intentional effort or pedagogical guidance", she (2002: 533) has usefully responded to this critique by clarifying her position, stating that in using 'acquire' she is referring to the various incorrect forms which characterise the path towards acquisition. In addition, as part of her clarification, Lightbown (2002: 533) suggests that the developmental process may be quite prolonged and that, therefore, teachers need to "exercise patience" in waiting for it to occur. Her response, however, is problematic for, once again, she provides no classroom-derived evidence demonstrating learners progressing from some initially inaccurate form. More specifically, it needs to be emphasised that there is nowhere in the literature empirical evidence derived from long term classroom studies demonstrating classes of students progressing from the initial inaccurate third person interrogative forms cited in Spada and Lightbown (2002) to more accurate forms should they be deprived of pedagogical guidance.

#### 4. Motivation for the research study

It is Long's and Lightbown's claims and the latter's clarification which motivated the research summarised in this article. More specifically, it was provoked by the direct advice given by Lightbown to teachers and this, because it was offered without supportive empirical evidence demonstrating learners passing through developmental sequences, no matter how slowly, on the way to accurate production. Moreover, as mentioned above, one of the rare comparative empirical studies specifically limited to the learning of interrogative forms, Spada and Lightbown (1993), produced no evidence to support their claims in terms of accurate or even near-accurate oral production resulting from incidental learning *alone* over either a short or prolonged period.

On the other hand, Sheen (2003) demonstrates that elementary students in a three-year course based on SCLT (i.e., depending wholly on incidental learning) had begun producing at the end of their first year 'wh'-interrogatives of the incorrect type exemplified by Spada and Lightbown (2002) – forms such as 'Where your father live?' and 'What your friends do?'. Further, it was demonstrated that by the end of their 6th grade elementary year, that is two years later, they were still producing the same forms, thus showing no sign of the developmental sequence described by these two authors.

Moreover, grammaticality judgments revealed that some of those same students (Sheen 2005) changed native-like forms for the incorrect forms they were used to producing.

This, however, does not necessarily invalidate Lightbown's advice to teachers as the students had only been producing these incorrect forms for two years. There is, however, published evidence which suggests that these incorrect forms may persist throughout the whole period of learning English both at secondary school and college. That evidence resulted from recorded oral interviews of graduating secondary school students and admission tests conducted at the University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières, Canada, from 1994 to 1999 (Sheen 1999). Those recordings demonstrated that no more than between 10% and 20% of high school graduates and university candidates schooled wholly in Quebec and without Anglophone parents were able to consistently produce correctly-formed third person 'wh'-interrogatives. The other 80% to 90% produced incorrect forms such as 'How long your wife live here?', 'What your friend did yesterday?' and 'What your friend doing?'. It needs to be noted that since 1984, Quebec schools have implemented a SCLT programme devoid of any systematic teaching of grammar (Guide Pédagogique 1986).

## 5. The research study

Indicative though this evidence is, there is clearly a need for data gathered in systematic fashion and regularly over an extended period of a number of years at school. Ideally, one would follow successive cohorts of learners through their school years and record their language development. Given that this would require eight years of research, an alternative is desirable. A cross-sectional study offers such an alternative and is valid providing that one can be confident that the successive cohorts of each year achieve similar standards. Inquiries to the five teachers involved in the application of SCLT in the Quebec school concerned confirmed this. It is, therefore, fair to assume that the oral production of third person 'wh'-interrogatives by fifth year graduating high school students reflects the future fifth-year production of the first years in this research providing that they continue to be taught by the same SCLT approach.

### 5.1. The cross-sectional study

Such a cross-sectional study was therefore carried out in 2002-2003. It entailed the following steps:

- (1) At the beginning of the school year in September 2002, one first year secondary class of 30 students underwent a recorded oral interview. These students had just arrived from elementary school where they had spent three years learning ESL in a SCLT classroom environment. The purpose of the interview was to verify the finding in Sheen (2003) that such students consistently produced third person 'wh'-interrogatives of the type 'What your father do?' and failed to produce the correct forms.
- (2) At the end of the school year 2002-2003, the best class of each of the five years of secondary school of approximately 30 students each were interviewed by the author. This included the class interviewed in Step 1, thus re-

sulting in 180 interviews of between five and ten minutes each. It should be noted that all the classes had followed the normal SCLT syllabus which prohibited systematic teaching of grammar.

Each oral interview, suitably adjusted for the different standards of each year had three parts:

- (1) A short warm-up conversation including remarks by the interviewer about his own situation in Quebec in order to provide context to the questions the students were to ask. The interviewer also asked third-person questions of the students similar to the ones they were to subsequently ask of the interviewer in order to verify that they fully understood correctly-formed questions.
- (2) Each student received a piece of paper on which were written instructions in French such as the following: *Ask questions in order to discover the following information about the person in front of you:*
  - (a) his name;
  - (b) where he lives;
  - (c) what his wife did last night;
  - (d) what his son is going to do this evening;
  - (e) what his son does on Saturdays;
  - (f) how long his wife has lived here;
  - (g) why his son likes football.
- (3) Each student was instructed to produce six third person 'wh'-interrogatives by using the following technique in the L1 of the learners. The author elicited an interrogative form by saying, for example, in French 'Ask me where my friends went yesterday'. As this was a new technique for students, the author explained to each class before their interviews what was expected of them. Following are examples of the items used in this part of the interview.
  - (a) Demandez-moi ce que fait mon fils le samedi (Ask me what my son does on Saturdays).
  - (b) Demandez-moi où habite mon ami (Ask me where my friend lives).
  - (c) Demandez-moi où est née ma fille (Ask me where my daughter was born).
  - (d) Demandez-moi pourquoi ma femme habite ici (Ask me why my wife lives here).
  - (e) Demandez-moi ce qu'ont fait mes amis hier (Ask me what my friends did yesterday).
  - (f) Demandez-moi ce que je fais en ce moment (Ask me what I am doing at the moment).

This technique was used in addition to the one in Step 2 as a means of comparing the results achieved with the two techniques.

## 5.2. Results

The purpose of this research was to investigate the oral production of interrogatives, in general, and third person interrogatives, in particular. Thus, though, in terms of vocabulary and content, there were marked differences between the performance of students in the lower years as compared to those of the later years, these will be neither specified nor discussed. The focus will be on any significant changes in the underlying grammar of the oral production of interrogatives from year to year. More specifically, the more specific focus was on for any signs of the development of appropriate auxiliary use.

In the warm-up conversation phase, what is worthy of note is the good comprehension of most of the questions asked, though questions of the type, 'How long have you lived here?' and 'Since when has your friend played football?' caused marked difficulty. What declarative remarks made tended to have neither tense nor aspectual verbal marking being largely of the infinite form such as 'I like tennis' and 'He live here' or 'I speak' in response to a question such as 'What are you doing at the moment?'. There was also a major tendency to use the simple future ('I will...') where the prospective future ('I'm going to...') was appropriate as in the response 'I will play tennis' to the question 'What are your plans for this evening?' Given the nature of the conversation at this phase, the students were not required to produce interrogatives.

- (1) *Step 1.* The first year students at the beginning of their first term at high school proved able to produce the first person 'wh'-interrogatives 'What's your name?' and 'Where do you live?'. Further, in the warm-up conversations, the students had no difficulty in understanding questions such as 'Do you like...?' or 'Do you play...?'. However, item (f) requiring 'What are you doing at the moment?' proved far more difficult, most students failing to use the progressive form. As to the items requiring third person interrogatives, they produced only incorrect forms such as 'Why your wife like golf?'. The two exceptions who did produce native-like forms proved to have at least one parent who spoke English in the home. Their results were, therefore, discounted as were all the responses provided by such students in other years.
- (2) *Step 2.* These results of the performance of each cohort of students at the end of each of the five years of high school reflected those in Step 1. Once again all students were able to produce correctly the first person interrogatives such as 'What's your name?' and 'Where do you live?'. The production of 'What are you doing at the moment?' again proved to be a far greater challenge as no students proved able to produce correct forms. In all cases, the major error entailed the failure to use the correct auxiliary or the omission of an auxiliary. Most students produced the form 'What do you do?' whilst others produced the forms 'What you doing?' or 'What's you doing?'.
- (3) *Step 3.* These results were very similar to those derived from the previous step. Most importantly, no students were able to produce third person 'wh'-interrogatives correctly.

Thus, in summary in terms of the focus of this research, the collected data showed no significant grammatical change in the production of third-person interrogatives from the beginning of the first year of high school to the end of the fifth

year. In other words, forms such as 'Where your father live?' without auxiliary verb, characterised such interrogatives for the whole five years.

### 5.3. Discussion

Before discussing the results, a point needs to be made concerning the use of statistics. It has become common in the field to subject quantitative research data to sophisticated statistical analysis and this, in order to demonstrate the statistical significance of the findings. This is necessary when the results are ambiguous in terms of what they reveal. This is not the case here. The purpose of this study was essentially to discover if the initial incidental learning of incorrectly-formed third person 'wh'-interrogatives developed into correct forms over the period of elementary and high school. As the results reported here reveal no such development in the overwhelming majority of cases, there is no need for statistical analysis, at least at this stage.

The ability of all students to produce comprehensible 'wh'-interrogatives clearly constitutes support for the reality of incidental learning of, at least, some limited nature. However, as the fact that their correct production is limited to 'What's your name?' and first person 'do' interrogatives such as 'Where do you live?', leads one to suggest that this may well be a matter simply of chunking. Whether it results in the acquisition of the native-like competence to produce 'wh'-interrogatives is another matter. The fact that only in rare cases were students able to produce correct third person 'wh'-interrogatives and continued to produce for five years forms similar to those they had first produced in elementary school, provides support for the argument that at least in the case of third person 'wh'-interrogatives, incidental learning does not result in learners' passing through developmental sequences or in producing correct native-like forms.

Furthermore, if one combines these findings with those of Sheen (2003) (dealing with the same type of students in Trois Rivieres, Quebec subjected to SCLT) it is fair to conclude that once students acquire an incorrect third-person interrogative which is comprehensible in 5<sup>th</sup> grade elementary, they continue to use it for the remaining seven years at school. If one then adds to this the findings in Sheen (1999) concerning similar students arriving at university after two further years of college after high school, it is fair to assume that the school years resulted in fossilisation of this incorrect third-person interrogative which the explicit teaching of grammar at college failed to correct.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, if the acquisition of interrogatives reflects the acquisitional process of grammatical features in general, the finding casts serious doubt on the validity of Lightbown's urging patience on teachers while they allow incidental learning and development sequences to bear fruit. Teachers should be made aware that the exercising of such patience may result in fossilisation and not in accurate or near accurate acquisition.

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<sup>4</sup> However, it should be noted that this applies only to students following the normal SCLT programme. Students benefiting from enriched programmes adopting an eclectic approach including explicit grammar instruction fared much better and were indeed signalled as being something of a 'success story' (Sheen 1999).

Further, as the two means of collecting data on interrogatives produced virtually identical results, it is plausible both to assume that those data fairly reflect the competence of the learners in terms of producing 'wh'-interrogatives and that the 'Demandez-moi... ' technique may provide both a convenient and efficient means of collecting oral data. This technique need not be limited to eliciting interrogative forms. It may be used to elicit declarative forms by giving instructions such as 'Dites-moi que votre père travaille en ce moment' (Tell me that your father is working at the moment).

Of course, neither of these two techniques allowed for completely spontaneous oral production, the best source of data truly reflecting a learner's underlying interim competence. However, as the two techniques used allowed some time for the students to think about their answers and that extra time did not permit them to produce correct third person 'wh'-interrogatives, it is fair to assume that that inability reflects their interim competence.

## 6. Implications for future research and the nature of classroom teaching

The fact that there is the general acceptance in the field of the validity of the principles of incidental learning and developmental sequences coupled with the contradictory findings reported above should provide food for thought. Should findings on the acquisition of other grammatical features reflect those discussed above and there is every reason to believe that they will and this, because, just as the literature contains no findings supporting the reality of incidental learning of correct 'wh'-interrogative forms, the literature contains no empirical support for the accurate acquisition of other grammatical features. As a consequence, applied linguists who invoke incidental learning and developmental sequences as support for the advocacy of instructional options need to provide substantial findings in support of what they propose. Further, they need to account for counter-evidence of the sort reported herein.

What is of greater importance is that it is inadvisable for applied linguists to offer advice to teachers, as does Lightbown, without compelling supportive empirical evidence. Of course, there is some ambiguity in Lightbown's position and this, because even in the clarification provided in Lightbown (2002), she fails to specify through which developmental sequences students pass and what they actually acquire thanks only to incidental learning. This is surely a prerequisite of any applied linguist who presumes to advise teachers on what they can expect learners to acquire naturally.

In particular, teachers need to be made aware that if they limit their options to the application of these two principles, it is likely that learners will fossilize initially-learned inaccurate forms rather than progressing to the acquisition of correct forms. This raises the issues of the aims of different curricula. Should the aims of students be the acquisition of survival skills and communicative ability with little concern for accurate production, it may well be that such aims justify a curriculum based largely on incidental learning brought about by communicative activities. On the other hand, in situations in which the ability to produce language accurately is afforded some priority, the curriculum will need to have some form of explicit pedagogical guidance (see Sheen 2002, 2004). This raises an issue beyond the scope of this chapter. It is, however, addressed at length in Sheen (2003 and 2005) and in Bruton (2002) and Swan (2005).

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OPEN CHOICE VERSUS  
THE IDIOM PRINCIPLE  
IN L2 LEXICAL USAGE

ABSTRACT

In this article we take the line that there is no hard and fast boundary between grammar and vocabulary. We cite a number of theorists who have advocated the proposition that there is continuity between these two domains, paying particular attention in this connection to the claim made by Sinclair (1991) and others that much of what looks like the production of structures on the basis of 'open choice' is in fact the deployment of prefabricated patterns, in a process where the selection of one particular expression primes the selection of a specific range of other expressions and morphosyntactic usages. We go on to report empirical findings of our own with respect to collocational patterning – findings which reveal differences between advanced learners of English and native speakers of English with regard to lexical choices they made in respect of a simple structure that is exactly paralleled in the former group's mother tongue. We interpret our results as a further demonstration of the interpenetration between grammatical and lexical issues. Finally, we argue that the continuity between lexis and grammar has pedagogical implications. We note the widespread acceptance of the notion that the L2 learner's task in target language grammar is not merely a formal one, and we suggest that the learner's task in this regard needs to be seen as not only encompassing functional and the semantic dimensions but as also extending into the collocational domain.

## 1. Introductory

Some eyebrows may be raised at the presence of a chapter on lexis in a volume on focus on form in language teaching, since form in this particular context has typically been associated with grammar. Any such eyebrow-raising derives from the fact that, to cite Lewis (1993: 89), "language teaching has developed an unhelpful dichotomy between the generalisable, pattern-generating quality of grammar and the apparently arbitrary nature of individual lexical items". We shall attempt to show that the dichotomy in question is ill-conceived, and that, to quote Lewis again (*ibid.*), "[t]he reality of

language data is more adequately represented by a Spectrum of Generalisability upon which grammatical or vocabulary items may be placed". We shall attempt to support this point on the basis of current thinking in linguistics and on the basis of empirical findings of our own with respect to collocational patterning. We shall then go on to argue that the continuity between lexis and grammar has important pedagogical implications.

## 2. Theoretical perspectives

Some schools of linguistics have always recognized the inseparability of grammatical and lexical issues, notably the so-called 'London School' of linguistics, founded by Firth and continuing in the work of Sinclair and Halliday. Sinclair we shall return to. As regards Halliday, he has always seen lexis and syntax as different parts of the same continuum, which he labels the *lexicogrammar*. In the Hallidayan perspective (see e.g. Halliday 1961, 1994) lexical distinctions are seen in terms of the different environments in which different lexical items are likely to occur, just as the distinction between, for instance, a count and mass noun is seen in terms of the different syntactic frames in which these categories can occur. Until relatively recently, however, this concept of lexis and grammar being continuous and interpenetrative was alien to many theoretical models, which makes it all the more remarkable that it has now gained almost universal acceptance (cf. Singleton 2000, Chapter 2).

Sinclair, for his part, addresses the lexis-syntax issue by focusing on what Chomsky calls the 'creative' dimension of syntax, which enables us to "understand an indefinite number of expressions that are new to one's experience (...) and (...) to produce such expressions" (Chomsky 1972: 100). Sinclair suggests that while it is undoubtedly true that we can and do use language innovatively and open-endedly in the way Chomsky claims, our use of language is far from exclusively 'creative' in this sense. He refers (1991: 109) to the Chomskyan notion of creativity under the heading of the *open-choice principle* – "a way of seeing language text as the result of a very large number of complex choices" on which "the only restraint is grammaticalness" so that "[a]t each slot, virtually any word can occur". He contrasts this perspective with that of the *idiom principle*, which states that "a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments" (1991: 110), and that what we are doing most of the time – in order to cope with the demands made on us by the extreme rapidity of speech – is drawing on such knowledge of semi-preconstructed phrases, varying lexical content within the chosen patterns to a fairly limited extent.

A similar distinction is made by Skehan (1998) between two modes of processing available to language users. The first mode, in this account, operates on the level of grammatical rules, which make it possible to generate novel utterances by putting individual words together; for example when meanings have to be expressed with precision or creativity. The second mode, on the other hand, is seen as based on memorized multi-word items, which can be quickly retrieved, making it possible for the speaker to communicate fluently under normal time constraints. According to

Skehan, these two modes are used interchangeably in language production, native speakers of a language flexibly combining them according to the demands of the situation.

Wray (2002a, 2002b) follows Sinclair in suggesting that “formulaic processing is the default,” and that “construction out of, and reduction into, smaller units by rule occurs only as necessary” (2002b: 119). She offers this as an explanation for the existence of irregularity in language:

(...) if we only create and understand utterances by applying rules to words and morphemes, it is difficult to see why irregularity should be tolerated, let alone why an item or construction should progress from regular, to marked, to antiquated, to a fossilized historical relic (Wray 2002b: 118).

The fore-runner of such ideas was Pawley and Syder's (1983) claim that language users have access to both individual lexical items and to entire memorized chunks, which they saw as the explanation for ‘two puzzles for linguistic theory’. The first of these is “the ability of the native speaker routinely to convey his meaning by an expression that is not only grammatical but also native-like”, the puzzle being “how he selects a sentence that is natural and idiomatic from among the range of grammatically correct paraphrases, many of which are non-native-like or highly marked usages” (1983: 191). The second puzzle relates to fluency, the fact “that human capacities for encoding novel speech in advance or while speaking appear to be severely limited, yet speakers commonly produce fluent multi-clause utterances which exceed these limits” (1983: 191). Pawley and Syder argue that native-like selection and fluency are enabled by the fact that “fluent and idiomatic control of a language rests to a considerable extent on knowledge of a body of ‘sentence stems’ which are ‘institutionalized’ or ‘lexicalized’” (1983: 191). Chomskyan ‘creativity’ is not excluded by this view; the implication is rather that native speakers “do *not* exercise the creative potential of syntactic rules to anything like their full extent, and that, indeed, if they did so they would not be accepted as exhibiting native-like control of the language” (1983: 193).

For Pawley and Syder, *native-like selection* is an element of communicative competence. Many of the examples they give refer to the kind of language choices which one would normally call ‘choosing the right expression for the right situation’. For example, it is more usual to say ‘I’m so glad to see you’ than ‘to see you gladdens me so’. There are of course varying degrees of unnaturalness of particular expressions, and it is perfectly possible for a speaker to use a less natural expression on purpose. Nevertheless, it is clear that part of the native speaker’s command of language is knowing which usages are more typical and which are marked, or unusual. Pawley and Syder argue persuasively that native-like selection is not a matter which can be explained in purely grammatical terms (using grammatical in its traditional sense). On the other hand, there is clearly a patterning surrounding lexical choice, such that to select one particular expression primes the selection of a specific range of other expressions and morphosyntactic usages. Thus it transpires (see Sinclair 1991, Chapter 4) that there is a strong tendency for particular words or particular senses of words to be associated with particular syntactic structures. It is precisely this kind of patterning which underlies the notion of a lexicogrammatical continuum.

### 3. The present study

If it is the case that native speaker processing is to a very large extent based on the *idiom principle*, what of non-native users of a given language? A plausible assumption might be that such language users would tend to operate more according to the *open-choice principle*. If this assumption were true, it would mean that they would be more likely to use individual words as the 'building bricks' of language rather than to rely on ready-made combinations. In the case of collocations, this tendency could be manifested in the use of semantically appropriate, but not necessarily 'typical' word combinations.

In the investigation reported here, we examined the combinatory preferences in English of native speakers and advanced L2 learners of that language in order to gauge whether there were differences in the patterns exhibited by the respective groups which might shed light on the above assumption. We focused on one particular type of combination, namely adjective phrases in which the adjective is preceded by an intensifier, such as 'very good'. This appears to be a completely straightforward syntactic structure of a kind that exists in many European languages (Polish 'bardzo dobry', German 'sehr gut', French 'très bon', etc). However, the basic grammatical pattern is complicated by the fact that some combinations of intensifiers and adjectives collocate more typically than others.

It has to be noted that typicality is not an unproblematic concept in this context. It is generally agreed that some word combinations are more 'typical' than others, such word combinations being labeled *collocations*. However, collocations, like other kinds of word combinations, are notoriously difficult to classify, and a precise delimitation of subcategories is practically impossible (see Nesselhauf 2003 for a discussion) though various attempts have been made in this direction (see e.g. Howarth 1996, 1998; Lorenz 1999; Nesselhauf 2003).

In this study, we investigated our subjects' preferences for word combinations with respect to two variables:

- (1) how frequent a particular collocation is – since the notion of 'typicality' obviously involves frequency of occurrence;
- (2) how specific or general the intensifying collocate is in its collocational range.

There is, of course, an interaction between 1 and 2. Thus, among intensifier + adjective combinations, combinations with 'very' ('very kind', 'very important') are highly frequent, because 'very' is an intensifier with an unrestricted collocational range, that is, it can intensify any adjective. Other intensifiers have a much narrower range; for example 'deeply' collocates readily with 'unhappy', 'religious' and 'impressed' but rather less readily with 'wet', 'tasty' or 'voluminous'. It is worth mentioning in passing that contextual specificity is widely recognized to be a difficulty factor in lexical acquisition (see e.g. Blum and Levenston 1978; Laufer 1997). Word combinations range along a scale from rarer to more frequent, and, similarly, the specific-general dimension is also a continuum. However, our approach here was to focus on the extreme ends of the continua in question and to treat the distinctions in a quasi-dichotomous manner.

### 3.1. Methodology

In arriving at a list of rare and frequent combinations we took three sources into consideration:

- (1) *The Oxford Collocations Dictionary (OCD)* (Deuter et al. 2002) – almost all combinations we classified as FREQUENT appear in the dictionary; while none of the combinations classified as RARE appear in the dictionary.
- (2) *The Internet* – for a given adjective, the FREQUENT combinations occur *very markedly* more often than the RARE ones (difference of several orders of magnitude: for example, if the frequent combinations appear several million times, the rare ones occur only several thousand times).
- (3) *The British National Corpus (BNC)* – FREQUENT combinations appear in the corpus, whereas RARE ones either do not appear at all (in most cases) or appear only once.

With reference to the GENERAL/SPECIFIC distinction, we based this on a consultation of various dictionaries, which tend to characterize our GENERAL intensifiers as 'used to give emphasis to an adjective', while providing more specific meanings for our SPECIFIC intensifiers. By way of example, here are the entries from the Collins COBUILD dictionary for a general intensifier, 'extremely':

extremely

You use extremely in front of adjectives and adverbs to emphasize that the specified quality is present to a very great degree.

*My mobile phone is extremely useful.*

*These headaches are extremely common.*

*Three of them are working extremely well.*

ADV: ADV adj/adv emphasis = exceedingly, very

The same dictionary treats 'excruciatingly' in the following way. Note that it has no separate entry but is listed under the adjective entry (very typical of the intensifiers in our 'specific' group):

excruciating

- (1) If you describe something as excruciating, you are emphasizing that it is extremely painful, either physically or emotionally.

*I was in excruciating pain and one leg wouldn't move.*

*Her search for love has often caused her excruciating misery and loneliness.*

ADJ-GRADED emphasis

= unbearable

excruciatingly

*He found the transition to boarding school excruciatingly painful.*

*The ball hit him excruciatingly in the most sensitive part of his anatomy.*

ADV-GRADED: usu ADV adj, also ADV after v

- (2) If you describe something as excruciating, you mean that it is very unpleasant to experience, for example because it is very boring or embarrassing.

*Meanwhile, the boredom is excruciating.*

*There was a moment of excruciating silence.*

ADJ-GRADED

excruciatingly

*The dialogue is excruciatingly embarrassing.*

*... the one where the children's chorus goes on excruciatingly about 'Grocer Jack'.*

ADV-GRADED: usu ADV adj, also ADV with v

Of course, we are fully aware that this distinction is by no means clear-cut. We are also conscious of the additional complication deriving from the fact that some intensifiers, e.g. 'terribly', start out as having a specific meaning which they gradually lose, in the process of acquiring a general intensifying function.

We selected altogether 120 word combinations of the type intensifier + adjective. These consist of 15 different adjectives, each intensified by eight different adverbs. Out of each set of eight intensifiers, four occur frequently with the given adjective, and four occur relatively seldom. Also, four of the intensifiers have a narrower collocational range than the other four. This means that the eight combinations with each adjective fall into four categories:

FREQUENT-GENERAL,  
 FREQUENT-SPECIFIC,  
 RARE-GENERAL,  
 RARE-SPECIFIC.

All the word combinations used in this study are listed in Table 1. The criteria used for classification (the actual frequencies of occurrence on the Internet, in the BNC and an indication as to whether the combination is listed in the OCD) are given in Appendix 2.

	FREQUENT GENERAL	FREQUENT SPECIFIC	RARE GENERAL	RARE SPECIFIC
CRITICAL	highly extremely	sharply harshly	immensely greatly	acutely profusely
INACCURATE	highly extremely	wildly grossly	utterly greatly	glaringly profoundly
RELIGIOUS	deeply highly	devoutly truly	greatly immensely	fervently incredibly
BORING	extremely terribly	incredibly dead	enormously greatly	insufferably monstrously
COLD	extremely terribly	freezing bitterly	immensely greatly	hellishly insufferably
IMPORTANT	particularly extremely	vitaly crucially	awfully greatly	immeasurably formidably
DISAPPOINTED	extremely deeply	bitterly sorely	highly largely	heavily insanely
OFFENSIVE	deeply highly	grossly downright	greatly heavily	severely bitterly
TIRED	extremely terribly	dead desperately	greatly hugely	massively monstrously

TALENTED	extremely highly	exceptionally extraordinarily	awfully terribly	profusely hellishly
PROTECTIVE	highly extremely	fiercely strongly	greatly immensely	exceptionally wildly
POPULAR	extremely highly	hugely wildly	greatly deeply	strikingly glaringly
OBVIOUS	very extremely	blatantly glaringly	highly greatly	strikingly genuinely
EXAGGERATED	greatly highly	grossly wildly	enormously immensely	intensely gravely
COMPETITIVE	highly extremely	fiercely intensely	enormously immensely	horribly wildly

Table 1. The 120 intensifier + adjective combinations used in the study.

The investigation was carried out by means of a test which elicited the subjects' acceptability and saliency judgments concerning the word combinations listed above. Each of the 15 adjectives was presented in a sentence, with a blank space preceding the adjective, and the subjects were given a range of eight intensifiers to choose from, e.g.

The report was \_\_\_\_\_ critical of the railway's poor safety record.  
*acutely extremely greatly harshly highly immensely profusely sharply*

The entire test is presented in Appendix 1.

### 3.2. Subjects

The tests were administered to both advanced learners of English and to native speakers of English. The subjects in both groups had a comparable educational background – they were all students of languages/linguistics at the university level. The learner group consisted of 50 students of English at the English Department of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, while the native group consisted of 50 students at the School of Linguistic Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin. The subjects were also roughly comparable with respect to age (most of them in their early twenties). The level of proficiency in English of the learner group can be described as comparable with the level required to pass the Cambridge Advanced English examination, or higher. While the number of years of studying English and the specific educational experience in this respect could be expected to vary among the subjects, the group was relatively homogenous with respect to their current level of advancement. All subjects in the learner group could be classified as learners of English as a foreign (rather than second) language, in that their experience of learning English had been limited to mostly educational settings, and none of them came from bilingual families or had extensive experience of functioning in an English language environment. Therefore, their L2 acquisition could not be termed naturalistic.

### 3.3. Procedure

The procedure of administering the tests was the same for all the subjects. The tests were completed by the participants in a classroom setting. The time limit was 5 minutes.

### 3.4. Results

The number of subjects who chose a particular intensifier in a given test sentence is given in columns 6 and 7 in the table in Appendix 2. Table 2 presents a summary of the results. For each test item, the number of intensifiers chosen from each of the four categories is indicated.

test item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	total	percent
<b>NATIVES</b>																	
frequent general	4 2		2 1	1 5		4 5	1 1	2 2	3 1		4 5	1 4	1 1	1 5	1 0	205	27.33%
frequent specific	6	3 1	2 7	1 9	4 5	4 2	3 7	2 7	1 9	4 4	3 8	3 6	4 7	2 6	2 5	469	62.53%
rare general	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	6	2	18	2.40%
rare specific	1	1 2		1 6	0	2	1	1	0	1	4	0	2	3	3	58	7.73%
TOTAL																750	100.00%
<b>LEARNERS</b>																	
frequent general	4 0	1 6	3 8	3 3	1 5	2 6	1 2	3 0	3 3		1 8	3 2		1 8		333	44.40%
frequent specific	8	1 1			3 0	1 8	3 2	1 0	1 5	4 5	1 8	1 1	1 6	1 1	2 3	261	34.80%
rare general	1	1 2	0	1	0	1	2	4	0	0	5	2	1	4	2	45	6.00%
rare specific	1	1 1	5	0	5	5	4	6	2	1	9	5	5	6	6	111	14.80%
TOTAL																750	100.00%

Table 2. A summary of the results.

The groups differed markedly as far as the distribution of the answers is concerned. In the native speaker group, the majority of the answers fell into the 'frequent-specific' category (over 62%). In the learner group, this figure was much lower (over 34%). For the learners, the 'frequent-general' category proved the most popular (over 44%), while for the natives this category contained only over 27% of the answers. The learners selected 'rare' combinations more often, both general and specific.

	natives	learners
frequent	89.87%	79.20%
rare	10.13%	20.80%
general	29.73%	50.40%
specific	70.27%	49.60%

Table 3. The results with respect to the frequent/rare and the general/specific distinction.

Table 3 lists the preferences of the subjects with respect to the frequent/rare and the general/specific dichotomies. It can be seen that the natives selected frequent collocations more willingly than the learners, but the difference was not very large – almost 90% as compared to almost 80%. A much more striking difference is visible in the case of the general/specific distinction. The learners had no marked preference – the answers were split almost 50/50 – while the natives displayed a preference for intensifiers which are specific (over 70% of answers) over ones which are general (around 30%).

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

What the above results reveal is that these advanced learners of English differed noticeably from native speakers of English with regard to lexical choices they made in respect of an extremely straightforward structure which is exactly paralleled in their mother tongue, Polish. The differences are principally discernible in terms of group tendencies and thus at the individual level would not be especially salient. This corresponds to Ringbom's (1993) suggestion in his study of near-nativeness that an important characteristic of very advanced learners' L2 production is that deviations from native-speaker norms may be very subtle, and do not often take the form of explicit errors. Advanced L2 users may produce phrases and expressions which, considered individually, are correct, in the sense that they do not violate the L2 rules of morphology, syntax, semantics, etc. However, the cumulative effect of the use of certain phrases rather than others may give the impression of non-nativeness. These 'hidden' distributional differences can be observed in corpus analyses of word combinations in learner texts, as shown e.g. in DeCock et al. (1998), Lorenz (1999), and Granger (1998). For example, there is nothing wrong with the phrase 'very interesting'; however, if a learner uses *very* as the only adjectival and adverbial intensifier, the overall effect in a piece of writing will be to attract attention as a case of overuse of 'very' and – at the same time – underuse of other potential intensifiers.

However, the above remarks do not rule out the notion that differences in collocational usage may distinguish between native speakers and learners at the level of the individual language user and the individual lexical combination. To refer to our own data again, some word combinations in our test were not selected by ANY of the 50 native speakers. While many of these were not selected by any of our learners either, in some cases (42 out of 750 answers – 5.6%) the learners did choose such combinations. In certain of these instances the resulting combinations – e.g. 'insanely dis-

appointed', 'insufferably cold', 'monstrously tired', 'intensely exaggerated' – would certainly strike the native speaker as unusual.

To turn now to the question of pedagogical implications, it has long been a commonplace that the L2 learner's task in acquiring elements of target language grammar is not merely a formal one. Thus, mastery of the English definite article is not simply a matter of memorizing 'the'! What we are arguing here is that the learner's task goes beyond the functional and the semantic also. 'Intensely exaggerated' makes perfect sense, but it falls outside the usual spectrum of combinations involving either of these words. If the goal of L2 teaching is to facilitate the acquisition of a competence which allows communication in the target language to proceed in as natural and 'glitch-free' manner as possible, then, clearly, collocational norms need to be taken into account.

It is not that L2 learners need to be exactly native-like or that they should communicate in their L2 only in clichés, but they do, as far as possible, need to know what kinds of collocational clothing on particular structures are likely to cause a native speaker interlocutor to be involved in extra processing effort. In the data we have reported – from advanced learners – the issue is not a major one. Potentially, however, the attachment of lexis to structure on an open choice basis without regard to collocational restrictions could easily lead to various kinds of double-take or even communicative breakdown. Accordingly, our summative conclusion is that the teaching effort should furnish input and raise consciousness not just with respect to form, not just with respect to function and meaning, but also with respect to lexical combinability. The idiom principle needs to be put into practice!

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## APPENDIX 1

### The test used in the study

Choose the word that best completes each sentence:

1. The report was ..... critical of the railway's poor safety record.  
*acutely extremely greatly harshly highly immensely profusely sharply*
2. Unfortunately, the article gives a ..... inaccurate account of events.  
*extremely glaringly greatly grossly highly profoundly utterly wildly*
3. His poetry reflects the fact that he was a ..... religious person.  
*deeply devoutly fervently greatly highly immensely incredibly truly*
4. Good thing you didn't make it to the lecture - it was ..... boring.  
*dead enormously extremely greatly incredibly insufferably monstrously terribly*
5. I didn't fancy going outside – it was ..... cold.  
*bitterly extremely freezing greatly hellishly immensely insufferably terribly*
6. The work of the intelligence services was ..... important to victory in the war.  
*awfully crucially extremely formidably greatly immeasurably particularly vitally*
7. I was ..... disappointed when I didn't get into university.

<i>bitterly</i>	<i>deeply</i>	<i>extremely</i>	<i>heavily</i>	<i>highly</i>	<i>insanely</i>	<i>largely</i>	<i>sorely</i>
8. I can't stand his sexist remarks about women. I find them ..... offensive.							
<i>bitterly</i>	<i>deeply</i>	<i>downright</i>	<i>greatly</i>	<i>grossly</i>	<i>heavily</i>	<i>highly</i>	<i>severely</i>
9. I suddenly felt ..... tired. All I wanted was to get some sleep.							
<i>dead</i>	<i>desperately</i>	<i>extremely</i>	<i>greatly</i>	<i>hugely</i>	<i>massively</i>	<i>monstrously</i>	<i>terribly</i>
10. He is a(n) ..... talented young musician.							
<i>awfully</i>	<i>exceptionally</i>	<i>extraordinarily</i>	<i>extremely</i>	<i>hellishly</i>	<i>highly</i>	<i>profusely</i>	<i>terribly</i>
11. The lionesses are ..... protective of their young.							
<i>exceptionally</i>	<i>extremely</i>	<i>fiercely</i>	<i>greatly</i>	<i>highly</i>	<i>immensely</i>	<i>strongly</i>	<i>wildly</i>
12. This actor is ..... popular in Poland at the moment.							
<i>deeply</i>	<i>extremely</i>	<i>glaringly</i>	<i>greatly</i>	<i>highly</i>	<i>hugely</i>	<i>strikingly</i>	<i>wildly</i>
13. It soon became ..... obvious that they had no intention of helping us.							
<i>blatantly</i>	<i>extremely</i>	<i>genuinely</i>	<i>glaringly</i>	<i>greatly</i>	<i>highly</i>	<i>strikingly</i>	<i>very</i>
14. In my opinion, the historical significance of these events has been ..... exaggerated.							
<i>enormously</i>	<i>gravely</i>	<i>greatly</i>	<i>grossly</i>	<i>highly</i>	<i>immensely</i>	<i>intensely</i>	<i>wildly</i>
15. I'm sick and tired of working for a company where everyone's so ..... competitive.							
<i>enormously</i>	<i>extremely</i>	<i>fiercely</i>	<i>highly</i>	<i>horribly</i>	<i>immensely</i>	<i>intensely</i>	<i>wildly</i>

## APPENDIX 2

*This table gives – for all the word combinations used in the test – the number of occurrences of a particular combination in the BNC (column 3), on the Internet (column 4) and an indication of whether a given combination is listed in the OCD (column 5). Also, it gives the number of native speakers (column 6) and learners (column 7) who selected a particular combination.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		BNC	Internet	OCD	natives total: 50	learners total: 50
test item	1					
Headword	critical					
frequent general 1	highly	115	1010000	OCD	33	31
frequent general 2	extremely	18	618000	OCD	9	9
frequent specific 1	sharply	12	218000	OCD	2	2
frequent specific 2	harshly	5	110000	OCD	4	6
rare general 1	immensely	2	1260		1	1
rare general 2	greatly	0	698		0	0
rare specific 1	acutely	1	711		1	1
rare specific 2	profusely	0	19		0	0
test item	2					
Headword	inaccurate					
frequent general 1	highly	1	188000	OCD	4	12
frequent general 2	extremely	1	49600	OCD	1	4
frequent specific 1	wildly	5	192000	OCD	8	3

frequent specific 2	grossly	3	169000	OCD	23	8
rare general 1	utterly	0	839		1	8
rare general 2	greatly	0	714		1	4
rare specific 1	glaringly	0	2010		5	8
rare specific 2	profoundly	0	1280		7	3
test item	3					
Headword	religious					
frequent general 1	deeply	23	684000	OCD	20	36
frequent general 2	highly	2	120000	OCD	1	2
frequent specific 1	devoutly	2	123000	OCD	24	4
frequent specific 2	truly	1	108000		3	3
rare general 1	greatly	0	584		0	0
rare general 2	immensely	0	327		0	0
rare specific 1	fervently	0	21500		2	3
rare specific 2	incredibly	0	2900		0	2
test item	4					
Headword	boring					
frequent general 1	extremely	7	264000	OCD	2	7
frequent general 2	terribly	5	93600	OCD	13	26
frequent specific 1	incredibly	5	271000	OCD	14	2
frequent specific 2	dead	14	59500	OCD	5	4
rare general 1	enormously	0	1090		0	1
rare general 2	greatly	0	538		0	0
rare specific 1	insufferably	1	929		16	10
rare specific 2	monstrously	0	249		0	0
test item	5					
Headword	cold					
frequent general 1	extremely	20	900000	OCD	0	5
frequent general 2	terribly	6	64400	OCD	4	10
frequent specific 1	freezing	75	1100000	OCD	17	29
frequent specific 2	bitterly	102	576000	OCD	28	1
rare general 1	immensely	0	1230		1	0
rare general 2	greatly	0	341		0	0
rare specific 1	hellishly	0	955		0	2
rare specific 2	insufferably	0	403		0	3
test item	6					
Headword	important					
frequent general 1	particularly	575	3620000	OCD	4	9
frequent general 2	extremely	279	2020000	OCD	1	17
frequent specific 1	vitaly	191	1230000	OCD	18	8
frequent specific 2	crucially	68	795000	OCD	24	10
rare general 1	awfully	1	31800		0	0
rare general 2	greatly	2	26500		1	1
rare specific 1	immeasurably	0	12300		2	5
rare specific 2	formidably	0	53		0	0
test item	7					
Headword	disappointed					
frequent general 1	extremely	13	808000	OCD	2	3

## Open choice versus the idiom principle in L2 lexical usage

frequent general 2	deeply	20	474000	OCD	9	9
frequent specific 1	bitterly	62	323000	OCD	27	32
frequent specific 2	sorely	4	460000	OCD	10	0
rare general 1	highly	0	115000		1	1
rare general 2	largely	0	17400		0	1
rare specific 1	heavily	0	830		1	3
rare specific 2	insanely	0	774		0	1
test item	8					
Headword	offensive					
frequent general 1	deeply	22	190000	OCD	10	10
frequent general 2	highly	6	286000	OCD	12	20
frequent specific 1	grossly	9	68900	OCD	7	4
frequent specific 2	downright	3	60300	OCD	20	6
rare general 1	greatly	0	1930		0	0
rare general 2	heavily	0	1320		0	4
rare specific 1	severely	0	971		1	4
rare specific 2	bitterly	0	211		0	2
test item	9					
Headword	tired					
frequent general 1	extremely	11	305000	OCD	19	21
frequent general 2	terribly	8	33300	OCD	12	12
frequent specific 1	dead	11	470000	OCD	3	13
frequent specific 2	desperately	10	15400	OCD	16	2
rare general 1	greatly	0	1490		0	0
rare general 2	hugely	0	447		0	0
rare specific 1	massively	0	1880		0	0
rare specific 2	monstrously	0	658		0	2
test item	10					
Headword	talented					
frequent general 1	extremely	5	825000	OCD	2	3
frequent general 2	highly	16	742000	OCD	3	1
frequent specific 1	exceptionally	9	354000	OCD	38	33
frequent specific 2	extraordinarily	3	114000	OCD	6	12
rare general 1	awfully	0	3200		0	0
rare general 2	terribly	0	810		0	0
rare specific 1	profusely	0	344		1	0
rare specific 2	hellishly	0	85		0	1
test item	11					
Headword	protective					
frequent general 1	highly	4	174000	OCD	0	9
frequent general 2	extremely	0	70300		4	9
frequent specific 1	fiercely	9	135000	OCD	37	15
frequent specific 2	strongly	1	22800		1	3
rare general 1	greatly	0	653		1	2
rare general 2	immensely	1	435		3	3
rare specific 1	exceptionally	0	675		2	5
rare specific 2	wildly	0	341		2	4
test item	12					

<b>Headword</b>	<b>popular</b>					
frequent general 1	extremely	72	1230000	OCD	9	27
frequent general 2	highly	44	1070000	OCD	5	5
frequent specific 1	hugely	19	1130000		31	3
frequent specific 2	wildly	7	1180000		5	8
rare general 1	greatly	0	14800		0	2
rare general 2	deeply	0	2000		0	0
rare specific 1	strikingly	0	298		0	4
rare specific 2	glaringly	0	10		0	1
test item	13					
<b>Headword</b>	<b>obvious</b>					
frequent general 1	very	119	1170000	OCD	1	8
frequent general 2	extremely	4	91000	OCD	0	0
frequent specific 1	blatantly	13	448000	OCD	33	13
frequent specific 2	glaringly	18	337000	OCD	14	3
rare general 1	highly	0	9470		0	1
rare general 2	greatly	0	303		0	0
rare specific 1	strikingly	1	25400		2	22
rare specific 2	genuinely	0	178		0	3
test item	14					
<b>Headword</b>	<b>exaggerated</b>					
frequent general 1	greatly	36	976000	OCD	14	12
frequent general 2	highly	6	130000		1	7
frequent specific 1	grossly	14	223000	OCD	10	8
frequent specific 2	wildly	10	95300	OCD	16	3
rare general 1	enormously	1	9600		2	11
rare general 2	immensely	1	618		4	3
rare specific 1	intensely	0	361		0	1
rare specific 2	gravely	0	324		3	5
test item	15					
<b>Headword</b>	<b>competitive</b>					
frequent general 1	highly	128	1440000	OCD	7	2
frequent general 2	extremely	14	1120000	OCD	3	7
frequent specific 1	fiercely	35	622000	OCD	13	20
frequent specific 2	intensely	15	779000	OCD	12	3
rare general 1	enormously	0	634		2	0
rare general 2	immensely	1	524		0	2
rare specific 1	horribly	0	1020		12	9
rare specific 2	wildly	0	739		1	7



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# PART III

## FOCUS ON FORM IN CLASSROOM PRACTICE



*Edward de Chazal*

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LANGUAGE LECTURES:  
A NOVEL CLASSICAL APPROACH  
TO FORM-BASED INSTRUCTION

ABSTRACT

This article describes and appraises a series of language lectures delivered as a weekly timetabled component of the University College London Language Centre Diploma in English for Academic Purposes. Focusing primarily on form and structure, the lectures offer insights into the English language, complementing and extending the form-based instruction which takes place concurrently in the academic writing, vocabulary and grammar skills classes. Examples of lectures range from a clarification of adverbs, adverb phrases and adverbials leading to a taxonomy of usable prototypical examples, to a guided investigation of future forms in English with interactive searches for up-to-date target examples. The use of an ancient methodology, the talk or lecture, seems an uncommon solution to the teaching and learning of grammar: one rationale is that the lecturer, cast in the role of researcher, is able to process and distill for students the literature on grammar, including the major grammar reference books. The result is that students progressively access a concise description of English which goes considerably beyond most student-focused resources. While the lecturer communicates the key interrelated meanings, forms, and functions of English, the students in the process also advance their listening and note-taking skills and acquire independent investigative tools.

## 1. Introduction

An instructional focus on form lies at the heart of many language programmes. While methodological practice and fashion have changed over the decades, students continue to expect a visible grammatical dimension to their classroom learning. One much-discussed long-term shift has been from a classically-derived deductive approach to a more inductive approach favoured by, among other methods and approaches, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Even as the trend of CLT itself has been questioned (e.g. Swan 1985a, 1985b), grammatical form and use has remained a major consideration for language teachers and learners. What I present in this paper is a 'novel classical' approach to the teaching of form: a series of language lectures. At first

glance the lecture format would appear to be an uncommon and unexpected solution to the teaching and learning of grammar, out of step with the zeitgeist: after all a lecture is typically both heavily teacher-centred, and communicative predominantly in a one-way sense. As a one-hour component within a 20 hour per week language programme, the University College London Language Centre *Diploma in English for Academic Purposes*, the Language Lectures consolidate and extend the concurrent language teaching and learning taking place elsewhere. The main forum for grammatical work is within the academic writing, vocabulary and grammar classes which comprise some 8 hours of the weekly timetable. The Language Lectures afford the opportunity for development and depth that would not, I argue, otherwise take place.

The series of Language Lectures comprises 18 hour-long lectures spread weekly over two terms. They take place in a lecture theatre at UCL and are given by myself in the role of lecturer, researcher and course coordinator. Central to this role is the notion of researcher, a point to which I will return in section 3 below. The lectures cover the language systems of English, mainly grammar, but also vocabulary and phonology, together with key skills in the academic environment. The students on the diploma course are all non-native speakers of English with quite a wide range of language levels from intermediate to advanced. They represent some 18 countries from Algeria and France through Iran and Saudi Arabia to Thailand, China and Japan. Most are postgraduate, but some have little or no experience of tertiary education. The majority aims to study at universities in London and around the UK. Subjects range from law and architecture through mathematics and the sciences to arts and humanities and the increasingly popular social sciences.

In this paper I offer a description of the Language Lecture series, followed by a critical rationale for this approach. I proceed to describe one of the lectures in some depth, that on prepositions in English, in order to illustrate and illuminate one type of lecture within the series. Subsequently, I report the results of a student evaluation of the Language Lecture series and conclude with an appraisal of the Language Lectures.

## 2. Overview of language lecture series

Fourteen of the 18 lectures in the series are based on the systems of English, with 10 of these being essentially grammar-based. Meanwhile two are vocabulary based, one based on phonology, with the final one philosophically bringing together all the three systems. The remaining four lectures deal with key skills in the academic environment.

The starting point for the core grammatical lectures is our recent heritage of the major English language descriptive reference grammars and their students' versions. Chronologically these comprise the seminal *Comprehensive grammar of the English language* by Quirk et al (1985), Biber et al's *Longman grammar of spoken and written English* (1999) and the Huddleston and Pullum *Cambridge grammar of the English language* (2002). From each of these tomes was developed a more accessible version aimed explicitly at students. Respectively these are: Greenbaum and Quirk (1990), *A student's grammar of the English language*; Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002), *Longman student grammar of spoken and written English*; and Huddleston and Pullum (2005), *A student's introduction to English grammar*. In each case the students' versions follow similar structures and organising

principles to those of their 'parent' editions. To a lesser extent, further publications from the Quirk school have informed my work, including the Greenbaum *Oxford reference grammar* in the updated version edited by Weiner (2000) and Quirk and Greenbaum's (1973) *University grammar of English*. Similarly useful have been the Collins COBUILD *English grammar* (ed. Sinclair 1990) and Eastwood's 1994 *Oxford guide to English grammar*. In addition, since its publication after the first cycle of Language Lectures, I have begun incorporating material from Carter and McCarthy's 2006 *Cambridge grammar of English*. These sources comprise the core literature to which I subsequently refer.

To turn to a brief description of the lectures, the whole cohort of some 80 students is required to attend, and I invite questions at strategic points throughout. They last an academic hour (50 minutes) and take place in a well-equipped lecture theatre. For each lecture I prepare visuals using PowerPoint and give copies of the slides, 3 per page allowing room for notes, to all students on handouts at the beginning of the lecture. Many of the student handouts also have a task, typically an authentic academic text, to highlight the target language. All materials are uploaded onto WebCT, the facility currently used by UCL for teaching and learning which allows students online access at any time. This option allows students to study the materials at an individualised pace. In certain lectures we search for target language and phrases, for example using Google Scholar. To illustrate the breadth of the Language Lectures, I give the titles and main content below. The title of each new lecture is indented.

'The Terminology of language': technical terms and their meanings with a particular focus on words and their part of speech, the five main phrases (noun, preposition, adverb, adjective and verb), and clause elements (subject [S], verb [V], object [O], complement [C], adverbial [A]). The task involves recognising three ways of analysing a text: by clause element; by phrase; by part of speech. One random example, a simple sentence from the text on which the students' task is based, is represented in Figure 1 below.

The sentence: 'Imperial this week agreed a formal split from the University of London in what was described as an amicable divorce'.

#### BY CLAUSE ELEMENT

S	A	V	O
Imperial	this week	agreed	a formal split from the University of London

A
in what was described as an 'amicable divorce'.

#### BY PHRASE

Noun phrase	Noun phrase	Verb phrase	Noun phrase
Imperial	this week	agreed	a formal split from the University of London

Prepositional phrase
in what was described as an 'amicable divorce'.

#### BY PART OF SPEECH

n.	det.	n.	v.	det.	adj.	n.	prep.	det.	n.	prep.	n.
Impe- rial	this	week	agreed	a	for- mal	split	from	the	Univer- sity	of	Lon- don

prep.	n.	v.	v.	prep.	det.	adj.	n.
in	what	was	described	as	an	amicable	divorce

Figure 1. An analysis of a sentence by clause element, phrase and part of speech.

'Words, Phrases and Clause Elements: what can be what and where': the 8 parts of speech (word classes), 5 phrases and 5 clause elements, and how they all fit together. I emphasise the lack of a one-to-one relationship between these divisions, as the sentence in Figure 1 above illustrates. For example, the typicality of a noun phrase being selected to function as the subject in a sentence needs to be described in the context of firstly a noun phrase working also as object, complement or adverbial and secondly the subject position being filled in addition by such phrases as preposition and verb. Following Huddleston's (2002: 327) analysis, I include pronouns within the noun class.

'The Noun Phrase: packing in information': an emphasis on the complexity of their structure, including premodification (including variously: determiner, adjective, '-ing'/'-ed' participle, noun) and postmodification (including variously: finite or non-finite clause, phrase, i.e. prepositional and noun phrase as appositive, plus more idiomatically an adjective or adverb phrase).

'The Verb Phrase (1): structure: including the mood → voice → tense/modal → aspect dynamic, 3 moods, 2 tenses, 2 aspects, 2 voices; the 8 tense/aspect combinations; frequency (about 1 in 6 words in a typical text), types of verb – lexical, auxiliary, finite and non-finite clauses; verb forms; patterns among different verbs.

'The Verb Phrase (2): patterns': verb complementation: verbs; functional patterns with verbs in sentences; complementation; types of object including noun phrase, 'that'-clause, 'wh-' clause or 'wh-' infinitive, *to*-infinitive, *-ing* clause. Verb [=V] + Ø (intransitive); V + C or A (copular); V + O (transitive, one object); V + O<sup>1</sup> O<sup>2</sup> (transitive, two objects); V + O + C or A (complex transitive).

'The future's bright, the future's periphrastic': future time expressions in English: prevalence of periphrasis and prism-like complexity; arguably in excess of 100 possible exponents to choose from; connectedness of function, meaning and form; self-perpetuating shortcomings and inconsistencies in language reference books; working with different 'routes' through some or all the columns of modal + 'be', 'appear', 'seem', 'look' + adjective phrase ('about to', 'bound to', 'likely to', 'unlikely to', 'sure to', 'certain to', 'due to', 'poised to') + obligatory lexical head; a student-led heuristic investigation of future forms using web-based and non-web based resources resulting in students themselves finding dozens of forms.

'Phrasal verbs, Latinate cognates and formality': the grammar of phrasal verbs; selecting and recognising the characteristics of academic written versus presentational language; suiting style to purpose; examples of this target language including the four main phrasal verb types and their Latinate synonyms; a task to supply missing elements of this language in a grid.

'Prepositions and the Prepositional Phrase': building and using prepositional phrases; structure and examples of prepositions. This lecture is described fully in section 3 below.

'Adverbs, the Adverb Phrase and Adverbials': types, structures and uses. An emphasis on the breadth of words modified by adverbs (adjective, adverb, noun, determiner, prepositional phrase; or stand-alone adverbs); structures of adverb phrases; some idiomatic adverb phrases.

'The Adverbial Cycle': the connection between the adverbials present in the writing of a child of eight in England and those in academic writing; the writer's starting point of either meaning, function or form to express key meanings, such as causality and contingency, through the adverbial clause element; leading to a taxonomy based on Biber et al's classification of adverbials (1999: 763ff) yielding a toolkit of fixed expressions, generatable expressions and idioms.

'How Deep Is Your Word?': word formation, connectedness to other words, connotation, essential and 'trace' meanings, and etymology. A classification of ways in which words can be introduced: provenance shift; affix shift; grammatical shift; semantic shift; concept extension or shift; portmanteau; eponym; acronym; metaphor and metonym; onomatopoeia; back formation; mistranslation.

'Sound and spelling in English': relationships between how particular sounds are realised and how particular orthographic sequences are pronounced, resulting in a two-way classification.

'Joining up your message': conjunctions – coordinators and subordinators – taxonomies of types, uses and meanings. How conjunctions join and subordinators develop rather than link; the semantic possibilities for subordinators.

#### *Key skills in the academic environment:*

'How to write an essay': orientating the reader; the general and thesis statements in the introduction; macro-organising principles of essays; micro-functions within the essay such as summarising; 'ideal' paragraphs – from topic sentence through evidence and exemplification to explanation and finally evaluation; the general, concluding and forward-looking valedictory statements of the conclusion.

'10 Steps to Better Academic Writing': rhetorical elements including genre, audience and purpose, and content and coherence; language components covering discourse and cohesion, vocabulary and style, grammar and style, and skills practice; academic considerations involving research, and conventions and presentation; and the pedagogical implications of teaching, tutoring and feedback, leading ultimately to independence.

'How to Give a Presentation': rationale, stages, audience, material, title, research, organisation, visuals, structure, variety, style, rehearsing, assessment, checking, beginning, timing, speaking, technical, etiquette, and questions.

#### *A philosophical angle:*

'Seven Wonders of the English Language': 1. Postmodification and Iterativity; 2. Stress, Rhyme and Rhythm, with a particular focus on poetry; 3. Future time expression in English; 4. Generatability, Flexibility and transformation without inflec-

tion; 5. The 'open-door policy': democratic and open qualities of English, and its global connectedness; 6. Adverbials; 7. Puns, Ambiguity and Humour. Wonders 1, 3, and 6 are essentially grammatical; 2 is grounded in phonology; 4 is lexico-grammatical; 5 is lexical; and 7 brings together lexis, grammar and phonology.

### 3. A justification for the language lectures approach

My reasons for adopting the Language Lecture approach fall into seven categories: expectations; evaluation; environment; effectiveness, essentialness and exposure; extensive skills practice; efficiency; experience and expertise.

As a starting point it is logical to consider student expectations. In a lecture we expect to engage with a distillation of complex material, delivered in an accessible way appropriate to the audience level. We would hope that the lecturer is well read in the subject and readily able to respond to relevant questions. We believe that because the chosen medium is the lecture, we will be given a route into the target material and the wherewithal to navigate within increasingly complex material. We expect to have to listen actively, take notes effectively, and ideally be able subsequently to process and use this key information. Conversely, we do not expect to be able to discuss the material at any great length within the lecture itself. The experience is more transactional than interactional. The series of Language Lectures aims to meet these expectations. Part of the rationale is that the lecturer is cast in the role of researcher. The lecturer reads and processes the literature on language in a deeper way and to a greater degree than is normally the case in the traditional language classroom lesson. Given the amount of reading and processing of information, together with the preparation of visuals, tasks and handouts, the lectures are time-consuming to write.

To evaluate lectures in principle, I have asked some of my current students for their views, and have received the following written comments: "a good lecturer can explain the subject better than books" (a German student); "(any) ineffectiveness occurs partly due to lack of preparedness of students and partly due to the technique that lecturers present, rather than the medium of instruction itself" (a Chinese student). A Japanese student has commented that when conducted in tandem with up-to-date technological tools such as timed pre-distribution of certain lecture material, lectures become more engaging and effective teaching and learning methods. Lastly a Polish student has pointed out that, while a seminar or tutorial allows for the kind of collective discussion which a lecture does not, "even the most eager discussion is not very probable to be remembered by a student a few months later (...) but notes made during consecutive lectures throughout the terms are a different matter". Lectures, then, appear to have a status widely recognised across cultures.

A carefully defined learning environment is central to course design. The Language Lecture approach being described here delineates between the two contexts of lectures and classes. This is akin to a theory/practice divide and allows for students to respond to two distinct teaching styles and formats in separate environments. In this way material is presented in different ways, by different teachers and in different learning environments, thereby more effectively satisfying varying learning styles. The lectures are higher in density and require some subsequent revisiting of the material. The

classroom, *inter alia*, is a place for the material to be used. The lectures involve greater technology and some interaction, including PowerPoint presentation and wireless connected searches for target items. By complementing classroom learning and teaching the lectures 'triangulate' and the combined experience is more comprehensive.

Further key considerations are effectiveness, essentialness and exposure. As we have seen, the Language Lectures complement, support and extend the concurrent grammar instruction in the writing and grammar classes. Through the control of one coordinator, all the major target areas of grammar can be covered effectively. Most significantly, the lectures are able to include areas of grammar which are not present in coursebooks. Such areas range from an emphasis on phrases and clause elements to a formal structural approach. This point is one I would like to emphasize: I argue that there is a gap between the coverage of many central grammatical phenomena, whether the structure of the noun phrase or the disparate types of form of adverbials, between the major reference grammars and current student materials such as academic writing coursebooks and grammar books aimed at students. Through the regular exposure to the lecturer, students gain access to much that is, in my view, essential to proficiency in the language but which is inadequately covered in the materials with which they typically engage. The experience assists in pulling the course together and promoting course identity. Students are directed to specific tasks for further study and gain access to a well-researched yet concise description of the language.

Apart from their content, the lectures offer extensive skills practice. As with the academic lectures which are also an integral component of the UCL Diploma language programme, students develop their listening and note-taking skills in three necessary stages: listening and understanding; concurrent recording of selected information via note-taking; and subsequent re-processing of this information. In the context of the wider academic environment, such practice is invaluable.

An important consideration when planning courses and syllabuses is efficiency. The series of language lectures are efficient in their use of time and therefore economically efficient. They allow for the teaching of the cohort of some 80 students, which elsewhere in the timetable are programmed mostly in seven concurrent classes. In this way there is the cost of only one teacher, saving the cost of six more for one hour. A concomitant characteristic is that of certainty: knowing that all the students are present for a particular piece of input means that the lecturer can be sure of its coverage within the cohort. This in itself can be efficient.

Lastly, from my own perspective, the lectures have proved exceptionally beneficial for my experience and expertise. I have read further and more systematically, met the preparation deadlines, anticipated and responded to unpredictable and perspicacious questions. I have 'reverse-engineered' several key lectures into standalone talks and presentations given elsewhere from internal training sessions to international conferences.

Drawbacks to the Language Lecture approach certainly exist. Criticisms might include the possibility that some students do not respond well to the lecture format, and lectures are not particularly communicative for the participants. Moreover, aspects of the discussions above might in whole or in part apply to other teaching approaches. These observations notwithstanding, lectures in principle are a highly valid activity for

an EAP setting, while feedback, as we see in section 4 below, has been broadly positive. The illustration of a lecture which follows illustrates many of the discussions in this section.

#### 4. An illustration of one language lecture: prepositions and prepositional phrases – form, function and meaning

The illustration I have chosen here is at the heart of English grammar: the preposition. Many teachers of English language would say that they were pretty familiar with prepositions. Yet I have found that much of the content of my lecture on prepositions is new, or at least cast in a new light, not only for students but teachers as well.

In the script, questions are given in italics, followed by answers. During the lectures I might ask some of these questions with a view to inviting students' responses, or respond instantly myself. These answers are based on my synthesis of the core literature on the English language detailed in section 1 above, together with my own thinking. The preposition phrase structure (figure 2) is my own representation.

First I recap how to work out part of speech, based on recognising the three criteria of form (structure), grammar (syntax), and meaning (semantics). The questions italicised and subsequent informative 'answers' constitute the essential material of the lecture. It is not a script *per se*, as I deliver the material using visual and note cues, broadly independently of any script.

*What are prepositions and prepositional phrases?*

A preposition is a linking word. It introduces a prepositional phrase; a prepositional phrase normally has a noun phrase as complement, so prepositions link noun phrases to other structures (Biber et al 1999: 74).

*Form (structure):*

*Looking at the list of prepositions (reproduced in figure 3 below), what can you say about their forms?*

Prepositions have a wide and unpredictable range of forms, such as: 'at', 'with', 'regarding', 'in spite of'. They do not look similar in form, so the form does not help identify prepositions. Compare them with prototypical adverbs ending in '-ly': the default for adjective-derived adverbs is this ending while none such default exists for prepositions.

*How many words can prepositions be made up of?*

Either one word (the most frequently-used ones), or complex prepositions comprising sequences of two, three or four words.

*What is the structure of the complex prepositions?*

With two-word structures the second word is a simple preposition; with three- and four-word structures the cluster begins and ends with a simple preposition. The other words are lexical, and often carry their original meanings, for example: 'in accordance with', 'in need of'. Many others, however, exhibit more discernable degrees of idiomaticity and opacity, such as: 'in the light of', 'on the face of'.

It is most effective to focus on prepositional phrases, that is the whole phrase rather than simply prepositions in isolation.

*What is a prepositional phrase?*

Like other phrases it contains head (the preposition). Unlike other phrases such as Noun Phrases the head is usually the first word of the phrase. The head is most frequently followed by a noun phrase: this is the complement of the preposition. Other types of complements include those given on the Prepositional Phrase Structure (Figure 2 below), and include gerund, 'wh-' clause, another prepositional phrase, or idiomatically an adverb or adjective phrase.

Figure 2 is the completed version of a student task in which they had to analyse the forms of the preposition phrases given, write them in the table, and identify the type from those described.

prepositional phrase			
premodification (type 'P') (optional)	preposition head (necessary)	prepositional complement (necessary)	
type		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• noun phrase (type 1)</li> <li>• gerund (type 2)</li> <li>• 'wh-' clause (type 3)</li> <li>• prepositional phrase (type 4)</li> <li>• infinitive (type 5)</li> <li>• adverb phrase (type 6) } <i>idioms or</i></li> <li>• adjective phrase (type 7) } <i>fixed expressions</i></li> </ul>	
1		near	the lecture room
1		to	students who achieved a distinction in the examination
1		in the wake of	9/11
1		like	me
2		in	playing football
2		at	driving
3		from	where he had left it
3		regarding	what he said
4		from	behind the screen
4		apart from	in times of crisis
5		except	to announce an emergency situation
6		until	recently
6		by	tomorrow
7		before	long
7		at	best
1+P	a few minutes	before	the end
4+P	totally	out	of this world
1+P	straight	to	the top
2+P	almost	without	trying

Figure 2. Prepositional Phrase Structure with examples.

*According to this analysis how many types of complement can we have?*

Up to seven.

*How can we explain the structures like 'wh-' clauses and prepositional phrases as complement to the preposition?*

These seem to express a meaning of 'place', as in 'from where he had left it'.

*For further practice, which patterns are the following?*

'by then' (answer = 6)

'just before the whistle' (1+P)

'in the light of what you just said' (3)

(and so on)

*Function (grammar/syntax):*

*How do prepositional phrases function?*

They can function in the following ways:

(1) postmodifier in a NP: 'the man *in the picture*';

(2) adverbial: 'They left *on Tuesday*';

(3) complement of a preposition: 'They were drawn from *among the poorest citizens*';

(4) complement of verb: 'It depends *on you*';

(5) complement of an adjective: 'I am sorry *for any trouble I may have caused*'.

(6) subject of a clause: '*Around 8 o'clock* is fine for me'.

They can also be premodified by an adverb phrase

*What are 'grammaticised' prepositions, namely: 'as', 'at', 'by', 'for', 'from', 'in', 'of', 'on', 'than', 'to', 'with'.*

When these are selected there is no choice, e.g. after 'depend' we have to select 'on'. When used in this way, these prepositions do not contain much meaning; they are simply used in a grammatical way, to link the words before and after them.

Examples:            interested *in*  
                          dependent *on*

bored *by*  
independent *of*

Swan and Walter (1997: 284) give useful practice for students in grammaticised prepositions following verbs, nouns and adjectives. These grammaticised prepositions can also be used like other prepositions, in which case they have meaning, e.g.

I sat *by* the door.

The meeting is *on* Tuesday.

[*by* indicates location in space]

[*on* indicates time]

*Can I choose which preposition to use?*

If the preposition is 'grammaticised', there is no choice: 'depend on...', 'independent of...'.  
If you want to express a particular meaning, you choose the preposition: 'the lecture theatre is situated opposite/by/near/beside/next to...the main library'.

*What is the difference between Prepositions and Adverbs?*

Some two dozen prepositions can also be used as adverbs, such as: 'about', 'below', 'down', 'round'. These words do not have complements when used as adverbs. Also, with phrasal and prepositional verbs, the words above are used as adverb particles when the verb can be separated.

*What is the difference between a preposition and a conjunction?*

Some prepositions can also be used as conjunctions, e.g. 'after':

'We left *after* the meeting' (preposition). 'We left *after* the meeting had finished' (conjunction). Huddleston (2002: 600ff) is unusual in analysing both of these as prepositions.

*What are 'Postponed (or 'stranded') Prepositions'?*

Sometimes a preposition is not followed by its complement; instead the preposition appears later in the clause. It is sometimes said that this has traditionally been considered bad style. In fact we postpone prepositions a lot in all registers, as the following circumstances show (Biber 1999: 105).

WH- QUESTIONS: 'What are you looking *at*'?

RELATIVE CLAUSES: 'The subject I want to talk to you *about* today is...'

WH- CLAUSES: 'What I would like to focus *on* this morning is...'

EXCLAMATIONS: 'What a terrible situation she's ended up *in*'!

PASSIVE FORMS: 'The children are being looked *after* by a Polish au pair. Who's he being looked *after* by?'

INFINITIVE CLAUSES: 'He's difficult to work *with*'.

*How would you categorise the following prepositions?: 'as it were', 'in my mind's eye', 'at large', 'in the main'*

They are idiomatic units; the first two are coined by Shakespeare and are more figurative, while the latter two are syntactically odd, with adjectives following the preposition/determiner. As prepositional phrases they tend to be used as adverbials, with 'at large' likely to be the complement of the copular verb 'be'.

Prepositions tend to follow the patterns so far described, but there is one unusual preposition, which can come either at the beginning or at the end of its complement: 'notwithstanding'. Additionally, 'ago' comes after its complement and can be analysed as either an adverb or preposition (e.g. Huddleston 2002: 632).

*Meaning (semantics):*

Prepositions typically constitute formal exponents for a wide range of notional and abstract meanings. Using Biber et al's semantic classification of adverbials as a framework (Biber 1999: 763ff), I illustrate these with examples including prepositional complements. My main reason for using the adverbial framework is that the most frequent exponent for the adverbial function is a prepositional phrase (Biber 1999: 768). The semantic categories remain valid for other adverbial exponents.

The head of each prepositional phrase is in bold. The semantic groupings are organised into three superordinate categories of Biber (1999: 768), as follows: circumstance (1. to 7.); style (8. to 10.); and linking (11. to 16). Biber appears to base his classification on that of Quirk et al (1985: 479) which is organised around the seven notions of space, time, process, respect, contingency, modality and degree. Biber's circumstance 'superordinate' gives these notions a new level:

- (1) Time – point in time, duration, frequency, time relationships.

Examples: 'from now on', 'in recent years', 'for a considerable period of time', 'at present', 'by the end of the decade', 'during the night'.

- (2) Space – distance, direction, position.

- Examples: 'from here', 'to the north', 'in the introduction', 'among indigenous populations', 'throughout the world', 'at home'.
- (3) Process – manner, means, agent, instrument.  
Examples: 'in a careful manner', 'by excluding students with learning disabilities', 'with a blunt instrument', 'by means of whatever method he could use'.
- (4) Contingency – cause, reason, purpose, concession, condition, result.  
Examples: 'of a heart attack', 'because of a lack of sugar in the bloodstream', 'despite monitoring', 'as a result of his enquiries', 'for show', 'owing to his indecision', 'on account of her bravery'
- (5) Degree.  
Examples: 'only to a limited extent', 'by 25%'.
- (6) Addition and restriction.  
Examples (these tend to be formulaic or idiomatic): 'in particular', 'in addition', 'as well'.
- (7) Recipient.  
Examples: 'for single parents', 'to HM Customs and Revenue'.
- (8) Epistemic – certainty and doubt, actuality and reality; source of knowledge, limitation; viewpoint or perspective; imprecision.  
Examples: 'without doubt', 'beyond reasonable doubt', 'in fact', 'in the opinion of this writer', 'according to Chomsky', 'from the perspective of the practitioner', 'only under certain conditions'.
- (9) Attitude (evaluation and assessment).  
Examples: 'in truth', 'in general'.
- (10) Style.  
Examples: 'in all honesty', 'in a technical way'.
- (11) Enumeration and addition.  
Examples: 'for one thing', 'in addition', 'in the first instance'.
- (12) Summation.  
Examples: 'in summary', 'in conclusion', 'in brief', 'in short', 'on balance', 'as a rule'.
- (13) Apposition.  
Examples: 'in other words', 'for example', 'such as in high-starch content carbohydrates'.
- (14) Result and Inference.  
Examples: 'as a result', 'in consequence'.
- (15) Contrast and Concession.  
Examples: 'in contrast', 'by comparison', 'on the one hand/on the other (hand)'.
- (16) Transition.  
Examples: 'by the way (informal)', 'with reference to this theory', 'with regard to our new venture', 'in the next section'.

Other, mainly grammaticised prepositions, have little identifiable meaning, for example: 'I'm not keen on speaking in public'.

*Turning to the question of meaning, what can you say about the structure of these two sentences? And what do the numbers in the prepositional phrases in the same sentences mean?*

a boy of four  
a mother of three

Each is a noun phrase comprising determiner, head, and postmodifying prepositional phrase. The structure or form of each is the same. The meaning of the head noun semantically informs the numeral: the boy is at the age of four; the mother has three children. The opposite does not work: a boy cannot have three children and a (human) mother cannot be aged three. Students can compare these sentences in their first language. We can see from this that bringing in a semantic dimension makes sense; conversely limiting ourselves to the syntax does not.

I add further examples and tasks in subsequent WebCT materials and Language Lectures. One such task focuses on particularly vivid complex prepositions such as 'in the wake of', 'in the light of', 'in communion with', which I accompany with visuals.

It is notable that the range of meanings is much broader than simply time and space, as often given in learners' materials. A brief review of the descriptions of prepositions in coursebooks and student language reference books soon reveals considerable shortcomings. Most commonly, such materials say that prepositions are used before nouns, noun phrases or pronouns (e.g. Fellag 2004: 47; Oshima and Hogue 2006: 29; Parrott 2000: 84). The noun phrase complement of prepositions is, as we have seen, the default or predominant tendency, but by no means the complete picture. Occasionally more detail is given, such as by Foley and Hall (2003: 285) who give the example of an infinitive being used after certain prepositions, *except*, *but* and *save*; other possibilities however are not mentioned. These authors also give the situations in which stranded prepositions are used.

A more serious shortcoming in many books is the limited semantic uses described. Fellag's description (2004: 84) that prepositions are words used "to show place, time, direction and other meanings" is a typical one. Even advanced materials such as *Advanced grammar in use* (Hewings 1999: 208-220) refer mainly to time and place with little coverage of the range of meanings we have seen above. Once again Foley and Hall (2003: 280-285) go further, offering a useful and original semantic categorisation including such meanings as exception and reason.

Simple prepositions: (i.e. 1 word)		
aboard	except/excepting	qua
about	excluding	
above		re
across	failing	regarding
after	following	round
against	for	
along	from	save
amid/amidst		since
among/amongst	given	
anti		than

apropos around as at atop  bar/barring before behind below beneath beside besides between beyond but by  circa concerning considering cum  despite down during	in including inside into  less like  minus  near/nearby notwithstanding  of off on onto opposite out outside over  past pending per plus post pro	through throughout till times to toward/towards  under underneath unlike until unto up upon  versus via vis-à-vis  with within without worth
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Complex prepositions: 2 words		Complex prepositions: 3+ words	
<i>as</i> such as  <i>for</i> as for but for except for save for  <i>from</i> apart from aside from as from away from  <i>of</i> because of	<i>than</i> rather than  <i>to</i> according to akin to as to close to contrary to down to due to further to next to on to opposite to owing to preliminary to	<i>as</i> as far as as well as so far as  <i>for</i> in exchange for in return for  <i>from</i> as distinct from  <i>of</i> by means of by virtue of by way of for lack of	in view of in the wake of on account of on the basis of on behalf of on (the) grounds of on pain of on the part of on top of as a result of for the sake of to the tune of with the help of  <i>to</i> as opposed to by reference to

care of instead of irrespective of out of / outside of regardless of short of  <i>on</i> depending on	previous to prior to relative to subject to subsequent to thanks to up to  <i>with</i> along with together with	for want of in aid of in back of in case of /in the case of in charge of in consequence of in the course of in the face of in favour of in front of in lieu of in light of / in the light of in need of in place of in respect of in search of in spite of in the middle of at the top / bottom/ end/side/front/back (end) of in the region of in terms of	in addition to in contrast to in reference to in regard to in relation to with regard to with reference to with respect to in response to  <i>with</i> at variance with in accordance with in common with in comparison with in compliance with in conformity with in conjunction with in connection with in contact with in keeping with in line with
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Figure 3. A list of prepositions.

I give the structure of prepositions (Figure 2) and the list of prepositions (Figure 3) as handouts for students to refer to in the lecture. Collating the items in this way necessitates an answer to the question: 'When does a preposition become a free variation?' The nearest examples in the above list are 'in the middle/top/etc. of'. Huddleston, meanwhile, adds colourful and more idiomatic items to his discussion, such as 'at loggerheads with', 'under the auspices of' (Huddleston 2002: 618). One tangible result of providing such a list is that students, with their acquisitive practice of incorporating new language, noticeably include prepositions such as *in the wake of* in their subsequent writing.

## 5. Evaluation

Formal feedback on the Language Lectures was conducted for the first cycle. This involved a questionnaire with open questions inviting qualitative evaluation, and basic quantitative information; the latter is reproduced below. The numbers represent raw student numbers, with those in bold giving majorities or significant numbers. As a tool of evaluation, a questionnaire has certain shortcomings, and these results may be seen as indicative of student perceptions at the time.

I found the Language Lectures:	very	reasonably	so-so	not at all
Useful	32	40	17	0
Difficult	2	13	48	26
Interesting	13	40	34	2
Necessary	33	28	28	2
Frustrating	0	9	28	50
Time-wasting	2	9	17	57
Unusual / innovative	4	19	30	32
Helpful for my knowledge	44	30	15	0

Figure 4. Student evaluation of language lectures.

In an educational context in which feedback tends not to be gushing with praise, the overall picture is gratifyingly positive. The spread of answers indicates that the students have indeed read the rubric carefully: in two ‘mirror’ questions, a comparable number of students (72) found the lectures ‘very’ or ‘reasonably’ useful as ‘not at all’ or ‘so-so’ time-wasting (74 students). A majority (48) admitted to finding the lectures fairly (‘so-so’) difficult, while at the same time recognizing that they were necessary. Similar numbers saw the lectures as helpful for their knowledge. A small number (9) felt that the lectures were frustrating, but very few indeed (2) said they were ‘not at all necessary’. More students than I would have expected reported that the lectures were not especially difficult (74). Perhaps most surprisingly, most students did not express the view that the lectures were ‘unusual’ or ‘innovative’: three quarters recorded ‘so-so’ or ‘not at all’ unusual/innovative. While I had been promoting the language lectures internally as an innovation, the students did not appear to see them this way; informal feedback suggested that in a university context, in the context of a language centre notwithstanding, a series of lectures was a perfectly normal way of delivering grammatical content.

As for individual comments written on the feedback document, the following is a representative sample: “Very useful/very good”; “I learnt a lot of new things”; “Not so useful /Mixed”; “More examples/practice would be good”; “I need the knowledge”; “Difficult to concentrate during lectures”; “Useful but complex”; “Useful for note-taking”. Once again, praise is not unanimous but nonetheless encouraging. Some students recognise the wider sense of usefulness of the lectures, such as in providing note-taking practice. To the written comments I can add unsolicited anecdotal feedback which is consistently along the lines of ‘very interesting’ and ‘very useful for my writing’. Feedback, of course, is entirely necessary in order to improve the lecture cycle.

## 6. Conclusion

I have argued, then, for a rationale for delivering language content via a series of lectures which centres on the appropriateness of the medium to the target learning envi-

ronment. The detailed account of the lecture on prepositions, lecture six in the cycle of 18, has shown that the format allows for a degree of comprehensiveness and perspicacity that exceeds many more usual learning materials and environments. To achieve this it is necessary for the lecturer to continually access the English language reference grammars and other literature. What also needs to develop is more comprehensive student practice linked to the lecture material. Herein lies an implication: the more broadly based team of teachers on the whole course needs to develop the related language work for students.

Above all, despite the apparent paradox, the well-researched deductive lecture-based approach has led to many students developing a heightened keenness to investigate heuristically their target language phenomena: from heavily postmodified noun phrases to subtly tentative future forms. A growing cohort of students are exhibiting, albeit to varying levels of proficiency, a readiness to discuss key phenomena of the English language using greater metalanguage, precision, and insight. They are not inspired to read the language reference books, for this is the job of the educator, but they do conduct their own searches, initially in a guided environment, thereby building up their own embryonic language corpora. The lectures communicate not only the English language but also the message that the language phenomena are ubiquitous; in a later lecture I present certain iterative characteristics of grammar such as modification. All parties need to learn to look out for the forms, functions and meanings and the core patterns that exist and are replicated in unlimited quantities; this experience is both stimulating and demanding.

The second cycle of lectures, in the subsequent academic year, has developed conceptually, technologically and visually from the first. Particularly noticeable has been the students' increasing study habit of accessing the concomitant electronic material, via WebCT; this lecture-plus-electronic resource opportunity should continue to enhance the effectiveness of the whole approach. Given the opportunities they offer to consolidate and extend our language descriptions, when conducted alongside the more communicative classroom format, I suggest that their success invite us to re-think our approach to language instruction, especially form-focused instruction. I feel it is important to re-emphasise the benefits to the lecturer: increased understanding of the subject of English language and increased confidence. What can be piloted by an enthusiastic researcher on a relatively small scale can be translated to other EAP environments and beyond.

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*Dave Willis*

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FOCUS ON MEANING,  
LANGUAGE AND FORM:  
A THREE-WAY DISTINCTION

ABSTRACT

Many models of learning make a two-way distinction between form and meaning, or accuracy and fluency. But learners are often concerned with both form and meaning at the same time. This paper looks at a three-way distinction which takes account of this within a task-based framework. It illustrates the value of this model by looking at a task sequence built round a discussion task, arguing that learning is most likely to take place when learners are concerned with formal accuracy within a communicative context.

## 1. A task-based lesson

A task-based teaching sequence is built around a series of activities in which learners focus primarily on the exchange of meanings. Built into this are a variety of activities which encourage learners to think about the language they are using. I will begin by looking at the genesis of a task sequence. I will then go on to examine the ways in which that sequence allows for a focus on language. In doing this I will develop a distinction between a focus on language and a focus on form. A focus on language I define as learner driven in response to communicative needs. It involves learners calling on whatever resources they can in order to help them express themselves. An activity which focuses on form is teacher-led. The teacher isolates a particular form or forms and requires learners to produce those forms. There is a range of techniques to achieve this including gap-filling, sentence completion and controlled question and answer pairs. I will then re-examine the task sequence contrasting the effects of a focus on language and a focus on form.

### 1.1. The elements of a task sequence

Willis and Willis (2007) contacted a large number of practising language teachers in order to tap into their experience of task-based teaching. One teacher based in Japan, Tim Marchand, offered the following discussion as the basis of a task-based lesson:

How strict were your parents?

Work in groups. Talk about your childhood. Whose parents were the strictest? Whose parents were the most easy-going?

He had used the discussion a number of times and had found that it generated real class interest and involvement. In order to build this task into a teaching sequence, however, Marchand needed to build in a number of other elements. At some stage of the teaching sequence he wanted to provide some language data to give learners exposure to relevant language forms. In order to do this he asked a number of friends and colleagues to provide him with their answers to the discussion question. Here are two of the answers he recorded:

A: My Dad is a quiet man really, so he didn't really make me do much at home. He sometimes asked me to wash his car or cut the grass, but I was never forced to do it, and I could usually get some pocket money for it as well. I think my Mum was also pretty easy-going; she let me stay out late with my friends. As long as she knew where I was, she wouldn't mind so much what I did.

B: My father was definitely stricter than my Mum. If I had been in trouble at school, it was always left up to him to tell me off. But I wouldn't say that my Mum was easy-going exactly. She would sit me down sometimes and make me do my homework in front of her, or force me to eat my greens, things like that. I guess I was just more scared of my father.

Initially the intention was to use these data to provide material for a focus on language at the end of the teaching sequence.

Marchand also felt the need to provide some introduction to the task. This would serve two basic functions. First, it would prompt learners with some ideas to work with. Secondly, it might help remove inhibitions some learners might feel when asked to talk about a personal subject. We all find it easier to unburden ourselves when someone else has led the way. This questionnaire was designed to fulfil these functions:

Questionnaire

- (a) Do you think your parents were strict or easy-going?
- (b) Did they allow you to stay out late at night?
- (c) Did they let you go on holiday on your own?
- (d) When you went out did you always have to tell them where you were going?
- (e) Did you always have to do your homework before supper?
- (f) Did your parents make you help about the house?
- (g) What jobs did they make you do?
- (h) Did you have to wash the car?

These, then, were the three elements around which a sequence could be built: an introductory questionnaire, a task consisting of a discussion question, and a sample of data to provide further exposure and the basis for focused language study at the end of the sequence.

## 1.2. Organising the sequence

Most discussion tasks need careful introduction. We need to do something to engage learners' interest and to ensure that they have something to say. We can think of this as *priming*. Very often this priming takes the form of an initial teacher-led discussion. Teachers may begin by making their own views clear or by engaging the class in a question-answer sequence highlighting the issues to be discussed. An alternative is to provide some written or spoken input. Learners may be given a text which presents a point of view and learners are asked to compare the text with their own views. The data recorded by Marchand could have been used to serve this priming function. Let us assume, however, that the questionnaire given above is used for priming. It serves the priming function in three ways. It highlights notions which may prompt learners to articulate their own ideas. It encodes some of the key concepts which learners themselves may wish to encode in the coming discussion – in this case notions of permission and compulsion. Finally, the processing of the questionnaire engages learners in exactly the kind of language use which will be required of them in the final discussion. They begin to rehearse for themselves the kind of language which will be required of them later. Of course, a teacher-led introduction and an introductory text or questionnaire are not mutually exclusive. The priming stage may, and often will, involve both these elements.

After the priming stage comes the task itself. In this case the task involves a group discussion. This is likely to be followed by a report to the class of the points raised and conclusions reached by each group. Finally, the recorded data could be used in two ways. First, it might form the basis of a subsidiary task. Learners might, for example, be asked to listen to the recordings and say which one is closest to the attitude of their own parents, or they might be asked which parental attitudes they most approve of and why.

In this sequence of activities we have seen the task initially set out by Marchand – *How strict were your parents?* – as the target task, the one around which the sequence is built. We have built around this a priming stage based on a questionnaire, and a review based on recorded data. But each activity in the sequence is a task in its own right, an activity which focuses on meaning, as defined, for example, by Ellis: "(...) there must be a primary concern for message content (although this does not preclude attention to form), the participants must be able to choose the linguistic and non linguistic resources needed, and there must be a clearly defined outcome" (2003: 141). We will now go on to see how a study of grammar and lexis might be built into the sequence.

## 2. Looking at language

Let us begin by looking at the priming stage of the sequence based on the questionnaire. It may be preceded by an introduction with the teacher describing their own childhood and their relationship with their parents, and prompting responses from learners. The sequence then moves on to the questionnaire. We need to ask how learners are likely to respond to this.

First, it will prompt genuine response and genuine discussion. With the exception of g), however, all the questions demand, strictly speaking, no more than a 'yes/no' response. There will, however, be a tendency to expand on a 'yes/no' answer and in response to b), for example, to explain that 'They allowed me to stay out late at the weekend, but not during the week, when I had to go to school'. The more time learners have to prepare their answers to the questionnaire, the more likely they are to expand on a 'yes/no' response.

In addition to prompting discussion, the questionnaire may encourage learners to expand their language resources by 'mining' (see Samuda 2001). Where they are unsure of their own language resources, they may supplement these by adopting and appropriately adapting elements of the questionnaire. Again, the more time learners have to prepare their answers to the questionnaire, the more they are likely to mine the questionnaire for language where they feel the need. There are two key differences between a teacher led-discussion as priming and a written text as priming. The written text is more accessible to mining. The spoken form produced by the teacher is more ephemeral. It can be mined only with difficulty, if at all. The time allowed for study of the written text is highly variable. Learners could be given a few minutes to respond to the questionnaire as individuals before moving into a general class discussion. On the other hand, they could take the questionnaire home with them and spend as long as they wished in preparation. The questionnaire may also be staged. Learners could begin by working as individuals to determine their own attitudes, then go on to discuss the questionnaire in pairs or groups and, finally, be asked to summarise the outcome of their discussion. A teacher-led discussion is also variable, but much less so. It might be carefully staged and long drawn out, but there are strict limits on the amount of time that learners can reasonably be expected to collaborate in this kind of discussion. So the written priming is more readily accessible and also more variably accessible than the teacher led input.

Moving from the priming stage to the target task we can go on to identify further opportunities for language focus. Willis and Willis (1987) and J. Willis (1996) outline a three-stage sequence for engaging learners in a given task: *task* → *planning* → *report*. In the discussion outlined here learners would first discuss the question – *How strict were your parents?* – in groups. This is regarded as the task proper. At the next stage, *planning*, learners are required to prepare to report the outcome of their discussion to the class as a whole. In the final, report, stage, learners deliver their report.

The important point here is that the *task* and the *report* are quite different kinds of communicative activity. The task is seen as *private*, *exploratory* and *ephemeral*. It is carried out in a small group. Members of the group are tolerant of one another's language. There is no demand for prestige forms of the language. The discussion is exploratory. Learners are working out what to say rather than how to say it. They are working on content, focusing on expressing meanings, rather than on form. Finally, the discussion is ephemeral. No one is taking note of content or language. The report stage is, by contrast, *public*, *final* and *permanent*. When a learner stands up to present the views of the group to the class as a whole there is a much greater premium on prestige forms of the language in this public forum than in the small group. What is being presented is a considered conclusion which has been prepared in advance. Again there

is a greater demand for a prestige form of the language. And finally a public performance is more permanent than a group discussion. Listeners, in particular the teacher, take note of what has been said. Since they are not involved in the discussion themselves they are in a position to stand back and take note of what is said.

Because of the contrast in communicative demands between the task and the report, there is work to be done at the *planning* stage. Learners work within their group to prepare their spokesperson to deliver a report in circumstances which are communicatively demanding. Both the planning and the report stages are themselves tasks in line with the criteria laid down by Ellis (2003) and set out above: there is a primary concern with content, learners are free to choose their own language resources and there is a defined outcome. By manipulating the communicative demands and allowing time for planning this sequence allows for a focus on language within a communicative context. This is part of a natural communicative process. Learners think about language and work on language form because this is required by the circumstances of communication, not because any artificial constraints have been placed upon them.

### 3. Focus on meaning, focus on language and focus on form

Long (1988) distinguishes between a *focus on forms* (plural) and a *focus on form*. A focus on forms occurs when a particular language form is identified by the teacher and isolated for study. A focus on form is in line with the kind of language study we have described above. Learners engage with a particular linguistic form because it assumes an importance within the context of a communicative activity. Samuda (2001) refers to a *focus on language* where there is a focus on the formal properties of language within a meaning-centred context, again along the lines described in the teaching sequence outlined above.

What emerges from this is a three-way distinction between a *focus on meaning*, a *focus on language within a meaning-based context*, and a *focus on specific language forms*. This three-way distinction is set out in Willis and Willis (2007: 133) who distinguish between a *focus on meaning*, a *focus on language* and a *focus on form*.

We are looking at a three-way distinction:

- a focus on *meaning* in which participants are concerned with communication,
- a focus on *language* in which learners pause in the course of a meaning-focused activity to think for themselves how best to express what they want to say, or a teacher takes part in an interaction and acts as a facilitator by rephrasing or clarifying learners language,
- a focus on *form* in which one or more lexical or grammatical forms are isolated and specified for study (...) (Willis and Willis 2007: 5).

The focus on meaning is incorporated within the basic definition of a task – the requirement that there is a primary focus on content or meaning. Learners are concerned first and foremost to get their meaning across. There is a focus on language when “learners think about language within the context of a task-based activity”. They work on language for themselves when, for example, they mine written input, or “they

help and correct one another or consult an authority (grammar book, dictionary, their teacher) to help them express their meanings more clearly". Willis and Willis argue that:

They (learners) are likely to do this:

- at the priming stage when they ask for the meanings of specific items;
- when they mine written language in preparation for the coming task;
- when they work together to prepare for a task;
- when they work together to prepare a report for the whole class;
- when they are making a record of a task either by putting it in writing or making and audio-recording (Willis and Willis 2007: 133).

There is a focus on form when the teacher takes control, isolating and specifying particular forms for study. In the teaching sequence we have outlined above we have allowed for a focus on meaning and a focus on language, but we have not so far built in a focus on form.

#### 4. Focus on form

A focus on form has been central to language teaching for many years. It is standard practice for the teacher to identify and isolate specific forms and encourage learners to work with these in a controlled way. Brumfit (1984) speculates on the value of this traditional focus on form:

Many language learners have testified to the usefulness of such traditional learning activities as exercises and drills, and an authoritative rejection of such procedures needs to be based on firmer evidence than has been forthcoming. Much more useful would be to explore the role that such traditional practices have had for learners who have found them helpful (Brumfit 1984: 320).

I would want to modify Brumfit's plea in at least one way by adding two words to the final sentence, so that it refers to *learners who believe they have found them helpful*. This acknowledges the importance of learner attitudes, but leaves open the question of whether or not the practices described actually do contribute effectively to learning.

In spite of Brumfit's plea there has been little in the way of exploration of the role of these practices. If anything, second language acquisition research continues to cast doubt on the value of such practices as contributing directly to learning. They may, however, play an important part in motivating both learners and teachers. Skehan (1998: 93) describes what he calls "the most influential approach" to teaching as "that of the 3Ps: presentation, practice and production". The presentation and practice stages of this approach focus on the manipulation of language forms identified by the teacher. They depend on what Brumfit calls *traditional learning activities*. At the final, production, stage "the degree of control and support would be reduced and the learners would be required to produce language more spontaneously, based on meanings the learners himself or herself would wish to express" (Skehan 1998: 93). Skehan (1998: 94) cites White (1988) in referring to this approach as "essentially a discredited, meaning impoverished methodology". The approach has been criticised elsewhere

(see, for example, Willis and Willis 1996) on the grounds that the initial focus on form compromises any later attempt to focus on meaning. Once learners have a mental set towards the production of prescribed forms, it is difficult for them to give priority to meaning. Even at the production stage they see the production of specified forms as the priority, and their success is judged in terms of their ability to produce these forms. The approach is one which prioritises *conformity* rather than *creativity*. Learners are encouraged to conform to teacher expectations rather than to exploit their own language resources.

Skehan recognises, however, that although this approach is discredited by most acquisition research, it is still the dominant paradigm. He cites three basic reasons for this. It reinforces teacher roles, placing teachers at the centre of the teaching learning process. The teaching techniques which orchestrate the processes are “eminently trainable”. Finally, the approach “lends itself very neatly to accountability, since it generates clear and tangible goals, precise syllabuses and a comfortably itemizable basis for the evaluation of effectiveness”. These reasons are seen from the point of view of the teacher, but they are also comforting for learners. Learners feel more secure with a teacher who takes control and responsibility. They are happy with an itemised approach to learning which enables them to mark their progress with confidence. It may be that this confidence is misplaced in that what they are able to do is manipulate language forms rather than use them in a communicative context. The appearance of learning is satisfying in itself. But one of the main reasons for the persistence of the 3Ps approach is “the lack of a clear alternative for pedagogy, not so much theoretically as practically, an alternative framework which will translate into classroom organisation, teacher training and accountability and assessment”.

It is not difficult to incorporate a focus on form within a task-based approach. We could, for example, ask learners to work through the questionnaire underlining all the expressions of compulsion and permission. We would expect them to identify phrases with ‘make’, ‘let’, ‘allow’ and ‘have to’. We could then go on to ask them to identify expressions of compulsion and permission in the recorded data to assemble a list of items like ‘they didn’t let me go’ – ‘they never made me do any horrible chores’ – ‘he didn’t really make me do much at home’ – ‘I was never forced to do it’ – ‘she let me stay out late with my friends’ – ‘she would sit me down sometimes and make me do my homework’ – ‘force me to eat my greens’. We could move from this to controlled practice asking learners, for example, to list three things they were forced to do and three things they were allowed to do. We could incorporate text reconstruction exercises, asking learners to complete blanks or to recall designated elements of the texts. So once we have language data – in this case in the form of a questionnaire and a set of recordings it is a relatively straightforward matter to provide activities which focus on form.

## 5. Language as a meaning system

It is natural to think of learners’ language in terms of the words and sentences they are able to produce. But it is perhaps more realistic to think of language as a meaning system and ask the question “What meanings can the learner negotiate?” What learn-

ers are working to do is build up the capacity to mean. There is obviously a relationship between the ability to produce sentences and the ability to create meanings, but the two are not the same. Learners are able to elicit information from others long before they have consistent control of question forms. They are able to make reference to past time without having command of the past tense system simply by using words like 'last week' or 'yesterday'. So it is possible for learners to engage in complex meanings even with a rudimentary grammar. They seem to do this partly by operating in a lexical rather than a grammatical mode, and partly by importing first language strategies.

This is seen clearly in the development of interrogatives in English. Interrogatives in English are marked lexically with 'wh'-words:

Who lives here?  
Where do you live?

grammatically by inversion or the insertion of do:

Who is it?  
What do you want?  
Do you live near here?

and by intonation. Learners begin by using lexical markers and importing intonation patterns from their first language together with non-linguistic devices such as facial expression and shrugs of the shoulder. It takes quite some time before question forms become grammaticised, before learners move from 'Where you live?' to 'Where do you live?' And this development is notoriously resistant to teaching.

We have argued so far that learners operate initially with a highly lexicalised system. We have also suggested that many forms, such as the interrogative forms cited above, are resistant to teaching, in that careful teaching may make learners aware of these grammatical systems but they do not, as a consequence, make these forms a part of their language use. The learners' priority, it seems, is to create an efficient meaning system, one which can be deployed spontaneously in real time. In order to do this they will strip down their conscious grammar of the language. They may be aware, for example, of the form of 'do'-questions in that they can produce these forms under careful control, but they are not immediately ready to incorporate these forms into their spontaneous system. This is in line with most studies in second language acquisition. There is a general consensus that there is a gap between conscious awareness of a given form and the ability to incorporate that form in spontaneous production. If we accept this then teaching should involve three elements:

- We need to encourage learners to develop a usable meaning system. This means providing plenty of opportunities in class to use the language to create meanings.
- We need also to encourage learners to develop their grammar by incorporating new forms. These may be forms which they have just encountered, or they may be forms that have been previously 'learned', but which have not yet become a part of the spontaneous system.

- Finally, we need to focus learners attention on specific forms, so that they become more aware of grammatical systems.

## 6. Putting things together

Let us propose the following teaching sequence and go on to see how each stage relates to a focus on language and a focus on form:

INTRODUCTION + QUESTIONNAIRE  
(Priming + Mining + Rehearsal)



TASK → PLANNING → REPORT



LISTENING + SCRIPT  
Review + Extension



FOCUS ON FORM

First, there is a priming stage which consists of a teacher led introduction followed by a questionnaire. These are both meaning-based activities. The learners' main aim is to understand input from their teacher and classmates and to get their own opinions across. But there will also be a focus on language. They will be mining the input, both the teacher's words and the written text which makes up the questionnaire. Learners will be operating autonomously using the input to help them frame their own contributions to the discussion. They are likely to pick up on forms which are salient in terms of the topic: 'make', 'let', 'have to' and 'allow ... to'. They may also pick up on phrases like 'help about the house' and grammatical items like the indirect question form in 'tell them where you were going'. The important thing to bear in mind with the focus on language is that learners set their own priorities. They decide for themselves which forms are important, which help them express their own meanings, and they then decide for themselves whether or not they can incorporate these forms in their output. The discussion of the questionnaire is a *rehearsal* for the task to come. Learners will be using the same language as they will need for the task.

When learners come to the TASK → PLANNING → REPORT phase, they will begin, as we described above by working informally in small groups. They then move into the *planning* stage in which they pay attention to the communicative demands of the coming *report*. Again there is a focus on language, in which the learners set their own individual priorities. This phase is followed by a follow-up exercise in which they listen to recordings and take part in a teacher led discussion of these. Fi-

nally, they are given the chance to look at the transcript of the recordings. By this time learners will be very much sensitised to the input and will probably pick up quickly on expressions like 'I was never forced to do it' contrasting with 'he sometimes asked me to'.

All these parts of the teaching sequence offer ample opportunities for learners to pay attention to language and to extend their repertoire. But all of this takes place within a sequence of meaning-based activities. Learners make their own choices as to what they can and what they cannot usefully incorporate in their output. There will certainly be errors. Learners will produce things like 'They make me to do homework' and 'I forced to wash car' and so on. But the important thing is that they will be working all the time not simply to conform to teachers' expectations, but to work with language to express what they want to mean for themselves.

The focus on form will come at the end of the teaching sequence. Here learners may be asked to take part in the kind of learning activities identified by Brumfit above. Depending on what forms the teacher decides to focus on learners might be asked to produce specific forms:

Think about your schooldays ...

- (1) List three things you had to do.
- (2) List three things you weren't allowed to do.
- (3) List three things you were supposed to do but didn't.

or:

Complete these to make true sentences:

- (1) When I was a child my parents made me ...
- (2) They let me ...
- (3) I was forced to ...
- (4) I was allowed to ...
- (5) I was supposed to ...

There are three good reasons for keeping this kind of controlled practice to the end of the sequence. We have already alluded to the first of these. A focus on form at the beginning of the sequence is likely to detract from a focus on meaning. There is a strong possibility that learners will be more concerned to reproduce the required forms than to work freely with the language they have at their disposal. The second reason is that the concern with the teacher nominated forms is likely to make other forms less salient. Learners will be preoccupied with one or two specific forms, to the detriment of other learning opportunities. When learners are focusing on language, however, they are free to notice and incorporate anything they find useful. Also, when the focus on form comes at the end of the sequence learners will have been thoroughly primed to take careful notice of it not simply as an isolated form, but as something they have experienced in use. They have been working hard to realise these meanings and have seen and heard many instances of these forms in use. There is still no guarantee that they will incorporate the forms into their spontaneous production at the next opportunity, but they have certainly been thoroughly sensitised to the forms and their meaning and use.

## 7. Form and language: A final contrast

A focus on form can certainly play an important part in learning. It is likely to make forms salient and so to facilitate acquisition in the future. It can also play an important part in motivating learners. It is important for them to recognise that the work they have done has contributed to their developing grammar of the language. As teachers we know that it will probably be some time before the new forms are a genuine part of the learners' repertoire, but it is important for their motivation that we highlight in some way the 'new' language they have experienced. It is an important part of the packaging of the teaching/learning process. By putting the form focus at the end of a sequence we are able to secure the advantages, without incurring the penalties which are a part of a preliminary focus on form.

A focus on language maximises learning opportunities. The input offers all kinds of learning opportunities. When learners focus on language, they are working autonomously and can mine an input text for anything which strikes them as useful. They are not blinkered by being asked to prioritise forms which the teacher has identified and which may be irrelevant to their immediate learning needs. Because a focus on language is learner-driven, it is more likely to promote genuine learning. They will not simply concentrate on producing specific forms which may or may not become a part of their language repertoire. They will adjust their performance in the light of new input in ways which are likely to be lasting, because they meet the learner's own priorities by helping them express what they want to mean.

It is important, therefore, to recognise a three-way distinction between meaning, language and form. Once we do this, we can manipulate the learning sequence in a way which encourages learners to focus on language for themselves, but which still allows us to reap the benefits of a focus on form.

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## FORM-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION IN INTERACTION-BASED LESSONS

### ABSTRACT

The approach to grammar teaching has been changing over the decades, accompanied by emerging approaches to the development of speaking skills. In grammar teaching the shift from focus on forms to focus on form resulted in attempts to combine grammar instruction with the communicative approach to language teaching. The emergence of the PPP approach and task-based learning gave grounds to the development of creativity of teachers in designing their own communicative tasks aiming to help students learn various aspects of grammar. This article presents an example of such a task, supported by theoretical background.

### 1. Introduction

In the era of communicative language teaching, numerous linguists and methodologists attempt to investigate the effectiveness of a number of techniques which aim at making learners able to communicate in a foreign language. Both benefits and drawbacks of many such techniques have been listed in a range of available sources, but teachers often have doubts or are inhibited towards certain ways of instructing their students in the world of a foreign language, as they are not convinced about the workability of these ways. And grammar teaching techniques seem to evoke the strongest doubts. Therefore, to combine grammar teaching with the development of students' communicative skills, teachers must rely on their creativity in inventing tasks incorporating these two aspects of foreign language instruction. The article, thus, proposes an example of such a task aiming to help students learn the use of gerunds vs. infinitives with specific verbs.

### 2. Theoretical background

Since the rule of the Grammar-Translation Method, with its unfavourable reputation, is long gone methodologists aim to invent a perfect method of grammar instruction

which would, in the era of communicative language teaching, focus more on form rather than forms (Long 1991).

The traditional approach to grammar teaching, namely the PPP (presentation, practice, production) does include a communicative component. At the presentation stage, the teacher introduces a new aspect of grammar which students are to retain passively. At this stage students are not required to use the form. The next stage, practice, gives students a chance to apply the new structure in exercises which are to provide them with the feeling of discovering the language. Such exercises are pair practice, grammar in context, or infogaps. Practice exercises lead to the third stage, production, which provides learners with an opportunity to use the new structure in "a relatively unstructured situation" (Maurer 1997). This could be an improvisation, discussion or writing. However, PPP was criticized for its limitations. Language instructors have pointed out that it was barely possible to make students use the new structure freely during one lesson (Ellis 1993). As Long and Crookes put it:

Where syntax is concerned, research shows that learners rarely if ever move from zero to target-like mastery of new items in one step. Both naturalistic and classroom learners pass through fixed developmental stages in word order, negation, questions, relative clauses, and so on – sequences which have to include often quite lengthy stages of *non*-target-like use of forms as well as use of non-target-like forms (Long and Crookes 1992: 31).

Disillusioned with the PPP model, linguists and methodologists developed task-based frameworks of language learning. The main difference between task-based instruction and the PPP was that the focus was shifted to language form which this time was at the end of the lesson cycle. Therefore, according to the principles of task-based learning, learners begin with a communicative pre-task involving all the interlanguage they have developed so far. The pre-task may be accompanied by written texts or recordings including a new structure. However, the material is processed for meaning, and not analysed with respect to the new structure it includes. Next, there comes the language focus stage where learners are familiarized with the new structure incorporated in the text or recording, which is followed by the practice of the new structure. The practice may comprise such activities as sentence completion or memory challenge games based on the processed text (Willis 1996). Thus, task-based learning provides a context for grammar teaching (Richards 1992; Brown 1994; Harmer 2003). There are, however, drawbacks of task-based learning. Since the main emphasis of the approach is on meaning and successful solution of communication problems, communicative strategies and lexicalized communication are of primary importance. This results in learners relying on prefabricated chunks and on the knowledge learners already have, which means that they abandon attempts to develop their interlanguage and focus on form (Skehan 1996).

The PPP sequence and the task-based model are two examples of approaches trying to combine grammar instruction with the development of communicative skills. Their aim is enabling the learner to master the target form so that he or she will be able to use it freely when speaking. They both set a goal of incorporating the target structure into the learners' interlanguage. However, the procedures they suggest are

significantly different. Thus, the problem of choice of either of them that arises here is based on two foundations. The first one is grammar teaching material proposed in most coursebooks which is designed according to the PPP principles. Language teachers, wanting to teach along the guidelines of the task-based approach, or any other approach, have to redesign the material offered by a coursebook. An easy solution here would be the choice of a coursebook prepared in a way matching the desired teaching objectives. However, it must be stressed that in Polish schools teachers can rarely have a book of their choice as it has to be one for the whole school. Very often it is selected by teachers working in the school for a long time, with the effect that they are unwilling to change the book they have got used to and know by heart, and, thus, they do not have to put much effort in lesson preparation. Consequently, young but already experienced teachers having a lot of fresh ideas for language classroom procedures are discouraged and limited by the available materials. The second source of problems resulting from the variety of grammar teaching techniques is insufficient awareness or sometimes even ignorance of language teachers as far as interest in such constantly emerging and developing techniques is concerned. It must be stressed that the way grammar is taught within the framework of communicative language learning and teaching depends mostly on teachers' interest, involvement and creativity in language instruction, not merely on what even a seemingly perfect coursebook offers.

### 3. What can the teacher do?

Taking into consideration the limitations restricting many teachers, what could be suggested is relying on one's own imagination supported with a theoretical background which can be either widely available written materials or frequently organised workshops for language teachers, or preferably both, if possible. Then, inventing additional tasks, such as the one suggested below, would be a satisfying solution for an ambitious language instructor. The teacher may design either a pre-task to introduce the topic and a task, or the task itself using or basing on the materials in the coursebook, or a follow-up task when embracing the principles of task-based learning. Teachers who see that their students still have problems with a certain structure, no matter how taught, may invent a task aiming to reinforce the use of the structure and, consequently, ease its incorporation into students' interlanguage. And this is what the article presents, an example of a task which is to help learners master a problematic form so that they are able to use it in communication preserving both fluency and accuracy at a satisfactory level, appropriate for the learners' knowledge of language. Teachers could also design such a task for revision of grammar instead of paper and pencil exercises or as their supplement.

### 4. The task and task procedures

The task presented in this article concerns the problematic gerund vs. infinitive distinction. It happens very often that students find it very difficult to remember, even when given certain clues, which verbs should be followed by a gerundial form of the succeeding verb and which by an infinitive. For such students, a task requiring the use

of these forms would be of considerable benefit. The author realises that this is not free production of language but rather controlled practice, but when students have not mastered a structure well enough to use it in e.g. a discussion, it would be better to precede such a discussion with a type of the task suggested below. As early as in 1982, Higgs and Clifford, while working with learners at the Defence Language Institute, noted that:

In programs that have as curricular goals an early emphasis on unstructured communication activities – minimising, or excluding entirely, considerations of grammatical accuracy – it is possible in a fairly short time (...) to provide students with a relatively large vocabulary and a high degree of fluency (...) These same data suggest that the premature immersion of a student into an unstructured of “free” conversational setting before certain fundamental linguistic structures are more or less in place is not done without cost. There appears to be a real danger of leading students too rapidly into the ‘creative aspects of language use’ in that if successful communication is encouraged and rewarded for its own sake, the effect seems to be one of rewarding at the same time the incorrect communication strategies seized upon in attempting to deal with the communication strategies presented (Higgs and Clifford 1982: 78).

Thus, giving students a chance to practice the not-yet-mastered form in an involving communicative task would prevent, at least some of them, from integrating an incorrect structure into their interlanguage. It would also provide learners with a feeling of security that what they use is correct, which consequently would not leave a place for irritation and, subsequently, demotivation caused by uncertainty of forms they use.

Taking this into account, having presented learners with a new structure, no matter by the use of what technique, teachers should provide them with a structured communicative task or tasks aiming to reinforce the acquisition of the structure in question before they embark on truly free use of the form in an unstructured situation. Such a task should be introduced not earlier than one or two days after the introduction of a new structure to avoid a situation where students rely on their short-term memory.

It must be stressed that each task of this type should meet certain conditions. Skehan (1996) emphasises that the task must not be too difficult as it may make learners draw on lexicalised communication, and, consequently, dependant on routine phrases and expressions resulting from fossilization. If, however, the task is too easy, it will not contribute to the extension of students’ interlanguage. Another condition mentioned by Skehan concerns pressure of time, namely, the amount of time required to solve the task. And it is the teacher’s responsibility to decide how much time is needed to complete a particular task. If the teacher assigns too little time, the students may abandon accuracy for the sake of task completion. The teacher should also remember that too heavy an emphasis on conformity, understood as students’ determined attempts to produce the target form (Willis 1996), and accuracy may have a negative influence on the development of fluency. However, fluency may prevail over accuracy if there are too many members in each group working on the task. Thus, adjusting task difficulty, time and number of participants in groups is the teacher’s main responsibility if the task is to be effective. Only the task which is well-balanced in

terms of accuracy, complexity and fluency is likely to help learners extend their existing language system. There are three stages of the task: the pre-task stage, the task, and the post-task stage, and they are discussed in the following subsections.

#### 4.1. Pre-task stage

The main objective of this stage is preparation of a questionnaire including a variety of verbs obligatorily followed by their completion in the form of gerundial or infinitive verbs. Students are told that they are going to be political party members and they need to design a questionnaire on the basis of which they will choose a leader of their party. There should be two parties in the class, each choosing its leader. In each party, students, possibly divided into groups of four, design such a questionnaire based on the verbs they learnt during previous lessons.

Before students embark on the preparation of the questionnaire, the teacher presents them with a similar questionnaire so that the students know exactly what they are supposed to do. Then, the burden of conformity is eased, and students focus more on accuracy needed to prepare a good questionnaire. The questionnaire should consist of examples of situations and candidates for leaders have to propose their solutions to problems presented in the questionnaire. Below there is an example of such a questionnaire:

##### Party leader questionnaire

- (1) If I was the leader of the party, I would like.....
- (2) In difficult times for the party I would refuse..... but I would decide.....
- (3) I would never make party members.....
- (4) When I work I don't like.....and I can't stand.....

What needs to be kept in mind is that we cannot avoid a situation where students will provide a noun instead of a verb in an appropriate form, like in, e.g., In difficult times for the party I would refuse a bribe. There are sentences which need to be completed with a verb solely. This stresses again the claim that there must not be too heavy emphasis on conformity, teachers need to let students complete some of the sentences with a noun if the task is to be a communicative, problem-solving one.

The time devoted to preparation of the questionnaire shall be called a planning phase of the pre-task. The planning phase is very significant for the process of the integration of a structure, gerund vs. infinitive in this case, into learners' interlanguage. Firstly, when students work on preparation of the gapped sentences, they need to activate appropriate language aspects which, at this stage, should already be retrieved from long-term memory. Then, during the task, fluency will not suffer because of the primary focus on accuracy resulting from retrieval of a suitable form from memory storage. This is what Skehan (1996) calls *linguistic preparation*. By shifting the responsibility of the questionnaire preparation to students, the teacher gives them an additional chance to incorporate the structure into their developing system of a foreign language, or retain the structure if already mastered. This is particularly beneficial for students who have not mastered the required form or forms yet. When all the groups

have finished with the questionnaire preparation, it is time to move on to the task itself.

#### 4.2. The task

At the beginning of the class students are divided into groups of four, ideally, and each group prepares its questionnaire. Now the teacher has to decide which students from each group will be members of the two electing committees, one committee for each party. Though there are two committees, each member will interview candidates assigned to him or her individually. This will create a greater chance and more time for students to speak. The electors stay at their desks with their questionnaire, and the remaining students, who are candidates for the two posts of the party leader, gather in a row in front of the electors. The teacher numbers the electors' tables putting a piece of paper with a number on each table. To assign candidates to a particular elector the teacher asks them to count to 7, for example (the number must equal the number of all the electors) so that the students will know by which elector they should be interviewed. Since the electors' tables are already marked with numbers, students, after counting, know which table they should sit at.

When the candidates have already been seated, the teacher explains that the committees' members are to read the prepared beginnings of the sentences, and each candidate has to finish the sentence providing the best answer suiting a party leader. To complete the sentences the students have to use appropriate gerund or infinitive forms. The committee members should take notes of candidates' answers. They will be needed later when discussing and deciding which student should be the leader of their party. To make the task even more communicative, the candidates should be asked to justify their answers. This will give the students a chance to use language freely with whatever forms they want, without an explicit focus on gerund vs. infinitive distinction. The teacher's role at this point is, by going from group to group, to observe the task proceedings and intervene only in cases of persistent use of an incorrect form. When all the candidates have been interviewed, electors from each party gather together in their committees to present the candidates by reporting their answers to the questionnaires. To do so, they need to use the practiced forms and focus on accuracy to use them correctly. After all the candidates for both parties have been presented, each electing committee compares them, their members vote and choose the leader of their party. In the discussion, the students can, again, use language freely, with no explicit focus on forms. The candidates, sitting aside, listen to the discussion of their party members and wait for their verdict.

#### 4.3. The post-task stage

The role of the post-task stage is significant for the effectiveness and success of the whole task. In the post-task, the role of the students is to report publicly the outcomes of their group discussions. Skehan says that the awareness that the students will have to summarize their conclusions publicly and not "in the security of a small group" (Skehan 1996: 27) is a constant linguistic challenge which helps them focus on

accuracy. This, consequently, contributes to the integration of the practiced form or structure into students' developing grammar. Willis (1996) distinguishes two varieties of the language students use in the classroom depending on circumstances of communication, namely *private use* in the course of pair and small group work, and *public use* when talking to whole class. Within *private use* she lists spontaneous, exploratory and ephemeral use, and stresses that in pairs and small groups there is focus on fluency and getting meanings across with infrequent requests for correction which is rarely executed. According to Willis (1996), *public use* is characterised by a planned and rehearsed approach towards task completion. She adds that public use can also be permanent if it is, for example, recorded. In this case, students focus on fluency together with accuracy and clarity needed for a public presentation. Here, students appreciate correction and advice on correctness of forms and structures. Thus, to avoid fossilisation of incorrect language forms, whose use may occur in small groups, teachers should not omit the phase of the post-task which is carried out in front of the whole class or even recorded. As Skehan puts it:

In this way, learners doing tasks know that they may be called upon to do the same thing in less private circumstances, and that when such a public performance is required, members of the audiences concerned may well focus on correctness and the complexity of the speech used. So, if, when actually doing a task, learners think ahead to the later possible public performance, they will not prioritise task-completion to the exclusion of other goals (Skehan 1996: 27).

In our task, the post-task stage is also based on public language use. The teacher appoints two students from each party to report to the whole class on their committee proceedings. These students are selected at the beginning of the post-task stage, though the whole class knows about this stage from the beginning of the lesson. In this way, all students focus on accuracy, as they do not know who is going to be appointed for the public presentation of the outcomes. Since the candidates for the post of a party leader are supposed to listen to their committee debate, they can also be appointed for the summary of the debate. This will make the candidates focus on the discussion they do not participate in. Summing up, the four appointed students give a brief overview of their three best candidates, compare them and state which ones were chosen for the two posts, giving ground for their choice. What is important, the students have to know, from the beginning, what they are expected to do in the post-task stage. Then during the task completion, and especially during the debates back in their parties, the students will keep in mind that they need to participate actively, in the case of the electors, and listen carefully, in the case of the candidates.

## 5. Conclusion

Contemporary methodology of foreign language teaching stresses the importance of the communicative aspect of language learning. Through the application of the communicative approach teachers should instruct their students in grammar so that it will be used easily and correctly during a conversation in the TL. But the communicative approach to the presentation and practice of a new language structure is not enough

for students to use it freely in a conversation, and to integrate it into their interlanguage. To achieve this, students need a series of the type of tasks presented above, repeated whenever the teacher spots reoccurrence of major problems with a particular structure. It may sound idealistic, especially in the case of a stretched school curriculum, but it is worth devoting some additional time to problematic language structures rather than to the introduction of a new structure before the previous one has been shifted from short-term memory into the long-term one. Otherwise, we will end up with a class of disoriented and discouraged students overloaded with excessive material, not knowing or not remembering how to use this knowledge.

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*Piotr Cap*

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ON THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF PRAGMATIC AWARENESS  
IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS  
A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

ABSTRACT

While the content of many textbooks used in teaching English grammar to non-natives may suggest otherwise, building up pragmatic competence seems to be an indispensable element of the ELT process. Pragmatic awareness, which integrates the cognitive, social, and cultural aspects of language and communication, significantly enhances the speaker's ability to make linguistic choices based on the structural-functional expertise at virtually each level of the L2 coding – phrasal, syntactic, textual, etc. All these levels are addressed in the present paper which examines the applicability of pragmatics-based instruction to the explanation of such grammatical (but also cognitive) phenomena as the theme/rheme interplay in the passive transformation, the 'negation trigger' for inversion in simple declarative clauses, the 'preparatory' status of *it* in pleonastic constructions, and more.

## 1. Introduction

In this short paper I make a small-range and tentative attempt to show that a genuinely successful elucidation of certain grammatical phenomena occurring in the English language may need adopting a pragmatic perspective. By the latter, I understand any explanatory approach that draws on a broad conception of all language being necessarily analyzable *in context* and thus all the grammatical structures being functionally anchored in the speaker's macro-goal realized by the use of specific lexical constructs (cf. Halliday 1985). I provide neither an exhaustive nor a rule-governed catalogue of situations; the goal is to make a heuristic, though hopefully convincing, preproposal for incorporation of a pragmatic 'mind-set' in the ELT classroom.

The rationale for writing this paper has been, first, the feeling that certain structural phenomena receive unsatisfactory treatment in the relevant ELT literature and, second, that there is a socially motivated connection between pragmatics and the classroom teaching process as such. Arguably, pragmatics is doubly applicable to lan-

guage teaching, because classroom language instruction is an occupation which essentially uses language in a social context to promote the learning and teaching of language for use in (other) social contexts. As the discipline par excellence which considers why communication often fails and how it can be more successful, pragmatics is a central competence to teach students who will use language outside the classroom and to teach teachers who will mediate its use for learning inside the classroom. Let us note at this point that English language teaching must now increasingly consider the ever-growing variety of contexts in which speakers across the globe are learning and using English. Theories of practice that shed light on how language is used in context and how people negotiate understanding, however different they may be in ability, culture and status are thus essential to our professional understanding.

The following discussion comes in five sections, in which select 'problem areas' are first identified within larger grammatical categories, and then ideas proposed for facilitating the teaching process by adopting a pragmatic standpoint. The domains addressed are, respectively, the passive transformation, the inversion of subject and verb in simple declarative clauses, the so-called '*should* for impropriety' in the English modality system, the 'pleonastic *it*' construction, and, finally, cleft sentences.

## 2. The passive

Consider the two sentences:

- (1) The Prime Minister got off the plane and the reporters immediately besieged him. (?)
- (2) The Prime Minister got off the plane and (he) was immediately besieged by the reporters.

Apparently, while (2) reads perfectly fine in terms of both grammar and style, (1) sounds at least odd, if not just wrong. There is a general and rather obvious consensus among grammarians (cf. Bywater 1971; Quirk et al. 1972; Huddleston and Pullum 2002, etc.) that the discrepancy in question follows from a swift passive 'turn' in the middle of the latter sentence and a lack thereof in the former. Since the primary element of the transformation is the old/new subject opening the second part of the sentence, the conclusion offered in traditional grammar textbooks usually goes as follows: "be the need, the passive can be used to avoid an awkward change of subject in the middle of a complex sentence".

In my view, this explanation misses the mark. It takes the student on a rather bumpy journey through the complicacies of subject-subject co-ordination and, worst of all, completely ignores the functional load and the focus of the proposition expressed in the second clause (in both (1) and (2)). Cue an alternative approach. The proposition in the second clause is inherently discourse-dynamic; the sentence as a whole is supposed to 'pick up speed' to give a picture of an event that unfolds fast, chaotically and, to an extent, uncontrollably. In order for this pragmatic goal to be effectively accomplished, the proposition [REPORTERS IMMEDIATELY BESIEGED PM] should best be structured in such a way that the instigator of the predi-

cated act occurs at the end of the clause, thus becoming the focus part or, in other words, the rhematic opposition to the theme (i.e. 'PM', 'he'). This is clearly the case with sentence (2), but not with (1) – hence the disparate stylistic and even grammatical, evaluations. Inscribing into this mode of explanation is a functional digression. Namely, acknowledge a parallel holding between the thematic-rhematic structure of the second sentence and a prototypical distribution of the 'given' and the 'new' information in a standard English declarative. All things equal, the given information assumes a left-hand position, thus pushing the chunk expressing a new proposition 'to the right', as in the 'PM(he)-reporters' configuration:

(3) I bought a car.

(4) This car is a Toyota.

(5) Toyota is a reliable make.

### 3. Inversion

Since a number of adverbial expressions can be forefronted in the English sentence for extra emphasis, and, within this group, the forefronting of some results in inversion of the subject and the (auxiliary) verb, there arises a need for a rule that would specify, clearly and unequivocally, which *exactly* are the adverbials that could function as inversion triggers. In the literature, the most common umbrella term for such expressions is 'negative adverbials' (cf. e.g. Biber et al. 1999). However, at the same time, it is observed that there are a few 'positive' openings which bring about the same syntactic effects (cf. Krzeszowski 1994). What we are dealing with, then, is a rule that not only fails on the principle of methodological universality, but in fact invites what I would deem a rather harmful mental process of conflation of two conflicting insights.

There seems to be a way out, though – as long as one can prove that the class of the traditionally 'positive' openings can be effectively tested for the existence of the underlying negative element, thus rendering the inversion rule a universal pragmatic account with the issue of discursal negativity in its primary scope. Consider the following:

(6) Never before did it happen to me to fall asleep during a lecture.

(7) Such was his fear that he fainted.

That the opening adverbial in (6) is 'negative' is obvious, but how to account, in the same terms of negativity, for the situation depicted in (7)? The prerequisite for the answer is the pinpointing of the contextual conditions for consideration of 'never before' as a negative adverbial. One can assume, with good reason, that the negative meaning of 'never before' is as much the matter of its own idiosyncratic constitution (viz. *never*), as it is the result of conceptualization of the adverbial in terms of a discourse element whose pragmatic function is to suggest that the act predicated in the

sentence is *underrepresented*, in the normal course of affairs, under prototypical contextual conditions and with regard to the addressee expectations – the anchoring of the act in reality is, after all, making it an exception. Hence the negative comprehension of the act, and, at the same time, a strong rationale for explaining the logic of inversion in (7). There is, in fact, little difference between the openings in (6) and (7), as far as the issue of underrepresentation is concerned. What is the ratio of occasions upon which a person experiencing fear will faint, to occasions when they will *not*? The act depicted in (7) is just as exceptional and underrepresented in the normal course of affairs as is the act in (6), the only difference being that (6) reports on the event in temporal terms, while (7) has a more axiological bent. All in all, the key thing to consider in making a judgment about the degree of the negative ingredient in the inversion trigger is how typical the asserted information is of the routine of actions performed by the discourse party captured in the subject part of the sentence. Of course, such considerations open virtually inconceivable prospects for the speaker's creativity and freedom in deciding whether a given opening does or does not 'deserve' inversion – on account of the assessed *degree* of underrepresentation – yet this emerging relativity, as long as its roots get fully elucidated, should not become a didactic deterrent.

#### 4. 'Should for impropriety'

In this subsection, my focus is on explaining the functionality of the modal verb 'should', in sentences such as below:

(8) It is ridiculous that Polish teachers should earn so little.

Within the 'classic' textbook approach, such cases come under the rubric of 'should for impropriety', yielding only a brief comment from the grammarian. The essence of the comment is, more or less, that 'should' "can be used after expressions of emotions, to give some extra emphasis to the apparent unacceptability of the situation depicted in the sentence". While not detracting from the accuracy of such an account, I argue that a fully-fledged description of the meaning of 'should for impropriety' is only possible within a broader pragma-cognitive framework, whose building blocks are essentially context-related. At the heart of the framework is, as can perhaps be foreseen by adopting an exclusively idiosyncratic perspective, the objectivization potential of 'should'. Crucially for a truly explanatory account, this potential goes far beyond the mere assigning of obligation to the agent performing an action or remaining in a state. In fact, it is also a potential for a *shift* from the 'particularized obligation' perspective to the objective construal of all aspects of reality that the agent is part of and thus *subordinate to*. The essence of 'should for impropriety' is, then, an attitudinal comment on the enactment of power exerted by the 'world' upon the entity talked about in the sentence, the latter reading analytically e.g.:

(8) It is ridiculous that the current reality (that I am myself part of, on a par with the entity I'm commenting on) is constructed in such a way as to allow for the situation in which Polish teachers earn (so) little.

Naturally, for the benefit of description, the objectivization potential of *should* will be best traced down to its 'mother' *shall* form (and the corresponding *will* option), which the ELT instructor might want to cover extensively prior to taking up cases such as (8).

## 5. 'Pleonastic *it*'

The basic problem underlying the use of 'pleonastic *it*' by a non-native speaker of English is largely a matter of stylistics and syntactic substitution – what is there to be considered before one legitimately chooses to replace a simple sentence with a corresponding complex equivalent which involves the 'extra *it*' construction? Consequently, what kind of stylistic markedness and pragmatic function follow from such a replacement? Let's work with the following examples:

(9) I hate her snoring.

(10) I hate it when she snores.

Apart from accepting sentences such as (10) as viable substitutes for the (9)-like ones, there is amazingly little said in ELT textbooks about the work the 'preparatory' object *it* does for the pragmatics of the proposition expressed.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, there is no comment whatsoever on whether the pleonastic *it* conversion has anything to do with the main verb – for instance, whether it matters that the verb carries a positive or a negative axiological load. The latter fact is at least intriguing given the statistical fact that the number of 'negative' verbs taking the extra *it* easily surpasses the number of verbs initiating a 'positive' proposition. Pragmatically, one could postulate the following explanation. Since one of the cornerstone principles of any verbal exchange is to keep the self-image of the interlocutor unharmed, and assuming that the interlocutor might indeed feel embarrassed by the direct imposition of a negative judgment involving not necessarily him- or herself but equally a third party (as in (9)), a feasible way to convey the proposition seems to be via 'diluting' the force of the negative judgment, which can in turn be accomplished through increasing the syntactic distance between the two major triggers of the imposition: the main verb (i.e. 'hate') and the act evaluated by this verb (i.e. 'snore'). Hence the 'preparatory' character of the object *it*, in fact acknowledged as such – but only in terms of a metalinguistic label – in most of the relevant literature.

If we accept that the 'pleonastic *it*' conversion follows, at least to an extent, from the psychological-pragmatic need to maintain a harmonious mental bond with the addressee, then again, like in the inversion case, far-reaching vistas open for the speaker's verbal flexibility. With the person of the interlocutor in the primary scope, some discourses may be naturally prone to the speaker's use of the extra *it* (for instance, whenever there is a considerable power or status differential between the interlocutors), while some others might entail, conversely, more directness, and thus favor the original, simple sentence option. Evidently, there is no recipe at hand for a 'cor-

<sup>1</sup> A notable exception is Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2004).

rect' choice – the bigger thus the responsibility of the instructor for proper elucidation of all the relativities pertaining to the politeness and deference backgrounds governing the most accurate pragmatic use of the given syntactic structure.

## 6. Cleft sentences

Finally, a short comment on possible ways of 'pragmaticisation' of standard approach to cleft sentences. Graver (1986) gives the following account:<sup>2</sup>

(11) *John* solved the problem.

(12) I need *your help*, not your sympathy.

(13) It gets really cold *only in the winter*.

English has a grammatical mechanism for focusing on words we wish to emphasize: we begin the sentence with *It*, and 'point' to the words:

(14) *It was John* who/that solved the problem.

(15) *It's your help* (that) I need, not your sympathy.

(16) *It's only in the winter* that it gets really cold.

Each sentence is now divided (cleft) to form two clauses, the second being very similar in appearance to a defining relative clause. Either *who* or *that* can be used to refer to a person, but in all other cases we use *that*, even when referring to adverbial phrases as in (16) (Graver 1986: 131)

It should be added, from the functional perspective, that the focus on specific words in cleft sentences comes from what seems like an 'excessive singularization' of entities these words denote. The degree of singularization may well be such as to infringe on some hard-and-fast grammatical rules – take, for instance, the violation of the subject/verb concord in sentences like

(17) *It was three firefighters* that helped him get out of the car.

And, in turn, the resulting salience of the focus part leads to a somewhat diminished importance of the remaining message – hence, in many cases, the prevalence of the 'dehumanized' 'that' over 'who' in phrases referring to persons. Altogether, the concept of 'singularization,' a clearly pragmatic development, seems a feasible explanatory tool for dealing with both the status of the *It*-phrase as such and, furthermore, the impact of this phrase on the lexical choices in the rest of the sentence.

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<sup>2</sup> The original numbering of examples in Graver is 1-3 and 1a-3a.

## 7. Concluding remarks

There is no way a foreign language could be taught without reference to context and there is no context description without invoking at least a few of the most 'productive' metalinguistic etiquettes which consistently draw students' attention to a precisely defined set of pragmatic-psychological-cognitive backgrounds that must be diligently explored for a correct linguistic performance. But one should not overdo, either. An excessive attachment to the contextual or 'interactive' meaning, sacrificing the *economy of description* which normally characterizes an idiosyncratic perspective, is just as harmful. Language-analytic competence must enhance the rule-governed didactic procedures – not replace them.

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PROBLEMS WITH FOCUS ON  
FORM IN PRONUNCIATION  
TEACHING:  
THE CASE OF STRESS AND  
RHYTHM VS. GRAMMATICAL  
ACCURACY IN EFL SPEECH

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to begin the discussion of the problem of pronunciation teaching from the perspective of *focus on form* rather than *focus on forms* by concentrating on the phonetic aspect of EFL as an element of spoken language. The article claims that phonetic accuracy can be developed by incidental focus on form and meaning-focused instruction if the aim of language teaching is specified with respect to the target: English as a Foreign vs. International Language. If English is taught as a foreign language, with the aim of communicating with native and non-native speakers, such aspects of pronunciation accuracy as stress and rhythm become crucial. However, there are numerous problems with teaching the organization of speech in a Polish English classroom; they include the interference and accommodation induced tendency not to produce weak forms in English by learners and teachers, and the tendency to use emphatic stress in grammatical focus-on-form instruction. These problems are believed to provide a challenge but not a negative context for incidental focus-on-form pronunciation.

## 1. Introduction

Regardless of the changes in the teaching methods, pronunciation seems to be a perfect candidate for a traditional focus on form teaching, or what Long (1991) calls a *focus on forms*, with elements of the sound system pre-selected, presented and practiced sequentially, focusing on particular sound contrasts or elements of the sound structure. Although the problem of transferring the accuracy from controlled practice to spontaneous speech has been repeatedly noticed as the major challenge for pronunciation teaching, in cases when pronunciation is explicitly taught, the tasks are based on form-focused instruction. This does not mean, however, that meaning-focused in-

struction can ignore pronunciation, as spoken communication relies on the ability to encode and decode messages into the articulatory-auditory form shared by the interlocutors. While language users can accommodate to a relatively high level of variability in the sound system, the importance of pronunciation for communication seems to be so obvious as not to require elaboration. Still, as noticed by Grant (1999) after Yule (1990), the distinction between the focus on 'getting the message across' and 'getting the sounds correct' summarizes the difference between pronunciation and spoken English classes. Rather than concentrating on bridging the gap between the two, this article assumes that as an integral part of spoken language, pronunciation requires and benefits from the *incidental focus on form* (in the sense of e.g. Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen 2001) within communicative language teaching.

Trying to motivate the need for incidental focus on form in teaching foreign language pronunciation as an integral part of speaking, this article focuses on the following issues: firstly, the priorities and aims of pronunciation teaching, the reality of pronunciation in a foreign language classroom and finally, the specific case of stress and rhythm in various types of language activities, with particular attention paid to the problem of grammatical and phonetic accuracy in conflict.

## 2. The aims and priorities in teaching the pronunciation of English

In communicative teaching, the spoken language is naturally given priority over the written one. However, although speech cannot be used without pronouncing sounds, the teaching of pronunciation is "something of a 'poor relation' among course components" (Hughes 2002: 68). This situation has been attributed to the focus on fluency versus accuracy in communicative language teaching, which concentrates on vocabulary development "while largely ignoring language structures, whether it be phonological, morphological or syntactic" (Hammerly 1991: 9, in Hughes 2002: 68). This attitude, in its extreme form, assumes that as general language accuracy is not an issue, mispronunciation can be given equally little attention to ungrammaticality of learners' utterances. However, as interlocutors do need to share some elements of the system before they can communicate, the idea of a 'restricted code' has been applied to the pronunciation teaching, advocating the minimal requirements on the sound system for the interlocutors with different language background to be able to communicate in English. Proposed as the Lingua Franca Core (Jenkins 2000), the set of pronunciation priorities is based on two types of assumptions: firstly, that only some elements of the sound system of English are essential for communication, and secondly, that elements which are believed to be unteachable should be dismissed from the pronunciation teaching.

The idea of Lingua Franca Core has received mixed reactions from phonetics and pronunciation teachers, who do not see the advantages of advocating this form of a 'restricted code' (see e.g. Sobkowiak 2005; Szpyra-Kozłowska 2005 and other articles in the same volume). Much criticism of this proposal fails to notice that the major aim of LFC is to cater for the growing number of users of English whose aim in language and pronunciation learning is strictly communicative, with the target placed at the international community, hence the proposal belongs to the teaching of English as an

International rather than Foreign or Second Language. Another important aspect of LFC is its stimulating role for specifying the goals of pronunciation teaching: however strange it may seem for the traditional EFL or ESL teachers, by advocating a limited set of phonetic and phonological priorities, the LFC makes the discussion of intelligibility vs. native-like accent more real. Acknowledging the global role of English, researchers in the field of pronunciation pedagogy have long abandoned the native speaker model as realistic, feasible or even desirable in the EFL context (e.g. Kenworthy 1987; Dalton and Seidlhofer 1994). However, without the native speaker as the point of reference, pronunciation priorities are difficult to establish and the discussion before the LFC was performed in a vacuum of unspecified targets. Ironically in a way, the major problem with the LFC is the lack of native speakers of this variety, and, consequently, the lack of a model, as it is not a variety, but a compromise between various native and non-native pronunciations, which do not represent a consistent system. Whether such a non-systematic proposal has a pedagogical value in teaching is an open question, the discussion of which would go far beyond the scope of this paper. What seems directly relevant in connection with the focus on form, especially the incidental one, occurring in communicative contexts, is the selection of those elements whose inaccurate production may lead to communication breakdowns. If LFC is not accepted at the face value, it should be supported by the observation of the sound structure elements causing problems in various classroom activities. This problem will be discussed further in the following section, for now let us notice its value from the perspective of the aims and priorities in pronunciation teaching: most generally, LFC can be said to have brought the intelligibility aim 'down-to-earth', trying to disambiguate its meaning.

It needs to be stressed, however, that concentrating on fluency and praising intelligibility does not exhaust the variety in the aims and priorities of the learners. As illustrated by questionnaire studies conducted in Poland (e.g. Waniek-Klimczak 2002; Sobkowiak 2002; Janicka et al. 2005; Scheuer 2005; Waniek-Klimczak and Klimczak 2005), Austria (Dalton-Puffer et al. 1997) and Spain (Cenoz and Lecumberri 1999), students' motivation and attitudes differ to a considerable extent depending – among other factors – on the purpose of their language study and the level of proficiency. The aim of comfortable intelligibility is generally shared by the learners, but many of them do recognize the native-like speech patterns as not only the theoretical model but also the target for pronunciation learning. Quite naturally then, the needs of the students will determine the degree to which individual elements of pronunciation will be recognized as important and relevant for communication in a language classroom.

Moreover, although a foreign accent in English is recognized as inevitable and positive from the perspective of identity marking, there is evidence that learners do not attach a positive value to their specific non-native accent (Dalton-Puffer et al. 1997). Consequently, while the priorities associated with intelligibility may be more or less stable across various non-native English speakers, the characteristics of a particular non-native accent and their sources in the background language system may call for some modification of the priorities.

Thus, the aims of language teaching and learning seem to be mainly dependent on whether we deal with English as a Foreign, Second or International Language (see

Wells 2005), on the attitudes and preferences of the learners, and finally, on the language background of the speaker. It is this final point that will be further elaborated in the next section: in a foreign language classroom in a non-English speaking country, most typically, the teachers and the students share the same background language or languages. Consequently, even if the lack of accuracy in a given element of the sound structure might lead to communication breakdown in a mixed language background situation, it is very unlikely to happen among non-native speakers who share the same native language.

### 3. Some characteristics of English spoken in a Polish foreign language classroom

As an element of spoken language, features of non-native pronunciation amount to the so-called foreign accent. Assumed to result mainly from negative transfer, foreign accent seems to be inevitable in a foreign language classroom due to the relatively late onset of language contact, its small intensity and the dominance of accented language experience. Still, it is not a stable feature: as an element of interlanguage, pronunciation features exhibit variability in relation to such major variables as the time of learning and the level of proficiency (see e.g. Major 2001).

In keeping with a well-established tradition of foreign accent discussion, let us begin some observations of the characteristics of English spoken in Polish foreign language classroom from the predictions based on contrastive analysis. Applying this approach, Śpiewak i Gołębiowska (2001) provide a number of features typical for a Polish accent; generalizing, they mention "the use of full instead of reduced vowels in unstressed syllables (...); certain intonation contours; a prominent rolled /r/ – especially word finally; final devoicing (especially /s/ in place of /z/; and mispronunciation of 'th', /N/ and sibilants" (2001: 162-163). Interestingly, although this presentation of the English of Polish learners is based on implicit contrastive analysis and impressionistic judgments, the main elements singled out in the summary of pronunciation features refer to the rhythm and intonation. On the one hand, this can be hardly surprising in the days when organization of speech is given priority over segments (for an overview, see Wrembel 2005), on the other hand, however, it seems particularly important in comparison with other descriptions of the Polish accent, including the one offered by the actor's accent manual (Herman and Herman 1947), where we read about a typical Polish speaker of English as "slow to thought, slow to speech and slow to action. His speech, therefore, is heavy, slow and hesitant" (1947: 351). Politically incorrect as this remark may be, it seems to characterize the impression of an average Polish immigrant's speech based on the characteristics of the organization of speech and not individual sound features. Thus, regardless of the predictive difficulties in the pronunciation of individual sounds (e.g. 'th'), it is the suprasegmental, rhythmic structure of English that seems to be crucial for the reception of the Polish accent.

Before the discussion of suprasegmental features of a Polish accent in English is continued, however, it needs to be noticed that these observations do not correspond to the priorities of the Lingua Franca Core, which treats word stress as unteachable, stress-timed rhythm and weak forms as possibly inhibiting rather than facilitating communication. Here again we need to specify the target for not only pronunciation,

but more generally, EFL vs. EIL teaching. I believe that stress, rhythm and connected speech phenomena provide a perfect ground for differentiating between the two: while it may be possible to imagine the instruction in an English foreign language classroom conducted in accented English, with no use of connected speech/weak form/stress timing characteristics. On the other hand, the lack of these features of natural speech in the English input would make it impossible not only to learn/ acquire these elements, but also to understand the messages produced by native speakers of the language.

In order to provide more precise background for further discussion, let us consider the following examples of classroom language:

- (1) I can swim, but I can't dance.
- (2) She is sitting, she isn't standing.

The distribution of beats corresponding to stressed syllable in (1) is the following:

- (1) I can SWIM, but I CAN'T DANCE.

With one strong beat in the affirmative, but two strong beats in the negative form. The difference stems from the predictably weak form of an auxiliary modal verb in the first part of the sentence, and the strong form when it conveys a negative meaning. The situation in (2) is analogous to that in (1), with the verb 'to be' in an auxiliary function in its weak form in affirmative, but not negative usage. The difference in the beat distribution stresses the difference in the meaning, with the negative form prominent due to its semantic function. The failure to use the weak form in the affirmative usage of an auxiliary may lead to misunderstanding, especially if the pronunciation of *can* and *can't* are not additionally differentiated by the vowel difference, as in /κΘv/ – /κΘvɾ/ vs. /κΘv/ – /κA]vɾ/. Thus, in spite of the LFC predictions, the weak forms and the distribution of strong beats may have an important communicative effect. This observation leads to another problem, directly relevant to focus on form: in view of the above, it seems obvious that the phonetic form of an utterance facilitates communication by the use of stress patterns which correspond to the intended meaning of the speaker.

#### 4. Grammatical vs. phonetic accuracy in communication

Given that we accept the need for pronunciation accuracy to the extent to which it facilitates communication (in keeping with the comfortable intelligibility criterion), the degree of accuracy and contexts in which it is required need to be considered. In the specific environment of a foreign language classroom, the use of spoken language by the teacher and the students who share the same first language creates specific conditions for the negotiations of meaning in relation to the form of the spoken utterance. Due to the shared features of the foreign accent and the natural tendency for the teacher to accommodate the speech style of the students (Waniek-Klimczak 2006), there is a serious problem with naturalness of a communicative setting as far as the

pronunciation features are concerned. In particular, it has been noticed that Polish teachers tend to modify the rhythmic structure of their utterances in English depending on the characteristics of the spoken language used by their interlocutors. The above cited study investigated Polish teacher trainees of EFL in the classroom interaction and in conversation with a native speaker of English. The difference in the organization of speech proved to be most striking: young teachers shifted to not only slower, but also more evenly syllable-timed stress pattern when talking to their students. This strategy forms a relatively successful guarantee against pronunciation-caused breakdowns in communication, as the interlocutors create their own version of spoken English.

The use of the shared non-native accent undoubtedly facilitates communication; however, I do not think any teacher would argue that this facilitation serves a real communicative goal – after all speakers of the same native language will find it much easier and more natural to communicate in their shared mother tongue than the shared foreign language. Consequently, in spite of the difficulty caused by natural accommodative tendency in the speakers, it seems important for the teachers to maintain the characteristics of the language they teach and that they can speak with a high level of proficiency (with the target of native-like pronunciation unchallenged in teacher training in Poland). The difficulty faced by Polish English teachers is obvious and easily predictable: not only do they speak English as a non-native language, with general Polish-background based problems in the use of stress/rhythm and connected speech phenomena in a native-like way, but they may also face difficulty applying the elements of teacher talk, such as slower speech tempo, with the appropriate, native-like organization of speech. Consequently, the slower their speech, the more difficult it may be to maintain the beat structure typical for English (Waniek-Klimczak in press).

The above considerations may seem to lead to a very pessimistic conclusion: pronunciation accuracy, especially the rhythmical organization of speech, cannot be viewed as a potential candidate for incidental focus-on-form instruction, as with the shared features of the interlocutors' accent, no possible breakdown in communication or need for explanation will arise. This indeed seems to be true in many Polish English classrooms, where pronunciation remains to be treated as a separate component, divorced from the actual communicative language experience. However, the situation is not totally hopeless: what I would like to suggest as an interesting area for an interplay between stress and rhythm and the classroom language are the activities where the meaning of grammatical forms is crucial for communication.

The first example is the use of auxiliaries in affirmative and negative form; the modal verb 'can' can be exploited here as the best example of how the use of a weak form of a word decides about understanding. However, in order to use the potential of this word, it is necessary to be consistent in not associating the beat with the affirmative form, stressing one syllable in 'you can go', but two in 'you can't go'. The same is true for other auxiliaries, not only modal verbs, but also primary verbs 'to have' and 'to be' – in natural speech they lack the beat in affirmative sentences. Consider the sentences below:

- (3) He is reading now, he was reading yesterday at the same time.
- (4) He has been running the business for years, and before that his father had been running it for years.

The sentences in (3) and (4) illustrate the lack of stress on verbs 'to be' and 'to have' – in casual speech, the difference between 'is' and 'was' in (3) can be predicted to be virtually non-existent in the form reduced to /z/. The difference between 'has' and 'had' in (4) is more likely to be maintained due to the /v/ –/d/ difference, but there is no beat on the auxiliary in any of the contexts (unless emphatic stress is applied). The situation is different if negation is used, as in (5) and (6):

- (5) He isn't reading now, he's watching the TV.
- (6) He hasn't run the family business, he's gone into teaching.

The beat on a negative, but not the affirmative verb phrase, offers a natural context for noticing and discussing weak forms – however, the lack of the beat on the affirmative results in the low level of intelligibility of the grammatical form.

The potential conflict between grammatical and phonetic accuracy in spoken language seems inevitable in the classroom. The use of weak forms on the so-called function or grammar words results in their lower salience in utterances, which is motivated by their predictability in natural language usage. In the non-native language usage, however, the predictability is not taken for granted, quite conversely, it is the presence of the grammatical words in complex verb phrases that tends to be looked after by the teacher. In the early years of my teaching experience, I have observed young learners performing various activities to the repeated three-beat tune:

- (7) I AM SITting, I AM JUMPing, I AM WRITing, I AM READing, etc.

Expectedly, these learners would have no experience of the stress/beat difference between sentences in (1) and (2). There are two questions that arise at this point: does it matter if they do? And if it does, how can the two aspects of focus on form: with respect to grammar and pronunciation, interact?

The answer to the first question depends on the aim of spoken language teaching: if the learners are to be equipped with the ability to process connected, rhythmical speech in English, typical for most native speakers of the language, they need to be acquainted with weak forms of grammatical words, at least in perception, if not in production. If the answer is positive, then the conflict between relative importance of these words for grammatical accuracy and the lack of their importance for pronunciation accuracy need to be reconciled. There may be many different solutions possible here: what I would like to suggest as one of them is use of incidental grammatical focus on form for the purpose of implicit exploration of the weak form issue. Consider the following examples taken from Pawlak (2006: 440):

- (8) S. (...) My parents have the car for ten years.  
T. ... Your parents HAVE a car for ten years?  
S. yes ... yes, they have a car since ten years and they like driving.

T. (...) Ok they HAVE HAD the car for ten years right now ... OK and have you ever driven a car Peter?

The exchange cited in (8) shows how the teacher corrects the student drawing his attention to the grammatical words, which become important and consequently, stressed in pronunciation. However, the lack of uptake does not allow the student and the teacher to negotiate the pronunciation or the grammaticality issue any further; the teacher continues using the form which is both grammatically and phonetically accurate, hoping the student to follow. Should the interchange of the same type be continued, with the correct grammatical version being given more often in the stressed form, the need for focus on phonetic form should arise, possibly by the teacher's asking the student to repeat the correct version. The focus on grammatical accuracy would then lead to the strengthening of the learner's foreign accent tendency to produce strong forms of grammatical words. Consequently, the choice is either for the teacher to provide explicit instruction, or to provide the language experience where the learner needs to concentrate on the grammatical correctness within a naturally rhythmic utterance, as in the guessing game below

- (9) clue: Tom had a car ten years ago, John has had a car for many years, Tim has a car.  
T. He's had a CAR.  
S. Tom  
T. No, TOM had a CAR TEN YEARS AGO.  
T. He's had a CAR  
S. John.,  
T. Right JOHN's HAD a CAR for many YEARS

The need to negotiate the meaning of the phonetic form associated with the weak form is particularly strong in the analysis of natural native speech in various types of recordings. One of the techniques employed for training translators – writing transcripts of natural connected speech – proves to be equally difficult for experienced and inexperienced language learners, depending on the tempo and the level of syntactic complexity of the recording. While this type of an activity may be too time consuming to be performed in the classroom, its shorter versions, with additional clues, such as gap filling or various types of pointing or guessing games on the basis of recordings can help to create a more natural environment for the motivation for weak forms. However, as direct interaction has the greatest effect on the development of speaking skills, nothing can be as helpful as the teacher's conscious effort to make students sensitive to the beat structure connected with weak forms of grammatical words. Focus on form in teaching the grammar issue may offer a perfect opportunity to include the strong-weak form distinction, to present and practice a rhythmic structure on the basis of the incidental focus on a grammatical form.

## 5. Conclusion

As an obvious element of spoken language, pronunciation is involved in every instance of a foreign language use in speech. The focus-on-forms approach, which se-

lects individual items of the sound system to practice, and consequently treats pronunciation as a separate component, has its own place in the foreign language teaching. It seems to be particularly useful in developing the awareness of systematic differences between the native and the target sound system and contrasts within the foreign language. However, the accuracy in pronunciation refers not only to the segmental or word-level phonetics. This article argues that accuracy needs to be viewed as an element of meaning-focused or incidental form-focused instruction in the cases when the ease of understanding is related to the beat distribution in utterances. Contrary to what might be expected, the focus on grammatical accuracy does not have to ruin phonetic accuracy with respect to such rhythmic phenomena as weak forms in English. Difficult as it may seem, even the teachers who share the interference and accommodation caused tendency for not using the weak forms of grammatical words with their students, can use the common difficulty to their and students' advantage by noticing the difference between emphatic stress in corrective utterances and the weak, unstressed forms in a natural flow of speech.

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# PART IV

TEACHER TRAINING,  
INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND  
EDUCATIONAL POLICY



*Michael Swan*

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WHY IS IT ALL SUCH A MUDDLE,  
AND WHAT IS THE POOR  
TEACHER TO DO?

ABSTRACT

Language teachers typically struggle with a variety of difficult questions. These involve problems of grammatical description (and the relations between 'form', 'meaning' and 'use'), the choice of linguistic models and targets, and the apparent opposition between more and less 'traditional' views of instructed second language acquisition. Many such questions, however, have no clear answers, or are irrelevant to the work of language teachers, or are generated by false assumptions about the nature of language and learning. More realistic assessments of the relevant issues can help to disperse conceptual confusion, thus liberating teachers' energies for their main task of teaching languages effectively.

1. Introduction

*... opuszcza mnie pewność,  
że to co ważne  
ważniejsze jest od nieważnego.*

*... I'm no longer sure  
that what's important  
is more important than what's not.*

(Wisława Szymborska)

Language teachers are usually in some kind of muddle. Languages are complicated, and it seems increasingly difficult to work out what exactly to teach and how best to teach it. For an earlier generation, the problems associated with grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, the 'four skills' and motivation were daunting enough. But recent theorising and research have added various new topics for the teacher to worry about: learner training, teacher development, strategies, formulaic language, English as a lingua franca, neurolinguistic programming, corpora in the classroom ... And confusion is compounded as teachers are blown this way and that on the changing winds of

theoretical fashion, which, paradoxically, may offer over-simple routes through the over-complicated language teaching landscape: "It's all a matter of habit formation/comprehensible input/communicative tasks/lexis/ -----" (fill in the blank).

For many teachers, the muddle is centred on the learning and teaching of grammar, the "vortex around which many controversies in language teaching have swirled" (Larsen-Freeman 2003: 9). Does grammar teaching have any effect at all on learning? How can we tell? If students' grammar improves, is this because of our teaching, or would it have improved anyway? If grammar teaching works, what grammar should we teach, and how? Which English should we take as a model – British, American, a local variety, or English as an International Language (whatever that is)? What about the grammar of speech? Should rules be presented explicitly or implicitly? Is a progressive structural syllabus useful? How can we use corpora in the classroom? Can all grammar be learnt through a 'lexical approach' or a 'task-based approach'? What is the role of practice? What level of correctness should we insist on? And so on, and so on.

Teachers are conscientious souls who like to get things clear. If they are confused, they can easily blame themselves. "These are complicated questions", they may feel, "but there must be answers, and we just haven't found them. We need to work harder, read more, think things through, attend another conference, reread our grammars. One more effort, and we'll really understand the lexical approach / negotiation of meaning / the present perfect / ...".

This is an admirable attitude; it can also be rather unrealistic. If teachers are confused, it is not necessarily their fault. Both language and learning are complex and ill-defined, and there are not always clear answers to be had. We can waste a good deal of time worrying about problems which cannot be solved, or which are not relevant to our work, or which are misleadingly posed, or which are actually nothing more than pseudo-problems. The modest purpose of this paper is to sort things out a little: to dissolve some unnecessary conceptual complexities, to suggest more realistic views of language and language teaching, and to make the whole business appear somewhat more manageable in the eyes of the beleaguered teacher. I shall find it convenient to look at four areas of potential muddle.

- (1) Grammar and grammars: what do teachers need to know?
- (2) Meaning: can we usefully distinguish 'literal meaning' and 'communicative use'?
- (3) Selection: what to teach, and what results to aim for.
- (4) Acquisition: how languages are learnt, and how best to teach them.

## 2. Grammar and grammars: what do teachers need to know?

### 2.1. Theoretical and descriptive grammar

Many teachers are interested in moving beyond the details of the language they are teaching – verb forms, relative clauses or whatever – towards a more general overview of the 'grammatical system'. However, this can quickly lead one into a bewildering conceptual landscape, where rival accounts of startling complexity jostle for attention. A glance at the index of a linguistics encyclopaedia will direct the reader to articles on

numerous 'grammars': generative, transformational, phrase structure, dependency, word, functional, systemic and dozens of other varieties. The articles themselves can present the reader with a daunting array of theoretical categories, often packaged in some very hostile terminology. How is the teacher to deal with all this? What should he or she know about these various kinds of grammar?

As many teachers probably suspect, the answer is: not very much. Theoretical grammarians seek relatively abstract generalisations which can capture the nature of language, account for cross-language similarities and differences, and help to explain how children perform the astonishing feat of learning their mother tongues. The differences between the models reflect not only different theoretical concerns, but also disagreements on matters of principle: for example, whether or not we possess inborn knowledge of how languages work – so-called 'Universal Grammar'. While these are important questions, they have little impact on day-to-day language teaching, which is generally more concerned with matters of detail than with the ways in which these details may be incorporated into higher-level abstractions. In one kind of grammatical theory, for example, verbs and prepositions are classed as members of a single overarching category, but for students of English they are quite distinct linguistic features, each presenting its own range of learning problems. That being so, the most useful kind of grammatical model for teaching is descriptive rather than theoretical – the close-to-the-surface picture offered for instance by Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002), or by one of the many less heavyweight pedagogic grammars which most teachers and students find themselves using.

## 2.2. How much grammar should teachers know?

This still leaves the question of how much descriptive grammar a teacher should know. Students make mistakes with, and ask questions about, a wide range of grammatical features, so teachers clearly need to be familiar with a good deal more than is taught in the coursebook. However, it seems to me unreasonable to expect teachers to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of English grammar, as is sometimes required on university training programmes, where future teachers may have to memorise virtually the whole of a comprehensive grammar or usage guide. Perhaps a sensible requirement is:

- (1) Teachers of English should have a good overview of the main categories which are generally used in the analysis of English grammar.
- (2) Without necessarily having a detailed knowledge of all of these categories, teachers should be familiar with the problems that generally arise under each heading for the students they are teaching.
- (3) Teachers should also know where to look up information which they don't have in their heads, as necessary.

So, for example, it seems reasonable to expect teachers to understand concepts such as *determiner* or *cohesion*, and to know where information on these can be found. And they certainly need to know about those specific aspects of determiner use or cohesion that may be problematic for their learners – for example the fact that English articles and possessives cannot be juxtaposed; or the use of the definite article to

signal prior reference; or the differences between the ways in which *it* and *this* can refer back in text; or some types of ellipsis. But there seems little point in requiring teachers to be able to list all the English predeterminers, determiners and postdeterminers, or to enumerate and exemplify all the cohesive devices listed in the grammar, if in their learners' language these grammatical categories operate in most respects as in English.

### 2.3. The 'grammatical system'

References to the 'grammatical system' of a language can give a misleading impression of homogeneity. In fact, the regularities that we call 'grammar' vary considerably in their nature. At one extreme, there are elaborate structural edifices like the Polish noun declension system, which indicates gender, number and case by a bewildering array of only partly predictable endings. At the other extreme, there is the rule for making questions in Mandarin: add 'ma' to the equivalent statement. In between, there are moderately complex rules like those relating to English negatives. Some rules apply to whole grammatical categories: English infinitives are normally preceded by 'to'. Others are more limited: only some English transfer-of-possession verbs are followed immediately by an indirect object. Some apply to only one word: 'child' has a unique plural form. Clearly, rules of these very different kinds cannot all be learnt and taught in the same way.

The 'system' metaphor can also imply that different parts of the grammar are interdependent, so that a command of the 'whole grammatical system' is necessary for successful communication. It is perhaps more realistic, however, to see grammar as a group of loosely interconnected subsystems. In a car, failure of the ignition, fuel supply or lubrication system will cause a breakdown; but failure in one of a language's subsystems has little effect on the others. Problems with article use, for example, do not stop speakers constructing sentences with correct verb forms.

Students and teachers may look for more system than is in fact there. Grammatical subsystems are often messy, with no logical explanations for the way things work. A teacher who tries to understand the exact differences in distribution between the various ways of referring to the future in English, for example, or who wants a simple general rule for the uses of the present perfect, may therefore be chasing a phantom. This untidiness frequently reflects the accidents of historical development. When a new structure enters a language, it may only slowly and partially displace an earlier structure with the same function, as has happened with the English *going to* future, or the use of *more* and *most* to form comparatives and superlatives. The divisions between one structure and another may consequently end up like the battle lines between two opposing armies, whose configurations owe little to logic. Understanding this may save teachers unnecessary worry and effort.

### 2.4. The 'grammar of speech'

Recording techniques, together with advances in computer storage and information processing, have enabled us for the first time in history to analyse the grammar of speech in its own right. This sometimes leads to exaggerated claims about the differ-

ences between spoken and written language, with a consequent further worry for teachers: should they be teaching both? In fact, the general view among scholars (e.g. Biber et al 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006) is that speech and writing differ in important ways, but draw largely on a common grammatical core. So although recent insights into the nature of spoken language will lead us to modify some aspects of our grammar teaching, they fortunately do not require us to teach two separate grammars.

### 3. Form, meaning and use

There is a claim, common in current pedagogic writing, to the effect that we have just discovered that grammar has meaning. A recently published student's grammar, for instance, tells us that "Most grammars have focused on structure, describing the form and (sometimes) meaning of grammatical constructions out of context. They have not described how forms and meanings are actually used in spoken and written discourse" (Biber et al 2002: 2). There are effectively two different assertions here: either (1) we have traditionally taught grammar without explaining the meanings of the structures involved, or (2) if we have taught one kind of meaning (literal, decontextualised), we have neglected another (pragmatic, use-defined).

The first of these is frankly bizarre. The meanings/uses of English structures have always been described in grammars, as a glance at for example Jespersen (1909-) or Kruisinga (1925-) will make clear, and they have always been taught. Modern pedagogic grammarians can hardly suppose that their predecessors made students learn plural forms without revealing that these referred to more than one entity; or that they concealed the information that past tenses were prototypically used to refer to past time; or that they were silent on the fact that forms like 'older' and 'more interesting' expressed comparison.

The other claim is at first sight more plausible, though the notion that there are "rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (Hymes 1971: 278) is scarcely novel. In this view, language can be divided into three segments: *form*, *semantics* (or 'meaning') and *pragmatics* (or 'use'), and teachers should be encouraged to concern themselves with all three (see for example Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999: 4). I believe, however, that this way of looking at things is seriously confusing. It is of course true that context converts the literal meanings of sentences into the specific messages intended by speakers and understood by hearers. A simple utterance like 'It's Wednesday' may imply any number of things: for instance 'No, it's not Thursday', or 'Put the dustbins out', or 'You said you'd pay me back today', or 'It's my half-day' or 'Remember Granny's coming to dinner'. But this aspect of pragmatics involves nothing that can usefully be taught. The countless possible interpretations of 'It's Wednesday' can hardly form part of one's teaching of the English structure used for indicating the days of the week. These interpretations are not facts about English at all; they are facts about the way language – any language – interacts with context in communication.

There are of course cases where a structure is regularly used in a particular language in a way which is not predictable from its more basic or prototypical literal meaning. This often happens when language needs to handle the more delicate aspects

of interpersonal communication: requests, the expression of respect, asking and granting permission, apologising, inviting, greeting, leave-taking and so on. Past tenses, for example, which normally indicate finished states and events, can also function in English to soften requests: 'I wondered if you could spare me a few minutes'. English verbs relating to possibility (e.g. 'can', 'may') are used to ask and grant permission. It is also the case that certain structures can function at both sentence and discourse level. Passives, for instance, are used to defocus the agent of the process being referred to; in discourse, this may facilitate topic-maintenance by avoiding a change of grammatical subject ('He turned up at the hospital at 9.00, but he wasn't seen by a doctor until 12.20'). These are facts about English, not about communication in general (unlike the various uses of 'It's Wednesday'); they can be found in dictionaries and grammars, and may certainly need to be taught to learners whose languages do not work in the same way.

Even here, however, the 'meaning/use' distinction is somewhat artificial. One might equally well say that past tenses have several different uses, including the expression of indirectness; or that verbs like *can* are used for various aspects of possibility, including permission; or that passives have both sentence-level and discourse-level uses. And as far as the language as a whole is concerned, an overall tripartite division for all language items into 'form', 'meaning' and 'use' seems unsustainable. Some formal features simply do not have anything one can reasonably call 'meaning': for example the position of English relative clauses, or gender agreement in Italian adjectives. Where forms do have meanings, it is usually difficult or impossible to distinguish sensibly between literal 'meaning' and pragmatic 'use'. The French expression 'boîte de vitesses' 'means' 'gearbox', and 'is used' to talk about gearboxes: these are obviously not two separate facts, but the same fact expressed in two different ways. Plural morphology 'means' or 'is used in reference to' more than one entity; it doesn't matter which way we put it. We are not talking about two kinds of meaning if we say that the pronouns 'he', 'she' and 'it' refer to identifiable people and things, and then add that they are used cohesively in text to refer back anaphorically to previously-mentioned people or things: the second rule is simply a part of the first. So to ask teachers to deal with 'form', 'meaning' and 'use' separately, and to teach rules for all three, is in my view to send them on a wild-goose chase.

## 4. What to teach, and what results to aim for

### 4.1. Models and targets

Teachers often worry about what variety of English their students should learn, and what standard of correctness they should aim at. Here, it is important to distinguish between a *model* and a *target*. A native-speaker variety can constitute a model: the kind of English that is used for exemplification, and whose grammar is taken as a basis for the selection of teaching points. Whether this is British, American, Canadian, Australian or some other native-speaker variety will depend on the learning context or the students' future communicative needs; in any case, the grammatical differences between these varieties are minimal.

A model is not, however, a target. Adults cannot generally learn languages perfectly, and teachers (trainers of spies apart) cannot take anything like native-speaker competence as a goal for their learners. None the less, for many teachers (as for many specialists in second language acquisition), the central problem in language teaching seems to be 'What kind of instruction will give students an accurate and appropriate command of grammatical structures in spontaneous use?' But the unpalatable fact is that, under normal circumstances, we cannot get more than part-way towards this desirable goal. Well-designed grammar instruction may well help students to become more accurate in their command of many structures; but native-speaker-like accuracy will inevitably remain out of reach, at the end of the rainbow. This being so, the question needs to be rephrased in more realistic terms: what level of competence is it reasonable to aim at, and what is the most cost-effective way of achieving this?

#### 4.2. Selection and prioritising

There is an awful lot of English grammar, and teachers understandably worry about how much of it to teach. In the same staffroom one might find in one armchair a university-trained specialist who seems determined to deal with all the grammar there is, and in another a minimally-trained native-speaking teacher, hooked on a version of the 'communicative approach', who justifies his/her ignorance of grammar by claiming that the explicit teaching of structure is more or less unnecessary. The truth, as usual, is likely to be somewhere between the two extremes. But how can teachers decide just what grammar to teach, and how much attention to give to it?

At lower levels the issues are reasonably clear. Any English beginners' course is likely to include lessons on 'be', 'have', present and past tenses, the formation of questions and negatives, and other 'basic' points. What is important is to introduce a wide enough range of structures to enable beginners to begin using the language realistically at an early stage. Whatever one's views on methodology, most people feel that grammar needs to be used communicatively for effective learning, and communication is not helped if, for example, we teach present tenses in year one and leave past tenses till year two.

At higher levels, things become more complicated. There is no time in any course to deal properly with the whole range of grammatical problems that learners are likely to encounter. The key question is not, therefore, 'How can we get students to learn all the grammar we would like them to know?' but 'Given the time constraints, how much grammar can we actually afford to teach?' The answer is generally 'Not very much', and prioritising is therefore crucial. Teaching materials may not be very helpful in this respect, and teachers may need to make their own decisions about which new grammar points to introduce, and which older points to choose for continued attention. What criteria are relevant to this decision-making?

One is *communicative effectiveness*. If students fail to master the form or use of a particular structure, will they misunderstand or be misunderstood? Unfortunately this is difficult to assess because of the unpredictable effect of context: a mistake which undermines communication in one situation may pass unnoticed in another. However, common sense and experience are reasonable guides. Clearly, to confuse actives and

passives or some modal uses can lead to trouble. 'John had told there was a meeting' conveys something very different from 'John had been told there was a meeting', and 'You mustn't sing' is not at all the same as 'You don't have to sing'. Some word order rules may merit attention: the student who wrote 'I helped cook my mother on Sunday' probably meant to say something rather different. In contrast, dropping third-person '-s', or confusing post-verbal infinitives and '-ing' forms, is unlikely to affect comprehensibility. 'My brother hope getting married next year' is easy enough to interpret.

Several other criteria can be helpful (Hulstijn 1995). *Teachability* is one. Some points of grammar are too complex for us to give reliable rules: for example the exact use of articles in generic reference, or some of the distinctions between different ways of talking about the future. Another is *frequency*: the future perfect progressive, for example, is unlikely to be high up on our list of third-year teaching points. And a third is *scope*. Rules that apply to a large number of items are more useful, all other things being equal, than those with narrow scope: we will probably not want to spend much time teaching intermediate learners the exact rules for tense use after 'I wish'.

#### 4.3. Perfectionism

Criteria such as communicative effectiveness may of course need to be balanced against considerations of acceptability. Students may have to produce English which will meet the criteria imposed by examining bodies, employers or other groups with whom they may find themselves interacting. Although third-person '-s' is unimportant for comprehensibility, consistently dropping it may provoke adverse judgements, for example, by examiners or business correspondents. Students' personal aims are also relevant: how correct do they themselves want to be?

Nonetheless, and however the balance is struck between communicative effectiveness and acceptability, it is essential not to allow the pursuit of correctness to fill the horizon. Teachers need not only to be selective in deciding what grammar to teach, but also to limit the time spent on trying to achieve a command of each chosen grammatical feature. High standards are valuable up to a point, but perfectionism in language teaching can have disastrous results. If excessive class time is devoted to continual remedial work on minor errors, there is less time available for other matters such as vocabulary expansion and skills practice; in extreme cases, teachers obsessed with correctness can end up simply teaching grammar instead of English. In addition, if students' written work is consistently covered in red ink, and if they are corrected whenever they open their mouths, they are likely to stop trying, taking refuge in a condition that a German teacher of my acquaintance described as *fehlerfreies Schweigen*: error-free silence. Teachers may feel that they are failures if their students continue to make elementary mistakes (and non-native-speaking teachers may be deeply upset at their own occasional errors). But these are counterproductive attitudes. To adapt a reassuring pronouncement made about parenting (attributed to both Bruno Bettelheim and D. W. Winnicott): a good enough teacher is good enough; and good enough English is good enough.

#### 4.4. The mother tongue

An important issue at all levels (often ignored in British or American publications on language teaching) is the contribution of the mother tongue: which aspects of English grammar do students effectively know before they start? French, German, Farsi, Japanese and Turkish all have relative structures; but the correspondences with English relative clauses (and the facts that students therefore need or do not need to learn) are different in each case. Our approach to teaching, say, prepositions or articles will depend on whether the students' mother tongue has an equivalent category: French has prepositions and articles; Polish has prepositions but no articles; Finnish mostly uses case endings instead of prepositions, and also lacks articles. The existence of cross-language equivalents can substantially reduce the teaching needed in some areas (though 'interference' problems can arise where correspondences are not exact, as when French speakers import mother-tongue article usage: 'I like the most music, but not the jazz'\*). Such cross-linguistic questions are not problematic for teachers who share their students' mother tongues. Polish, Greek or Chinese teachers generally know perfectly well what aspects of English grammar are difficult for Polish, Greek or Chinese learners, and locally-produced teaching materials may handle these points perfectly adequately. Teachers who do not speak their students' languages, however, need information about the way these languages work, and about the specific problems their speakers typically have with English (see for example Swan and Smith 2001). And British- or American-produced 'global' materials need to be used selectively and critically, since their coverage will not correspond exactly to what is needed by particular student populations.

### 5. How languages are learnt, and how to teach them

#### 5.1. What do we know about how languages are learnt?

Despite substantial research, we know surprisingly little about how languages are learnt. There is continuing disagreement about whether knowledge of mother-tongue grammar is derived entirely from the unconscious detection of recurrent patterns in the input, or whether our brains possess wired-in knowledge of how languages work – Universal Grammar (UG). There is even greater disagreement about second-language acquisition (SLA), with controversy circling round the hypothesised similarities and differences with first language acquisition, the role of UG (if it exists) in SLA, the reasons why second language learners fall short of native-speaker-like attainment, and the kinds of instruction (if any) that can reduce this gap.

Teachers trying to make sense of the bewildering debate about instructed SLA are likely to encounter questions such as the following:

- Does grammar acquisition follow inbuilt developmental sequences (Piennemann 1998) which make preplanned grammar syllabuses unworkable? Can second-language grammar only be genuinely acquired 'on-line' during naturalistic communicative activity – that is to say, by the unconscious 'picking up' of structural features, supplemented by incidental 'focus on form' when

communication problems cause learners to notice gaps in their knowledge and thus 'restructure their interlanguage' (Doughty and Williams 1998: *passim*)? And when such problems arise, are implicit teaching approaches such as recasts more or less effective than the provision of explicit information?

- Can second-language learning, like mother-tongue learning, work effectively through a lexical approach, whereby grammatical knowledge derives from the conscious or unconscious analysis of, and generalisation from, lexical 'chunks'?
- Alternatively, is separated-out off-line' grammar teaching useful or necessary to help learners master the structural complexities of a second language? If so, is such teaching primarily a matter of sensitisation and consciousness-raising which will prime focus on form during naturalistic acquisition? Or should we take a more traditional skills-learning view of SLA, whereby students start with explicit 'declarative' knowledge and move progressively towards a less conscious 'proceduralised' command of the relevant structures in spontaneous communication? If so, how can we best foster this process of 'carry-over'?
- What form should any separate grammar lessons take? Is it helpful to teach rules? Or should students work inductively, for example by analysing selected examples? Should these examples be authentic, extracted from corpora of real English in use? Should we actually take corpus data into the classroom for students to analyse?
- What is the role of practice? Is there any value in 'mechanical' non-communicative practice activities such as gap-filling and transformation exercises, or should all practice be 'communicative'?
- Is there a case for old-style memorisation of rules or tables of forms?

What on earth are teachers supposed to make of all this? An empty but comforting response is that these questions are interesting and merit research, but for the moment there is little point in seeking the right answers, because nobody knows what they are. Some of the views referred to above, especially those relating to currently favoured approaches, are often put forward with considerable conviction, but this conviction is not generally justified by the available evidence. Teachers should bear in mind, in particular:

- The role of a language classroom is arguably not to replicate the conditions of first-language acquisition, but to find effective ways of compensating for their absence.
- Current research does not convincingly support the idea that learners follow inflexible developmental routes through second-language grammar (Dąbrowska 2004: 31). And there is no research demonstrating the superior long-term effectiveness of naturalistic 'on-line' approaches to the learning of grammar as against more 'traditional' methods (Sheen 1994; Swan 2005). On the other hand, there is some evidence that explicit 'off-line' grammar teaching aids acquisition (Norris and Ortega 2000). In any case, people have

learnt languages successfully in the past through a variety of 'traditional' approaches ranging from grammar-translation to audiolingualism.

- Evidence for the wholesale acquisition of second-language grammar through the analysis of lexical chunks is not persuasive (Granger 1998: 158).
- 'Authentic' utterances depend for their meaning and authenticity on their original context of use. Taken out of context, they may be quite unsatisfactory as language teaching examples. And analysing corpus data is a specialised task, the job of a descriptive grammarian, not an intermediate language student.

## 5.2. An unconstructive opposition

Underlying much of the above is what seems to me an unconstructive debate about which aspect of language to take as a starting point. Should we systematically teach forms and their meanings (the more 'traditional' approach), while helping students to carry over their knowledge into accurate and appropriate communicative use? Or should we, in line with much current academic thinking, start from the other end, giving students experience of communication while helping them to pick up the grammar while using the language? In fact, the question is obviously far too general. 'Grammar', as we have seen, is an umbrella term for many different kinds of linguistic regularity. Teaching contexts vary considerably, as do students' aims, learning preferences and levels of prior knowledge. Given this range of variation, all available approaches and techniques are likely to be relevant in one situation or another, from the most 'formal' to the most 'communicative'. Learning example sentences or grammatical tables by heart may help with the acquisition of one structure; communicative use may be all that is necessary with another. A grammar syllabus may structure a course at lower levels, but serve simply as a checklist with more advanced students. A heavily task-based approach may have little to offer beginners, but may be ideal for students who have learnt far more language than they can use fluently.

Academic research is typically concerned to explore new solutions to problems, while teachers' practice is often rooted in more traditional ways of doing things. This can easily turn into a counterproductive antagonism, with each perspective being undervalued or rejected by adherents of the other. Applied linguistic research and theory-building have done much to systematise and deepen our understanding of how languages are learnt and can be taught, and to define and clarify the many questions that remain to be answered (for a useful survey, see Ellis 2006). At the same time, as in other areas of human enquiry (Walter 2002), the accumulated experience and reflection of generations of practitioners have provided us with an impressive body of knowledge and expertise. Both of these complementary sources of professional enlightenment have their shortcomings (often considerable), and neither should be expected to provide clearer or more reliable answers to our questions than they are able to. But both need to be understood, taken seriously and drawn on as appropriate by those responsible for designing and implementing language teaching programmes.

## 6. Summary and conclusion

I have suggested that many of the muddles with which teachers typically find themselves struggling arise from misleading assumptions, such as:

- Language is systematic.
- The things we call 'grammar' are all similar in nature.
- Teachers need a detailed knowledge of an appropriate model of grammar.
- Form, meaning and use can be systematically distinguished.
- It is realistic to take a high level of grammatical correctness as a target.
- If we find the right approach, we can somehow successfully teach all the grammar we want to.
- There is an opposition between form-based and communication-based approaches, and it is necessary to adjudicate between them.

Language teaching is a hard enough business, without our making it more complicated than it is. Teachers are not helped by feeling that they are somehow inadequate if they cannot find clear answers to complex and perhaps unanswerable questions which may be generated by unrealistic views of the nature of language and language acquisition. Nor are they helped by being offered misleadingly simple answers to such questions. If teachers can clear their minds of unnecessary worries in these areas, they can liberate their energies for their main task of teaching language as effectively as possible. This means selecting on a rational basis those language features which learners most need to master, deploying the most appropriate combination of techniques, materials and activities to teach these features, incorporating form-focused instruction where appropriate without expecting it to achieve miracles, and thus maximising their chances of producing good enough learners with good enough English.

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WHEN I THINK ABOUT GRAMMAR...  
EXPLORING ENGLISH DEPARTMENT  
STUDENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT  
GRAMMAR, GRAMMAR LEARNING  
AND GRAMMAR TEACHING

ABSTRACT

Although the last twenty years have witnessed some major changes in the way grammar, its learning and teaching are perceived by researchers and educators in the field of ELT, it seems that the changes have had little effect on classroom practices themselves. As teachers are reluctant to accept evidence provided by research, much of what is going on in language classrooms around the world, Poland included, can be described as *traditional language teaching*, in which the PPP model is dominant, and learners accumulate grammar as a *static collection of items*, without exploring their communicative value.

Since it is believed that such a situation may result from teachers' belief systems shaped, among other things, by their experiences as language learners, the aim of the study reported in the present paper was to explore the beliefs of prospective teachers with reference to grammar, its overall importance, the relationship between knowing grammar and being able to function effectively in a foreign language. The students were also asked to evaluate grammar teaching in Polish schools and to offer some solutions for making it more effective. The paper starts with a brief overview of current stands on grammar, grammar learning and grammar teaching, highlighting the most important developments in the field as well as pedagogical proposals motivated by various theoretical positions, and proceeds with the description of the study, its subjects, and instruments of data collection. The presentation and discussion of research findings follow next. The paper ends with suggesting some tentative guidelines for teacher training programmes as well as identifying some areas for further research.

## 1. Introduction

If teachers of English as a second or foreign language across the globe were to be asked about their experiences in being taught grammar, the vast majority would probably come up with descriptions of lessons in which the introduction of a specific grammar point, most frequently in the form of explicit rule provision, was followed by exercises aimed at ensuring error-free production of the feature and then, perhaps, opportunities for somewhat more spontaneous use of the form. Alternatively, they might provide accounts of implicit grammar instruction, such as this found in Audiolingualism or the Oral-Situational Approach, where the main emphasis was placed on learning automatic responses as a result of performing a large number of low-level cognitive activities in the form of drills and patterned dialogues. In both cases, however, we are dealing with a variation of what Stern (1992) labeled the *analytic strategy*, Long (1991) referred to as a *focus on forms approach* and Doughty (1998) described as *traditional language teaching*. Such instruction is based on the assumption that language is a system of forms and functions to which learners' attention should be more or less explicitly drawn by means of techniques of study and practice, even if this entails abstracting particular features from the context of actual use (cf. Stern 1992; Doughty 1998).

What may come as a surprise, this traditional approach to teaching language forms has turned out to be quite impervious to change in foreign language contexts such as the Polish one despite the major theoretical and empirical developments in the field of second language acquisition as well as the pedagogical proposals that these advancements have generated (cf. Skehan 1998; Fotos 2005; Pawlak 2006a, 2006b). For example, compelling evidence that L2 attainment is constrained by acquisitional orders and sequences, language learning does not proceed in a linear fashion and production practice in itself does not ensure that the structures taught will become available in spontaneous language use, does not appear to have brought about any significant changes in foreign language pedagogy. This is reflected in the fact that most coursebooks still more or less tacitly rely on a structural syllabus, learners are typically expected to immediately produce the targeted form rather than being first asked to process the form-function mappings for comprehension, and teachers tend to follow the PPP (presentation – practice – presentation) procedure, frequently neglecting to sufficiently emphasize the free production component thereof and depriving students of the opportunity to use the structure in real-operating conditions. While the reluctance to embrace some of the proposals advanced by theorists and researchers may be warranted given their incompatibility with foreign language settings, the failure to adopt those more practicable may be connected with teachers' belief systems which are shaped, among other things, by their experiences as language learners as well as the methodology training they receive at the college or university level (cf. Richards and Lockhart 1994).

It is for this reason that any attempt to introduce modifications into current practices of teaching grammar in Polish schools should involve a careful investigation of the beliefs held in this respect by prospective teachers since teacher training programs at foreign languages departments appear to be perfectly suited for initiating pedagogic innovation. The present paper reports the findings of a study which contri-

butes to this line of enquiry by exploring the attitudes that English department students display towards grammar, grammar learning and teaching. At the outset, a succinct overview of the current theoretical positions and research findings in these areas is provided, which is followed by the description of the subjects and instruments of data collection as well as the presentation and discussion of the research findings. These, in turn, serve as a basis for proposing tentative guidelines for teacher training programs and suggesting possible directions for further empirical investigations.

## 2. An overview of current views on grammar, grammar learning and grammar teaching

The last twenty years have witnessed major changes in our perceptions of grammar, the way learners go about mastering grammatical structures, and the most effective ways in which formal aspects of language should be taught. For one thing, this was due to the realization that models of language have to include not only rules of grammar but also rules of use, which led Hymes (1972) to propose the concept of communicative competence, subsequently elaborated upon by Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983), Bachman (1990) and Savignon (2001). Equally important were the research findings showing that conscious rule knowledge does not transfer to communicative situations, learners pass through a number of intermediary stages before they master certain linguistic features, and formal instruction seems powerless to alter the natural route of acquisition (see comprehensive reviews in Ellis 1994; Larsen-Freeman 2003; Pawlak 2006a). These, in turn, led to the advent of influential theoretical positions, such as Krashen's Monitor Model (e.g. Krashen 1982, 1985) which attributed a marginal role to conscious rule knowledge and advocated the *zero-grammar option*, thus providing theoretical underpinnings for such non-interventionist approaches as immersion, the Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrell 1983) or the Communicational Teaching Project (Prabhu 1985). Although approaches of this kind have themselves come in for criticism and there is currently broad consensus that form-focused instruction aids L2 development and may even be necessary in some contexts, they sensitized us to the necessity of providing learners with ample opportunities for meaning and message conveyance. In effect, what is being advocated is not a reversal to teaching isolated features, but rather an attempt to combine form and meaning in the performance of communicative activities, as is visible in Long's (1991) concept of a *focus on form*. Since, for reasons of space, detailed characterization of all of such developments would be impossible at this point, this section will only deal with the dynamic perspectives on grammar, the nature of grammar learning as well as several current trends in form-focused instruction.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2003), the predominant trends in linguistic description which place a premium on competence rather than performance have perpetuated numerous misconceptions about the nature of grammar. As a consequence, many language teachers view grammar as an area of knowledge, equate grammaticality with accuracy, associate grammar with rules, believe that it mainly operates at the sentence level, stress the arbitrariness of the language system, and are sometimes convinced that there is always one permissible answer. In other words, it is what Batstone

(1994) has referred to as a *product perspective* that seems to be prevalent in language pedagogy, with grammar being perceived as a static collection of items that have to be taught one by one for the complete system to be constructed. As Larsen-Freeman (2003) argues, however, uncritically adopting such a perspective is bound to be counterproductive as it prevents teachers from making grammar instruction engaging and, crucially, does not guarantee that learners will be able to transfer what they are taught to spontaneous language use. Instead, there is a need to emphasize the complexity, rationality, non-arbitrariness, discursive nature and dynamism of the language system, thus adopting a *process perspective* (Batstone 1994). In this view, grammar is an important resource offering language users numerous choices and alternatives at the level of discourse which allow them to make their meanings more precise and position themselves in the world on a moment-by-moment basis with regard to their attitudes and presuppositions. To make the dynamic nature of the language system more explicit, Larsen-Freeman (2003) makes a distinction between *grammar*, associated with static, rigid descriptions of linguistic knowledge, and *grammaring*, which emphasizes its meaning-making potential and skill-like nature. She also proposes a three-dimensional framework in which grammatical structures are described in terms of their *form* (structure), the *meanings* they express (semantics) and their *appropriate uses* in specific contexts (pragmatics), stressing that all of them are vital in using language not only *accurately* but meaningfully and appropriately as well. As she illuminates, "By thinking of grammar as a skill to be mastered, rather than a set of rules to be memorized, we will be helping ESL/EFL students go a long way toward the goal of being able to accurately convey meaning in the manner they deem appropriate" (2001: 255). There can be little doubt that such understanding of grammatical knowledge has important implications for the classroom and at the very least calls for adding a process dimension to traditional, product-oriented instructional approaches.

As regards the acquisition of L2 grammatical knowledge, researchers are now convinced that it is not a matter of *accumulating entities* (Rutherford 1987), where linguistic items are simply added one at a time in a block-building fashion, but, rather, "a gradual process involving the mapping of form, meaning, and use" (Larsen-Freeman 2001: 255). This is because interlanguage development is largely based on the formation and testing of hypotheses about the features of the TL, with the effect that learner output is frequently fraught with errors, backsliding is bound to occur and a certain degree of variability may often be the norm. In addition, there is strong evidence that much language production may be lexical in nature, with learners relying on language chunks and prefabricated patterns to get their meanings across, which results in imprecision and lack of accuracy until the formulae become analyzed and a stable rule-based representation is built (Skehan 1998). Perhaps the most crucial insight, however, is that there exist fixed developmental orders and sequences in the acquisition of many morphosyntactic features in English and other languages, which all learners have to pass through and which are largely impervious to pedagogical intervention (cf. Ellis 1994; Pawlak 2006a). As Pienemann (1989, 1998) postulates, the acquisition of such *developmental features* entails movement through six stages, each requiring a greater degree of analysis and greater capacity to manipulate the constituents of syntactic strings. What is important, however, such constraints only apply to implicit knowledge under-

lying spontaneous language use and only concern the production of grammatical structures, which implies that explicit knowledge can be developed at any time and so can the comprehension dimension of implicit representation (Ellis 1997, 2006). Besides, even though instruction may be powerless to subvert the natural pattern of development, it can speed up the process of acquisition, result in the acquisition of features which learners are psycholinguistically ready to acquire, those not psycholinguistically constrained or lexical chunks, and improve access to elements of L2 knowledge, assumptions that have been corroborated in form-focused instruction research (Norris and Ortega 2001; Ellis 2002a, 2005; Pawlak 2006a).

Not surprisingly, the shift towards more dynamic conceptualizations of grammar and the findings of research into the processes of L2 development have contributed to the emergence of fresh pedagogical proposals aiming at enhancing the effectiveness of formal instruction. In the first place, Long's (1991) influential distinction between a *focus on forms* and a *focus on form* has prompted researchers to investigate different ways in which instructional focus on linguistic features can be embedded in meaningful communication. In line with the original formulation, such intervention can be *incidental*, *triggered by learner need*, *reactive* and *extensive* in nature, in which case corrective feedback is provided in the course of message conveyance, preferably in the form of *recasts* (i.e. reformulations of erroneous utterances which preserve their intended meaning) as well as other devices typically used to negotiate meaning (i.e. confirmation checks or clarification requests). Unplanned focus on form can also be *preemptive*, in the sense that the teacher or one of the students may decide to raise a query about a linguistic feature that is perceived as problematic, such as a new lexical item or grammatical structure in a reading text (Ellis 2001a; Williams 2005; Nassaji and Fotos 2007).

Following the extension of the original definition, it is now recognized that focus on form can also be *planned* and *intensive* as long as it takes place in response to learner need (e.g. persistent errors) and students' engagement with meaning precedes attention to the code (Doughty and Williams 1998a; Williams 2005). As is the case with incidental focus on form, also here the teacher can opt for some sort of corrective feedback, the only difference being that only one preselected form or a set of such forms will be repeatedly targeted in classroom discourse. Alternatively, it is possible to design *focused communication tasks*, which require the use of a specific feature for successful completion (e.g. the use of prepositions of place in a spot-the-difference picture description task), or employ some form of *enriched input*, either through *input flooding*, where the frequency of the targeted feature is increased in written or spoken text, or *input enhancement*, in which case a preselected form is flagged or highlighted in some way in speech or writing (e.g. typographical alterations, added emphasis) (Doughty and Williams 1998b; Ellis 2001a, 2003; Williams 2005; Nassaji and Fotos 2007). Although such a solution would probably be frowned upon by some researchers who prefer to investigate the contributions of single instructional options, there is also a possibility or perhaps even necessity of combining different focus on form devices in actual teaching in order to maximize learning opportunities (cf. Pawlak 2004, 2006a). It should also be pointed out that, irrespective of whether focus on form is unplanned or planned, fully embracing the tenets of the approach would entail supplanting a

structural syllabus with some form of a task-based one, where instruction is organized around communicative tasks rather than preselected linguistic features (cf. Ellis 2003).

Apart from the pedagogical proposals connected with various interpretations of focus on form, it is also possible to point to other key developments in grammar instruction. For one thing, the claims of the *weak-interface position*, which states that explicit knowledge can turn into implicit representation only when learners have achieved psycholinguistic readiness to acquire developmentally constrained linguistic features, have prompted some researchers to question the value of output-based instruction, as represented by the PPP sequence. Instead, they propose *structured input activities* such as *interpretation tasks* (Ellis 1995, 1997) or *input processing instruction* (VanPatten 1996, 2002), which encourage learners to process the target structure for comprehension, understand the meanings it conveys and undertake form-function analysis thereof. The advantage of reception-based grammar teaching is connected with the fact that, as was pointed out above, the ability to comprehend the meanings of linguistic features is not subject to developmental constraints, nor is the learners' capacity to notice them in the input and conduct internal comparisons. The weak-interface hypothesis also provides a rationale for the use of *consciousness-raising activities* and *text-reconstruction tasks* such as the dictogloss which assist learners in developing explicit knowledge of the target structure by encouraging them to solve grammar problems through meaning focused interaction, reflect on their TL use and engage in metatalk (Fotos and Ellis 1991; Swain 1998; Ellis 2002b; Fotos 2002). Although the resulting awareness of forms and rules and the way these relate to the meanings expressed does not immediately translate into unplanned production, it may be instrumental in stimulating interlanguage change in the long run and, under favorable conditions, sufficiently automatized explicit representation can be accessed and deployed in real-time performance (Yuan and Ellis 2003; DeKeyser and Juffs 2005).

On a somewhat different tack, advances in corpus linguistics have made it possible for researchers to explore the ways in which grammar operates in naturally occurring spoken and written discourse. This has resulted in proposals that instruction should go beyond the level of a sentence and target as well suprasentential aspects of grammatical knowledge, focusing not only on the rules governing written texts but also the characteristic features of the grammar of speech (Celce-Murcia 2002; McCarthy and Carter 2002; Larsen-Freeman 2003). Insights into the role of prefabricated patterns and formulae in language acquisition and use have also led to the emergence of lexical approaches, which emphasize the importance of teaching multi-word units which allow fluency and contribute to linguistic novelty and creativity (e.g. Lewis 1998; Willis 2003). While such pedagogical proposals do not deny the value of grammar teaching, it is perceived as useful only when learners have built up a sufficiently large mental lexicon to which generalizations can be applied. In addition, its role is typically limited to aiding the progression from the stage *lexicalization*, where meanings are expressed imprecisely and inaccurately, to the stage of *consolidation* or *syntacticalization*, where language chunks are gradually analyzed and the application of a rule-governed system allows greater correctness, precision and linguistic creativity (cf. Skehan 1998; Willis 2003).

While such pedagogical proposals are informed by recent theoretical positions and research findings, it does not mean of course that all of them would be equally applicable to our educational context and should be uncritically embraced by practitioners. It is obvious, for example, that the existence of the orders and sequences of acquisition is not directly relevant to classroom practice, replacing a structural syllabus with a task-based one is not likely to be effective in a situation where in- and out-of-class exposure is limited, and teaching TL forms only through structured-input activities requires considerable expertise and might simply be too time-consuming (Pawlak 2006a). It should also be emphasized that researchers are not all unanimous in their support of the weak-interface, with the adherents of Skill-Building Theory, for example, arguing that declarative knowledge can convert into procedural knowledge if a sufficient amount of practice occurs (Johnson 1996; DeKeyser 1998). If such a position is adopted, traditional approaches to grammar teaching based on a structural syllabus and the PPP procedure receive important theoretical underpinnings and do not have to be regarded as less efficacious than some of the innovations described above. Furthermore, somewhat in contrast to what the writers of methodology textbooks often advocate, research findings show that deductive teaching tends to produce better results than inductive teaching (Erlam 2003) and that explicit instructional techniques are superior to implicit ones (Norris and Ortega 2001). Obviously, all of this should not be taken to mean that practitioners should tenaciously cling to traditional approaches and refuse to introduce modifications to the ways they teach but, rather, that the adoption of innovations should be carefully premeditated. After all, logic dictates that it is better to improve on the techniques and procedures that have been working for our students than replace them with methodological options that might not work at all.

### 3. Subjects, data collection instruments and types of analysis

The subjects of the study were 81 Polish students of English philology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, 64 females and 17 males. Of this number, 64 were enrolled in the third year of a BA program (30 at the School of English and 34 in the Teacher Training College) while the remaining 17 were attending the first and second year MA courses at the School of English. The participants reported that they had been learning English for an average of over 12 years, with 4 and 23 years being the shortest and the longest periods of study. Interestingly, the mean length of instruction was identical in the two groups (12.12) and they were similar in terms of inter-student variation, as evident in standard deviations (3.41 for the BA students and 3.33 for the MA students). The vast majority of the students (91.36%) stated they had received some form of out-of-school instruction before being admitted into the English department, either in the form of private tutoring or different kinds of language courses. Additionally, 15 (18.52%) students reported having visited an English country for study or leisure purposes and, what may be surprising, 3 (3.71%) of them stated they had not attended English lessons at school and had learnt the language on their own.

Given the massive exposure to the TL and the intensive nature of instruction in foreign languages departments, all the 81 participants could be regarded as advanced

and successful learners of English who were aware of their strengths and weaknesses, had their own favorite ways of dealing with learning tasks, and held strong beliefs about language, language learning and teaching. Moreover, since the participants had attended teacher training courses as part of the BA program, they had a fair grounding in teaching methodology and were presumably aware of what language learning involves and the instructional options available to teachers. The main differences between the BA and MA students lay in the fact that the latter could be expected to represent a slightly higher level of proficiency, they might have had greater experience with teaching in the state school system and, equally importantly, the English department they were attending set higher standards than those in some teacher training colleges. While not numerous, such factors provide sufficient justification for investigating the ways in which the two groups differ with respect to their views on the nature of grammar and issues involved in its learning and teaching.

The data were obtained by means of a questionnaire which was filled in by the students during their classes, ensuring that all the copies were returned and could be included in the analysis. Both the instructions and the survey items were in Polish but the participants were told that they could respond in Polish or in English as they saw fit. While such a solution may be surprising given the respondents' proficiency in English, it minimized the risk of their failing to answer some questions for fear of being unable to express their views clearly in the TL or answering them imprecisely. The first part of the survey aimed at obtaining background information about the subjects and contained questions about the type of program and year of study, gender, duration of the learning experience and out-of-school contact with English. The questions in the second part were all open-ended and they were directly related to the goals of the study. Firstly, the students were asked about their associations with the word 'grammar', whether it was an important component of language and, if so, why they thought so, whether grammatical knowledge could be equated with the knowledge of language, how they would define the term, and whether there was a connection between the knowledge of grammar and the ability to use English in a competent manner. Then, the focus shifted to issues involved in grammar learning and teaching, with the survey items centering on the ease with which the respondents learnt grammar, their opinions about the quality of grammar instruction in Polish schools and the ways it should best be taught, and, finally, their own ideas for learning it most effectively. The responses the subjects provided were subjected to qualitative and quantitative analysis, which involved seeking out patterns in the data, determining the main categories for each item, and establishing the number of responses that fell into them. Since the researchers were interested in potential differences between the BA and MA students, separate analyses were also conducted for the two groups, but, owing to the small number of MA participants, no attempt was made to distinguish between the first and second year subjects in this case.

#### 4. Findings of the study

The analysis of the questionnaire responses showed that the subjects held traditional views on grammar, mostly subscribing to the product perspective and equating it with

a static area of knowledge, sentence-level rules, specific grammatical structures and accuracy. Quite in line with such assumptions, most of them were also in favor of focus on forms approaches, where linguistic features are introduced one by one and intensively practiced in numerous, mainly controlled exercises. When asked about their associations with the concept of grammar, for example, 53.08% of the students made some kind of reference to rules and principles, 33.33% mentioned doing exercises, 27.16% included comments about tenses or structures, 8.64% jotted down the names of the authors of popular grammar books (Alexander, Vince, etc.) or referred to examinations. There were some differences in this area between the BA and MA subjects, the former being somewhat less likely to associate grammar with rules (51.56% vs. 58.82%) but at the same time more often referring to doing exercises (35.93% vs. 23.52%) and specific grammatical structures (29.69% vs. 17.65%).

Preoccupation with rules and structures was also evident in the definitions of grammar provided by the respondents as 75.31% of them described it as 'a set of principles governing a language' or 'making it possible to construct sentences', and 19.75% equated it with the 'structure of language' or specific language features. In contrast to the questions concerning associations, in this case it was the BA students who were more likely to talk about rules and less inclined to mention specific constructions than the MA participants (78.13% vs. 64.70% and 17.19% vs. 23.53%, respectively). Interesting as they are, such differences do not affect the overall tendency to view grammar as a static body of knowledge that has to be mastered in much the same way as any other factual information, a finding that echoes the one reported by Pawlak (2006b) in his study of English teachers in different types of schools, 57% of whom expressed very similar views. On the one hand, the fact that English department students have a propensity to define grammar in terms of rules more frequently than practicing teachers may be surprising because it could be surmised that their methodology training should have made them aware of the meaning-making potential of this language subsystem. On the other hand, however, a finding like this may be reflective of the emphasis placed on linguistic courses in BA programs which may have a much greater impact on students' belief systems than teacher training. In fact, such an assumption finds support in the subjects' responses, some of which sound as if they came straight from a syntax textbook rather than a methodology class.

When it comes to the place of grammar in the overall TL knowledge, the vast majority of the respondents were strongly convinced of its significance as a language subsystem, which is evidenced by the fact that 81.48% answered the question in the affirmative. 16.05% also expressed the view that grammar plays a key role, with the caveat that other subsystems and skills such as lexis or communicative ability may be equally or perhaps even more vital to communication. The most common justifications for the weight of grammatical knowledge revolved around accuracy (46.97% of those who answered in the affirmative), the ability to communicate (25.76%), precision of expression (22.73%), and its role imposing structure on different components of language such as lexical items (21.21%). There were only slight differences here between the BA and MA students, with the former being somewhat more likely to stress the importance of grammar (82.81% vs. 76.47%), and the types and frequency of the explanations were very similar. Only 3 respondents (2 in the BA group and 1 in

the MA group) stated that the knowledge of grammar was unimportant, claiming, for example, that 'people abroad do not speak grammatically and it is still possible to understand them'.

The subjects' conviction that grammar plays a key role also found its reflection in their responses to the question concerning the relationship between grammatical knowledge and the ability to function competently in English. Well over half of the students (47 or 58.02%) were unequivocal in their opinion that such a relationship is very strong and stressed once again that familiarity with this language subsystem allows much greater precision in comprehension and production (51.06% of the positive responses), facilitates communication by diminishing the potential for misunderstandings, communication breakdowns or ambiguities (14.89%) and reduces the likelihood of the occurrence of errors (10.64%). Another 29.63% of the subjects also recognized the contribution of grammar to attaining high levels of proficiency in the TL and helping avoid negative social evaluation, but they made the provision that grammatical competence is not necessary for simply getting messages across and it is insufficient to ensure successful communication. In justification of such a stance, one student wrote, 'although native speakers do not attach importance to accuracy, it is what they require from us', another commented that 'the knowledge of grammar is very important at higher proficiency levels but not so important at the elementary level', and yet another expressed the view that 'the better we know grammar, the better linguistic competence we possess, but it should be accompanied by vocabulary, pronunciation, etc'. Only 3 participants stated that grammatical knowledge was irrelevant, 2 provided responses that were irrelevant or impossible to interpret, and in 2 cases there were no answers at all. As regards the differences between the BA and MA participants, the former were somewhat less likely to recognize the significance of grammar than the latter (56.52% vs. 64.71%). While such a finding could reasonably be attributed to the greater educational and professional experience of the students in the MA program, this interpretation must be viewed as speculative given the small size of the group and the size of the difference.

Even though the knowledge of grammar was viewed as vital either as a component of language or as a tool ensuring its accurate, precise and socially acceptable use, there was also a realization that it cannot be equated with the knowledge of the TL. This stance was adopted by 82.72% of the respondents and, in this case, the percentages in both groups were almost identical (82.81% for the BA group and 82.35% for the MA group). As regards the types of rationale supplied, the students most frequently pointed to the fact that vocabulary is much more important (49.25% of those who answered in the negative), the knowledge of rules does not guarantee that they will be successfully used in communication (26.87%), being able to get messages across is a skill in its own right (17.91%), communicative goals are difficult to attain without good or at least serviceable pronunciation (10.45%) and familiarity with TL cultural norms may be crucial (4.48%). Interestingly, the two groups differed to some extent on this count, with lexis figuring much less often in the responses provided by the BA students than those of their MA counterparts (47.17% vs. 57.14%) and the opposite holding for the distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge (28.30% vs. 20.00%). While there may be many explanations for this state of affairs or such a re-

sult could just be reflective of the beliefs held by this particular group of participants, one possibility is that in providing their justifications the BA students could have drawn upon the methodology courses they were attending while the MA subjects relied more on their experience in using English for genuine communication. The 14 subjects (17.28%) for whom the knowledge of grammar was by and large tantamount to the knowledge of language justified their opinions by stating that it is responsible for the accuracy and precision of output and that it is indispensable at higher levels of proficiency. Still, the responses were in most cases far from categorical, with the students admitting that communication is feasible with only rudiments of grammar and that much depends on how the subsystem is defined.

While such responses are comforting and, when combined with some of the answers to the questions about the ability to function competently in the TL, they provide evidence that most of the students are cognizant of the limitations of grammatical knowledge on its own, closer analysis of the data raises doubts as to their awareness of what language is and what its use in fact involves. In the first place, when explaining why language knowledge cannot be equated with grammar, the vast majority of the respondents emphasized the crucial role of vocabulary and pronunciation or made references to rather vaguely defined communicative skills. In other words, they focused on a single component of current conceptualizations of communicative competence, known as *grammatical* (Canale and Swain 1980; Canale 1983; Bachman 1990) or *systemic* (Johnson 2001) *competence*. However, all such models assume that language ability also includes *discourse (textual) competence*, related to creating coherent and cohesive texts and managing the conversation, *sociolinguistic (pragmatic) competence*, related to using the TL appropriately and knowing sociocultural conventions, and *strategic competence*, which helps language users compensate for gaps in their systemic knowledge or may even be responsible for integrating all the other resources (Canale and Swain 1980; Canale 1983; Bachman 1990; Savignon 2001; Johnson 2001). Except for three comments that somewhat imprecisely stated that TL knowledge encompasses culture, there was no mention of any of these dimensions of communicative competence in the data. This is extremely disconcerting as it indicates that not only do the students lack awareness of such issues, but also that, despite representing very high proficiency levels, they themselves may not possess sufficient abilities in these areas.

Also disturbing is the fact that only about one fifth (18) of the respondents emphasized that conscious knowledge of rules is not tantamount to the ability to employ them in spontaneous communication, thus displaying the awareness of the distinction between explicit (declarative) and implicit (procedural) knowledge (Ellis 2005). Although some of the students may have simply considered other factors as more pertinent to explaining the limitations of grammatical knowledge, the potential for interface between these two types of representation is so basic and crucial to teaching practice that it could have been expected to figure more prominently in the questionnaire responses. Another problem is that, as was the case with the definition of grammar, it is not at all clear whether all the students who referred to the difference between declarative and procedural knowledge were expressing their concern with the availability of consciously known rules in spontaneous communication or, rather, simply repeating what they had heard in their methodology lectures or classes. After all, it was the

BA students who were more likely to touch upon such issues and it should be noted that they were following a teacher training program at the time the questionnaire was conducted. Not less importantly, it was not at all clear whether the expression 'being able to use grammatical structures' was used in all cases to indicate communicative, spontaneous use of linguistic features or perhaps the application of a particular form in a specific linguistic context, as required on tests. As Pawlak (2006b) showed, language teachers often understand the term 'use' in the latter sense and this could have also been the case with at least some of the respondents in the present study.

Moving on to the subjects' views on learning grammar, 49 of them (60.49%) stated that it was easy for them to gain control over English grammar, 17 (20.99%) highlighted both the easy and difficult aspects of this language subsystem and 15 (18.52%) admitted that mastering it represented a challenge. There was not much difference in this respect between the BA and MA students, with 60.94% of the former and 58.82% of the latter claiming that they did not experience difficulty, although the disparity was somewhat greater among those who did find grammar problematic (18.75% vs. 23.53%, respectively). While this might indicate that, due to their greater proficiency and experience in learning and perhaps also teaching English, the MA participants manifested increased awareness of the complexities of the language system, this interpretation can only be viewed as speculative for the reasons expounded above. As regards the rationale provided, the participants most often attributed their success to intensive practice (22.45% of those for whom grammar was easy), the logic of the system (20.41%), the skill of their teachers (14.29%), their analytic approach to learning (8.16%) or such personal traits as being hard-working and systematic (6.12%). On the other hand, those who reported problems mostly ascribed them to tedium and lack of pleasure (33.33%), the difficulty in applying rules in unplanned speech (26.66%), the existence of structural differences between Polish and English (20.00%) as well as boring and unattractive materials (13.33%). The students who were in two minds about the challenge of learning grammar provided similar arguments, claiming that they did well on tests but could not use grammar properly in communication (29.41%) and adding that much depended on the nature of the material being studied and the lucidity of teacher presentation (23.53%). A particularly interesting and perhaps fitting comment came from one student who wrote that 'learning grammar is easy up to a point; when it comes to the complex transformations I came across here, things got much more tricky; I typically learned by heart, thoughtlessly'. This rightly shows that there is much more to English grammar than tenses or modals, but also indicates that in English departments perhaps too much emphasis is placed on introducing rare and difficult constructions at the expense of communicative use of simpler and more common structures, a point which will be taken up in the concluding section of this paper.

While the fact that the majority of English department students find grammar learning or at least some aspects of this process easy is not surprising, what did come as a surprise were their responses to the question concerning what they thought was the best way to learn it on their own. In the first place, as many as 12 participants (14.81%), of whom 9 were BA and 3 MA students, failed to provide a comment whatsoever, which is surely a cause for concern. This is because, although a failure to pro-

vide an answer can perhaps be attributed to the fact that this was the last item in the survey, an equally plausible explanation could be that despite all the methodology training, the respondents could not think of a single learning strategy that could help them better master or use grammatical structures. As for those students who did supply a response, they pointed to very traditional ways of going about learning this language subsystem and more or less tacitly admitted that what is crucial is the knowledge of rules and their application in controlled exercises. This is evidenced by the fact that most of them (40 or 57.97% of those who elected to comment) emphasized the need to practice the grammatical structures taught, saying, for example, that 'it is necessary to read grammar books and do exercises', 'exercises are the one and only way', or 'first you need to understand the rules and only later move on to exercises'. Other suggestions for dealing with grammar included using a good grammar book such as Murphy or Martinet, memorizing the rules, translating sentences into Polish, noting down examples or analyzing complex constructions. On a somewhat more optimistic note, 10 respondents (14.49%) pointed to the value of reading English newspapers and watching films with the original soundtrack in order to see how grammar structures are used in real life and 3 (4.92%) stressed the need to use them in communication with others. Several respondents also indicated the usefulness of making associations, drawing graphs or tables or using multimedia programs, and simply stated that it is necessary to be systematic. Generally speaking, however, the students proved to be rather uninventive in their approach to learning grammar, preferring quite traditional cognitive strategies such as formal practice, and manifested little awareness of the potential contributions of metacognitive, social or affective strategic behaviors. Particularly disturbing is the fact that very few of them mentioned ideas for how declarative rule knowledge can be proceduralized and automatized to the extent that it can be applied in spontaneous communication. It should also be noted that there were no major differences between the responses of the BA and MA students with respect to this item.

The last issue touched upon in the survey were the students' views on teaching grammar, with one question requesting them to evaluate the quality of instruction in Polish schools and the other to express their views on how grammar should best be taught. When it comes to the assessment of teaching practices, it was very harsh, as over half of the students (53.08%) were highly critical of the way grammatical structures are introduced and practiced and only 16 participants (19.75%) stated that, basing on their experiences, they could not see any major problems. The negative comments were more common among the BA (57.81%) than the MA (35.29%) students, which may be connected with the fact that the former had more vivid recollections of the way they had been instructed, but the latter, in turn, were somewhat less likely to provide positive assessment (17.64% vs. 20.31%). The most frequent reservation about the quality of grammar instruction had to do with inadequate opportunities to use the structures taught in communication (34.88%), which once again touches upon the issue of the distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge. Such a stance is visible in the following comment from an MA student: '(...) In schools the main emphasis is placed on teaching rules and there is a lack of sufficient practice. Since I have done a lot of tutoring, I know that on graduating from school students often know

rules but they cannot employ them in their own utterances'. Other frequently cited criticisms concerned the teachers' preference for deductive rather than inductive presentation (16.28%), boredom (13.95%) and lack of logic (9.30%). There were also 20 participants (24.69%), 20.31% among the BA and 41.18% among the MA students, who were hesitant about the quality of teaching grammar, most often commenting that much depended on the teacher.

Although 4 participants failed to provide a response, the others offered quite numerous and diverse suggestions on how grammar could be taught more effectively, some of which were contradictory. The most frequent were the comments that grammatical structures should be introduced inductively (18.56%) since, in the respondents' view, this ensures engagement on the part of the students, respects their intellectual powers and is inherently motivating. The students also stressed the need to provide learners with ample controlled practice (16.05%), enable them to employ language forms in communicative tasks (14.81%), introduce grammar in context (13.58%), supply more examples illustrating the use of a structure (12.35%), give lucid explanations (8.64%) or compare target language features with their native language equivalents (6.17%). There were also calls for moderation in the teaching of grammar, the use of the PPP sequence, the selection of good coursebooks and the employment of visual aids as well as comments that no changes should be introduced. Looking at such responses, it is easy to see some contrasting opinions on what constitutes effective grammar teaching, since, for instance, it would be difficult to reconcile appeals for more controlled practice with those for more spontaneous language use or the use of induction with giving clear explanations. While the sheer number and diversity of responses precludes us from making detailed comparisons between the comments in the two groups, there was a striking difference in the importance attached to induction since it was mentioned by 14 BA participants compared to just 1 MA student. One cannot help thinking that such an outcome was the corollary of the methodology training the BA students were receiving rather than their own experiences or preferences.

The analysis of the responses to the items concerning the teaching of grammar revealed as well two disturbing facts, namely some of the students' confusion as to basic terminology and sometimes erroneous assumptions as to what effective grammar instruction involves. For one thing, there were comments which demonstrate that the students did not understand the difference between implicit and inductive teaching, and tended to conflate the two, which led to bizarre recommendations that instruction should be inductive and implicit at the same time. Also, several responses suggested that, despite all the training, some students could not tell the difference between induction and deduction, and others simply made little sense. Such problems are illustrated in comments like: '(...) I personally prefer inductive teaching – first the rules and then practice (...)', '(...) too much emphasis is placed on formal teaching of grammar, without adding more inductive techniques', or 'Grammar should be taught linearly; besides written exercises, it should also be practiced in speaking'. It goes without saying that here the understanding of induction is faulty, discovery techniques also fall into the category of formal grammar teaching and linearity does not typically apply to the transition from the written to the oral mode. One would surely expect prospective teachers to have greater awareness of such issues, not least because this

might help them make better use of various teaching resources and avoid confusion as they enter the classroom. Finally, as was made clear in the overview of the theoretical positions and research findings, there is no empirical evidence that induction is superior to deduction and in fact the opposite seems to be the case. It would be interesting to see whether such unwarranted assumptions stem from the respondents' experiences as learners or teachers or they are the residue of at best imprecise interpretation of the information imparted to them in methodology courses.

## 5. Conclusions, implications and directions for future research

The picture that emerges from the analysis of the English department students' beliefs about grammar, its learning and teaching is exceedingly complex and quite difficult to interpret. On the whole, however, most of the English department students who participated in the study expressed rather traditional views in all of these areas, frequently equating the knowledge of grammar with rules and accuracy, and viewing it in terms of product rather than process. Not surprisingly, such beliefs affected the respondents' opinions about grammar learning and teaching since, in this case, particular importance seems to be attached to understanding rules and formal practice of grammatical structures. Although most of the participants do realize that grammatical knowledge is not tantamount to the knowledge of the TL and some of them are aware that conscious mastery of rules is insufficient for spontaneous communication, there were few references to the remaining dimensions of communicative competence and hardly any mention of the pedagogical innovations outlined at the beginning of this paper. As Nassaji and Fotos (2007: 9) write, "(...) although teachers believe that pedagogical grammar is essential for the language classroom, many find it challenging – not only because it is difficult to learn and teach, but also partially because of the emphasis on communicative pedagogy many received during their training". In the case of the participants of this study, however, a very different problem seems to come to the fore because they attach ample or perhaps even excessive attention to TL forms but fail to sufficiently emphasize communicative aspects of grammar, a situation that is typical of foreign language contexts. Despite slight differences in some areas, this comment applies in equal measure to the BA and MA participants and, what is particularly disconcerting, some of the subjects manifested little awareness of rudimentary concepts, used specialist terms without being fully cognizant of their application, and found it difficult to mention even a single strategy that would facilitate the learning of grammar.

While the beliefs held by the participants cannot be only attributed to the training they received in the English department as they reflect the totality of their learning and teaching experience, certain steps can definitely be taken in BA and MA programs to modify some of the views and initiate innovation in the way language forms are taught in Polish schools. For one thing, for those students who choose to follow the teacher training track, the methodology element should be extended and given at least as much prominence as courses in theoretical linguistics. Although such a change goes against the recommendations found in the teacher training standards proposed by the Ministry of Science, it is quite obvious that there are few students endowed with a special gift for teaching and even those would undoubtedly benefit from extensive,

high quality methodology training, both at the level of theory, research and classroom practice. This brings us to the issue of content and conduct of methodology courses since increasing the number of such classes only makes sense when they in fact contribute to producing teachers who are not only familiar with the latest trends and pedagogical proposals, but are also capable of adopting a reflective approach and critically appraising their practices. With respect to grammar, this would mean that students have to be acquainted with relevant theoretical positions, research findings and the related instructional options, provided with opportunities to apply them in practice, and made aware of their limitations and the need to adjust them to particular groups of learners in particular contexts.

In addition, there is a close connection between English department students' views on grammar learning and teaching and the way this language subsystem is dealt with in practical English classes. Is it really surprising that the respondents focused so much on rules, exercises and grammar practice books if this is the reality of the majority of practical grammar classes? Moreover, in such classes, the emphasis is often placed on rare and complex constructions that educated native speakers are sometimes unlikely to know and use, and, at the same time, there are no communicative tasks that would allow students to use more common structures in unplanned speech. It can reasonably be argued that if substantial changes in students' beliefs about grammar, its learning and teaching are expected, and if such changes are to affect future teaching practice, communicative aspects of grammatical knowledge have to be emphasized in practical grammar classes and advances in theory and research have to be reflected in the way grammar structures are introduced and practiced. This is also the right place to make students aware of grammar learning strategies as well as the sociolinguistic and discoursal dimensions of the use of language forms in speech and writing. Last but not least, there is a need to forge links between methodology training, grammar teaching and other modules of practical English as only in this way can we ensure that theory will be translated into practice and the structures practiced in one type of class will also be focused upon in others (cf. Drożdżiał-Szelest and Kębiłowska 2006).

As for future research endeavors aimed at exploring pre-service and in-service teachers' beliefs about grammar, grammar learning and grammar teaching, it should be pointed out that although the present study has provided valuable insights into these areas, its main aim has been to contribute to a research agenda that is still neglected in the Polish educational context. Due to its focus on a very specific group of respondents, their relatively small number as well as its reliance on a single data collection instrument, the investigation is limited in scope and suffers from a number of limitations. As Borg (2006) shows in his recent book on teacher cognition, apart from exploring teachers' beliefs about the teaching of grammar, it is also important to address the issues of how such beliefs compare with those held by students, how they can differ crossculturally and, most importantly, how teachers' cognitions are expressed through their actual teaching practices. All of these lines of enquiry are clearly worth pursuing in our context, both among prospective teachers in foreign languages departments as well as among practitioners at different educational levels, teaching a variety of languages. Although questionnaires are popular with researchers because

they allow them to collect large amounts of data quickly, it should be remembered that "Questionnaire data (..) are obviously limited in their ability to capture the complex nature of teachers' mental lives" (Borg 2006: 174). Thus, the application of self-report instruments should be complemented with such tools as verbal commentaries (e.g. stimulated recall interviews), various types of observation and reflective writing (cf. Borg 2006). Such broadening of the research agenda and relying on data from a variety of sources will surely deepen our understanding of pre-service and in-service teachers' beliefs about grammar, grammar learning and teaching as well as the extent to which they are translated into classroom practice. This, in turn, can serve as a basis for introducing changes in teacher training programs in foreign languages departments and initiating lasting change in the way grammatical structures are taught in Polish schools.

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PRESENTATION AND PRACTICE  
OF GRAMMATICAL ITEMS IN  
SELECTED ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
TEACHING COURSEBOOKS

ABSTRACT

More than thirty years ago two authors, L. Selinker and H. V. George, published their works on learners' errors in second language acquisition. They concentrated mainly on why learners made errors. It is obvious that first language interference constitutes one of the most serious reasons for unwanted forms and both authors have no doubt about it. Nevertheless, both Selinker and George point out other reasons, transfer of training being one of them. By transfer of training we can understand the language used by teachers and presented in language teaching coursebooks and other materials. Sometimes, as George argues, the input learners receive in classroom teaching has nothing to do with the real-life language. What is more, it may even offer a distorted picture of authentic use. The most problematic seem to be: (1) presentation of contrasting items (structures or vocabulary) close together, which may cause cross-association errors; (2) presentation of structural items in unrealistic and rare contexts.

The aim of this paper is to show that even the most contemporary course books may use unrealistic and decontextualized techniques of grammar and vocabulary presentation and practice. Four elementary course books were analyzed and examples of problematic presentation and practice activities are given in this paper. It is essential to make teachers aware that even the most glamorous layout does not guarantee the good quality of teaching and presentation techniques provided in some course books.

## 1. Introduction

Although many linguists claim that their interest in language description has nothing to do with its teaching, it is obvious that some of the first serious language analyses were made for the purpose of instruction. In traditional approaches, both to the language itself and to its teaching, the nature of language was associated with its description in grammar handbooks and dictionaries. In other words, the term 'language' im-

plied its grammar "and the key to learning the foreign language was the knowledge of its grammar, especially in the form of memorized rules learned by heart and accompanied by various declensions and conjugations" (Dakowska 2005: 19).

In the history of language teaching, however, approaches to the teaching of grammar changed, mostly due to developments in linguistic studies. Consequently, explicit rule presentation was replaced by implicit grammar teaching in the Audio-lingual or Oral Approach. Still later, language functions started to be more prominent in language instruction, with grammar being of secondary importance (cf. the strong version of the communicative approach). Still later, Michael Lewis's claim that "language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar" (Lewis 1993: vi) gave rise to the Lexical Approach to language teaching. In Task-Based Learning the language analysis part comes at the end of the lesson, the most important being learners' completion of a given task, with a free choice of available language structures. Many materials writers and publishers proudly announced that their language teaching course books followed a *communicative syllabus*, and not the traditional and widely criticized *structural (grammatical) syllabus*. In the 1980s and early 1990s it was not fashionable even to admit that grammar is important in language teaching and grammar errors should be corrected. To get the feeling of the heated atmosphere of these years of controversies, it is enough to get familiar with the discussion between Michael Swan and Henry Widdowson originally published in the *ELT Journal* between 1983 and 1986 and reprinted in Rossner and Bolitho (1995). Swan argues for the necessity of grammar instruction and claims that communicative language teaching is nothing else but a set of dogmas. Widdowson presents an opposing viewpoint. Only with the onset of grammatical consciousness-raising (Rutherford 1987) did grammar teaching start to gently creep back into the language teaching methodology and regain its extremely important position in foreign language instruction.

It is my strong belief that in order to introduce a systematic approach to language instruction a structural syllabus is necessary. Such a systematic approach is needed, especially at the early stages of language development. A similar view is presented by Johnson (1982), who argued against functional syllabuses at the beginners' level because they impose structural disorganization. Whether we like it or not, grammar appears to be the only manageable subsystem of language which can be somehow graded for presentation. It is practically impossible to grade language functions, and it is extremely difficult to do the same with lexis, whereas grammar constitutes a finite and logically constructed system. My own school experience confirms this belief. Students, after having worked for a few months with a coursebook based on language functions, gladly volunteered to return to a more traditional one, based on a structural syllabus. Besides, as I had already stated elsewhere (Michońska-Stadnik 1993: 21), even the most innovative approach cannot guarantee successful language learning which depends on many variable factors. There is nothing wrong with a well-constructed grammatical syllabus supported by well-chosen communicative teaching techniques. As Widdowson argues (1984: 26), "there is no such thing as a communicative syllabus: there can only be a methodology that stimulates communicative learning".

As was already mentioned above, grammatical consciousness-raising and the focus on form approach contributed to grammar regaining its position in classroom

foreign language instruction. Both approaches drew students' attention to forms which appeared incidentally in language materials whose focus was on meaning or communication (Nizegorodcew 2007: 5). In other words, the followers of these approaches argue that structural items must appear in a language course not because they exist in the system, but because they have specific functions to fulfill in the real-life language. For example, the present simple tense is basically used to express likes and dislikes, opinions and states; the past simple exists because people like to tell stories to each other; the determiner 'a' exists because it refers to 'anyone of many', etc. It is extremely important, then, to present and practise grammatical structures in their real-life usage. Only in this way will they be properly understood by the learners, errors will not appear, and the structures will be acquired with much less effort on the part of the learner. In other words, the key to learning grammar is its appropriate presentation in the lesson: by the teacher and in the course book.

The aim of this article is to claim that even the most contemporary English coursebooks frequently offer a distorted view of grammatical structures. Presentation and practice their authors propose do not differ a lot from those claimed to be innovative more than thirty years ago. I believe that language teachers should be made aware of this problem as they may be frequently lured by a famous author or a famous publishing house and purchase a coursebook which is neither modern nor motivating for their students.

## 2. Sources of errors in classroom teaching

The choice of publications referred to in connection with this issue is deliberate: the most important ones appeared in 1972, i.e. thirty five years ago. In this year, Larry Selinker published his article on interlanguage, which became a turning point in the analysis of learners' language. Although many other applied linguists dealt with learners' language in second language development, it is Selinker's idea that gained prominence.

As the name indicates, interlanguage is the language 'in-between', i.e. a system which consists of correct elements from the target language, incorrect elements of the target language, and elements from the learner's native language. Interlanguage is in constant development. At the beginners' stage, it will contain mostly incorrect target language structures and native language elements. In the course of language acquisition, the correct target language forms will gradually replace the incorrect ones and the native language structures will be eliminated. Interlanguage has four developmental stages. At the first stage, the learner is not even aware that s/he has made a mistake. In the last stage, the learner is able to successfully monitor his or her utterances.

Selinker claims that there exist five cognitive processes that operate in the learner's interlanguage and these processes may become responsible for errors:

- (1) *Language transfer*. It is natural for a second/foreign language learner to rely on his or her first language in interpreting L2 utterances and in trying to communicate. Language transfer may be positive or negative and the negative transfer is frequently called *interference*. Interference is one of the most serious reasons for errors and it cannot really be avoided.

- (2) *Transfer of training.* The language that is used by teachers or by coursebooks may also become responsible for creating errors in learners' interlanguage. These errors may be avoided and more space will be devoted to this issue in further parts of this paper.
- (3) *Overgeneralization.* Learners have a tendency to look for general rules of the target language grammar and to avoid exceptions. For example, the irregular plural in English is systematically regularized by learners, e.g. 'childrens'\* or 'childs'\* instead of 'children'. This is done mostly because of inadequate knowledge and sometimes for convenience.
- (4) *Strategies of foreign language learning.* Certain techniques which students make use of to facilitate language acquisition may lead to problems. For example, using dictionaries excessively while writing some texts in English may cause inappropriate usage of vocabulary and collocations.
- (5) *Strategies of foreign language communication.* Certain ways of overcoming communication problems may lead to different kinds of errors. For instance, paraphrasing may cause syntactic or lexical errors.

Another author interested in learners' errors and their reasons was H. V. George (1972) in his book *Common errors in language learning: Insights from English*. It is a fascinating book, full of interesting, though sometimes controversial, ideas. Even though many sources quoted there are a bit outdated nowadays, the main issues raised there are still valid. As a Ministry of Education expert for assessing English language teaching course books for their usefulness for schools, I can confirm that many problems with language presentation discussed by George are still observed in the teaching materials thirty five years later. Sometimes one may wonder how little has changed in grammar teaching despite such great progress in the development of applied linguistics and second language acquisition theories. We may have an impression that both the course book authors and the publishers sometimes do not make an effort to get acquainted with new achievements in methodology and teaching techniques. Recently one of the authors in her coursebook to be published in 2006 proposed 'innovative' teaching techniques based on the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1983). What is more, in the introduction the author argued that the multiple intelligences theory was proposed by Gardiner (sic!). Two months ago at a workshop prepared for English Department students specializing in English language teaching, a representative of another renown publisher was enthusiastically presenting a set of activities for left/right-brain functioning learners. The students themselves could have prepared a much better presentation on the same issue!

Coming back to reasons for learners' errors, George's basic claim is that coursebooks and teachers sometimes offer a distorted view of authentic English language. The learner's input is the result of his experience of English coming from his teacher and from his course book. George says that "if storage procedures are inadequate, or if there is muddled classification or organization of material for storage, we may thus expect an imperfect output (...)" (1972: 5).

An example of such a 'muddled' organization of language material for storage is the presentation of contrasting elements, as in the following:

This is my book. That is your book.  
Jane is tall. Betty is short.  
He plays football every day. He played football yesterday.

Situations presented in this way require unusual stressing. "Observation of ordinary use of English shows such alterations of form to be exceptional (the sentences themselves would hardly recur in succession outside a course book)" (George 1972: 15-16). Such vocabulary items as 'this/that', 'tall/short' are only artificially brought into immediate contrast. In effect, it may happen that grammatical items like 'this/that' or '-s/-ed', which carry comparatively less meaning than lexical items ('tall/short'), will get confused in the learner's mind, especially when they are presented in the same lesson unit. This confusion can also be referred to as *cross-association*. Two related forms take more effort to internalize when they are learned together than two unrelated ones. Besides, some effort must also be spent on keeping them apart (George 1972: 44). Sometimes, the latter effort exceeds the former and the items are not learned at all, or only one of them is. The acquired item will eventually stand for both of them in students' language production. Experienced teachers know very well how frequently their students confuse two personal pronouns 'he' and 'she', regardless of the situational context.

George argues as well that marked forms, like '-s/-ed' endings, are naturally processed slower than unmarked forms (verbs without endings). Consequently, basic verb forms will be remembered faster than other forms. Thus, we may presume that '-s/-ed' endings may also be confused because of their markedness in relation to infinitives, and not only because of their contrasting presentation.

Verb form frequency counts constitute a separate issue. Although they were done in the 1960s, they still reflect the real use of English in everyday communication. George claims that "a great formal simplification is possible by selecting for inclusion into the early parts of a teaching program those verb forms which have a high frequency of occurrence in the ordinary use of the language" (1972: 24). George then lists verb forms which occur most frequently and account for 575 of every 1,000 verb-form occurrences. Some of them are:

simple past narrative,  
simple present actual (e.g. 'I like... I live in...'),  
simple past actual (e.g. 'I liked... I lived in...'),  
simple present neutral (e.g. 'The sun shines'),  
past participle (e.g. 'It's made of... He's gone'),  
infinitive (e.g. 'I want to go'),  
imperative (e.g. 'Don't go'), etc. (George 1972: 24-25).

Still lower on the frequency list we find simple present for habitual actions and present continuous for 'now'. Even though that frequency list is based on written language data, the spoken language does not differ very much in this respect. It is claimed that, except for simple past narrative which goes slightly down on the frequency list, the order of the remaining verb forms remains the same. As regards the presentation of tenses in English teaching course books, George asserts (1972: 59)

that we can observe "an excessive use of low-frequency forms". Thus, the English which appears in course books seems to be strange, the contexts of presentation are unusual, unrelated to everyday usage. This frequently results in errors as learners do not get the language they could make use of in authentic communication. My own example seems to confirm this statement. In the course book I learned English from the first verb form presented was 'verb+ing' as the present continuous tense for 'now'. As this tense does not exist in Polish, it had been excessively practised for a long time before another English tense was introduced (incidentally, it happened to be the present perfect tense!). Most learners, including myself, started to associate the present continuous tense with all kinds of present contexts, and thus we used to produce the following sentences 'I am studying at the university'\* in answer to a simple question 'What do you do?'

All in all, following George, it can be claimed that ordinary English may be distorted in its classroom presentation in two ways:

1. for the sake of association or contrast, forms are juxtaposed which would have slight chance of so occurring in the normal use of English, and 2. forms occur in a progression of items or in contrast with no regard to their frequency of occurrence in ordinary English (George 1972: 156).

### 3. Presentation and practice of language items in selected course books

For obvious reasons the authors and the publishers of four selected course books will not be mentioned. They will be referred to as coursebooks A, B, C and D. They are all beginner or elementary courses designed for Polish primary learners. All of them were (or still are) designed to be published either in the year 2006 or 2007 by widely recognized publishing houses. The author of this paper is ready to show the described materials to individual teachers on request.

Coursebook A is designed for primary school, grade five. There are a few activities worth mentioning. One of them is a typical fill-in-the-blank exercise with pairs of contrasting adjectives. Some of them are given, the others are supposed to be completed by the students:

Long hair – short hair  
Big body – ..... body  
..... meal – light meal  
..... man – short man  
Fat cat – ..... cat  
Old woman – ..... woman  
..... book – thin book  
Fast animal – ..... animal  
..... hotel – cheap hotel  
..... person – poor person

We can clearly see that there is no context given and pairs of adjectives are presented in unnaturally contrasted situations.

Another example comes from the same course book. Here the simple past of regular verbs is presented:

I played	I did not/didn't play	Did I play?
You played	You did not/didn't play	Did you play?
He/she/it played	He/she/it did not/didn't play	Did he/she/it play?
We played	We did not/didn't play	Did we play?
You played	You did not/didn't play	Did you play?
They played	They did not/didn't play	Did they play?

This is a typical grammar-translation and deductive rule presentation. It is followed by a completely decontextualized and depersonalized activity:

1. I phoned my uncle yesterday.
2. We visited the zoo ..... week.
3. They played tennis two days .....
4. She watched a cartoon .....
5. He played with his friends ..... etc.

The learners do not know who 'I', 'we', 'they', 'he', 'she' are. The sentences are not connected with one another and it is hard for a child of eleven to get interested in an activity of that type. Consequently, lack of interest leads to demotivation.

For irregular verbs the paradigm with 'went' is introduced in the same way as it was done with 'play' in the previous activity for regular verbs in the simple past tense. To practise some irregular verbs, the learners are asked to complete simple dialogues, such as the one that follows:

- Ray went to Paris (we do not know who Ray is). What did he do there? Look, ask and answer.
- A: What did he have for breakfast?  
B: He had croissants.  
A: What did he see at the Louvre?  
B: He saw the Mona Lisa.  
A: What did he buy?  
B: He ..... a souvenir of the Eiffel Tower.  
A: What did he eat for lunch?  
B: He ..... snails, etc.

The activity resembles a traditional question and answer drill, frequently used in the audio-lingual method of teaching languages which came to schools in the 1960s.

Coursebook B was written by the same author, for the same publisher. It is supposed to be prepared for grade four, i.e. for children at the age of ten. The first English tense introduced there is the present continuous for 'now', in unit 7. Fortunately, the context for present continuous is quite realistic, i.e. describing a picture. Still, we have got another typical grammatical paradigm here:

- I am/I'm watching a film.  
She is/She's making a cake.

We are/We're running.  
Am I watching a film?  
Is she making a cake?  
Are we running?  
I am not/I'm not watching a film.  
She is not/She isn't making a cake.  
We are not/We're not running.

All these sentences appear in a colour box accompanied by an exclamation mark. The artificiality of context is emphasized by unrealistic questions: 'Am I watching a film?', 'Are we running?' In real life English such questions are not normally asked as people usually know what they are doing at the moment of speaking.

The present simple tense appears in the same book in Unit 16 and is introduced with the help of another typical grammar summary:

I/You work	I/You do not/don't work	Do I/you work?
He/She/It works	He/She/It does not/doesn't work	Does he/she/it work?
We/You/They work	We/You/They do not/don't work	Do we/you/they work?

The context of this presentation suggests interpreting the simple present tense as expressing states or as simple present actual ('I work permanently', 'I have a job'). What follows, though, is another fill-in-the-blank exercise with habitual present simple where pictures and adverbials of time are supplied, and the learners are only supposed to complete the correct form of the verb:

*Example:*

*Mr Welsh gets up (get up) at quarter past seven.*

- (1) He ..... (eat) his breakfast at half past seven.
- (2) He ..... (not work) on Saturdays!
- (3) He ..... (go) to school at half past eight.
- (4) He ..... (visit) his friends on Sundays.

On the opposite page there is just one activity, the only one in the whole lesson, which practises likes and dislikes:

A: Do you like History?  
B: Yes, I like History! It is interesting!  
C: No, I don't like History! It's boring!

Students are asked to build similar dialogues using the names of other school subjects.

Coursebook C is designed for grade six of primary school. In File Two (Chapter 2) the past simple is introduced with the focus on extreme sports. Students are asked to read three texts about these sports with verbs in the past simple underlined. Then they have to work with a dictionary to divide them into two groups – regular and irregular verbs. This type of grammatical presentation resembles the grammatical consciousness-raising approach (Rutherford 1987) and seems to be quite promising.

However, immediately below we can see two very traditional exercises. The first one is a typical, decontextualized fill-in-the-blank activity, e.g.

I ..... at home yesterday (not be).  
The effect ..... great (be).  
The kites ..... wet (be).  
They ..... their decision (change).

The other activity is more contextualized and closely connected with the texts. It, however, requires building extremely artificial English utterances. Students are supposed to correct sentences which are not true:

*Example:*

*Windsurfers used the new kite on the Canary Islands.*

*Windsurfers didn't use the new kite on the Canary Islands. They used the new kite on the Hawaiian Islands.*

1. The sport became popular 10 years ago.

The sport didn't become popular 10 years ago. The sport became popular 5 years ago.

These utterances represent a typical distortion of ordinary English sometimes observed in the coursebooks and other materials.

In coursebook D we can notice that the present simple tense is presented in the context of habitual actions which, according to George (1972), is not the most popular function of this tense in real-life language. Still, the context seems to be interesting for the learners as it is a song:

I get up at seven o'clock,  
Seven o'clock in the morning.  
I get dressed at half past seven,  
Half past seven in the morning.

In this course book the age of the learners is not really specified. It is supposed to be suitable for learners aged 6-12. This age distance, however, makes it really impossible to introduce materials and activities equally appropriate for all learners.

Many vocabulary items and grammatical structures are introduced as contrasting pairs in coursebook D. For example, we have contrasting adjectives in one lesson:

This is my brother. He's (younger/older) than me. He's got (long/short) hair. His birthday is in July, etc.

There are also modal verbs contrasted: 'can/can't'. This pair seems to be especially difficult because of its difference in pronunciation. Also, as George (1972) claims, the contrast itself may be confusing for the reason that the two items are given unnatural stress. Still, the practice activity looks as follows:

It can jump and it can sing. It's got six legs but it can't swim. It can swim but it can't walk or jump. It's got no legs.

The last issue I would like to comment on is connected with the teacher's language in the classroom. What is extremely confusing for Polish learners of English is the faulty presentation of the indefinite/definite article. Most teachers do it in the same lesson and using the same real object, e.g.

This is a book. The book is red.

In the first sentence the indefinite article appears because the object ('book') 'is mentioned for the first time'. In the second sentence the book is already mentioned for the second time and thus the definite article is used. Such presentation of articles makes it even more difficult for Poles to understand the difference: the object of presentation is the same (the book). In real English 'a' represents 'anyone of many' and its real meaning should be pointed out to the learners. What could be suggested is the context of many objects of the same type out of which only one is chosen each time and shown to the students. The definite article 'the' should be introduced in the next lesson.

There is another confusing element, especially for beginners: these are pairs 'this/that' and 'these/those'. Their pronunciation is similar and the meaning is not quite clear as it mostly depends on the context. Sometimes in the course books 'this' denotes something that is closer to the interlocutor and 'that' denotes something which is situated further. However, one may ask a question: How much further something needs to be situated from something else or somebody in order to be called 'that'? In fact spatial distance may not play any significant role at all. We say 'That's right' and not 'This is right'.

#### 4. Conclusion

There are, fortunately, many course books on the market which are up-to-date, logical, well-designed and written by highly professional authors. They offer a much better presentation and practice of grammatical items than the course books described above. Teachers, however, should be aware of the existence of teaching materials which are outdated, badly designed, and full of distorted contexts of presentation of grammatical and lexical items.

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*Andrea Nava*

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LEARNING TO TEACH THE PASSIVE:  
THE REPRESENTATION OF  
SUBJECT-MATTER KNOWLEDGE  
FOR GRAMMAR TEACHING IN  
PEDAGOGICAL GRAMMARS FOR  
EFL/ESL TEACHERS

ABSTRACT

The article reports on an ongoing study which aims at identifying how the learning and teaching of grammar is conceptualised and represented in 'pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers', viz. those grammar books aimed specifically at trainee and practising teachers of English as a foreign/second language and intended to supply comprehensive and exhaustive information on English grammar, combined with information on the typical problems experienced by EFL/ESL learners in acquiring different grammatical areas, suggestions on suitable teaching activities and practice in error correction and language analysis. Given they are expressly meant as teacher education tools, 'pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers' are arguably an ideal 'laboratory' for investigating how theory/research in second language acquisition and language teaching is operationalized for the benefit of the non-academic language teaching professional.

The study has singled out seven pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers, from which the descriptions of the grammatical area of the passive are sampled. The analysis has focused on the information about the acquisition and the teaching of the passive featured in the seven grammars, which has been coded and categorised using (in part) Ellis' (1997, 1998) framework of methodological options in grammar teaching. The article illustrates the findings of this analysis, highlighting in particular what they reveal about the way theory/research in second language acquisition and language teaching is selected and represented for the EFL/ESL teacher.

## 1. Introduction

A lot of ink has been poured in recent years in attempts to dissect the construct of subject matter knowledge for language – in particular, grammar-teaching (cf. e.g. Leech 1994; Andrews 1999, 2001; Trappes Lomax and Ferguson 2002; Andrews 2003, 2006) and pinpoint the components that a training course aiming to provide for this knowledge should have (Liu and Master 2003). The present article reports on an exploratory study into how subject matter knowledge for grammar teaching is mediated and presented to EFL/ESL teachers. The focus of the investigation is an existing teacher training tool – pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers, namely those grammar books aimed specifically at trainee and practising teachers of English as a foreign/second language and intended to supply metalinguistic information on English grammar, combined with information on the typical problems experienced by EFL/ESL learners in acquiring different grammatical areas, suggestions on suitable teaching activities and practice in language analysis and error correction. Given that they not only address grammar description but also the issue of how second language grammar is learnt and should be taught, pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers arguably constitute an ideal yet hitherto neglected ‘laboratory’ for investigating how theory/research in second language acquisition and language teaching is operationalized for the benefit of the non-academic language teaching professional. The article will first briefly introduce the sampling and analytical strategies adopted in the study. The findings of the analysis will then be illustrated and discussed.

## 2. The sample

Seven pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers have been considered in this study. Although several grammar books often claim to be aimed at both advanced EFL/ESL students and teachers or university students of English linguistics and EFL/ESL teachers, the books that this study focuses upon are exclusively intended for EFL/ESL teachers. Their teacher-oriented bias is obvious from the fact that they include information about the learning and/or teaching of grammar as well as a detailed description of grammatical classes, categories and structures. Details about the author(s), title, year and place of publication of the seven pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers in the sample are provided in Table 1. As is apparent, the grammars span almost thirty years (the oldest was published at the beginning of the eighties, while the most recent came out in 2003) and also vary in terms of where they originated – i. e. not only in Inner Circle countries (Canada, USA, UK, New Zealand), but also in former British colonies (Hong Kong, Singapore). Henceforth I will refer to each grammar through the shorthand way (e.g. CMLF 83) shown in the last column of Table 1.

Author(s)	Title	Year of Publication	Place of Publication	Shorthand
M. Celce-Murcia D. Larsen-Freeman	<i>The grammar book: An ESL/ESL teacher's course. First edition</i>	1983	USA	CMLF 83
G. Lock	<i>Functional English grammar: An introduction for second language teachers</i>	1996	Hong Kong	L 96
P. Master	<i>Systems in English grammar: An introduction for language teachers</i>	1996	USA	M 96
M. Celce-Murcia D. Larsen-Freeman	<i>The grammar book: An ESL/EFL teacher's course. Second edition</i>	1999	USA	CMLF 99
M. Parrott	<i>Grammar for English language teachers</i>	2000	USA	P 00
D. H. Deterding J. R. Poed- josoedarmo	<i>The grammar of English. Morphology and syntax for English teachers in South-East Asia</i>	2001	Singapore	DP 01
G. Kennedy	<i>Structure and meaning in English: A guide for teachers</i>	2003	New Zealand	K 03

Table 1. The sample for the present investigation.

For each grammar, it has been decided to focus on the chapter(s) that deal(s) with the passive. Data has been generated by identifying the verbal descriptions and the examples that concern the issue of how the passive is learnt by EFL/ESL students and the best way of teaching it. The next two sections report on the findings of the analysis.

### 3. Data analysis

#### 3.1. The passive as a learning issue

The acquisition of the English passive is tackled by six out of the seven grammars in the sample. The commonest way second language acquisition research findings are mediated by pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers is by hypothesising possible reasons for the typical difficulties that foreign students might encounter in learning the English passive. The scope of the learning problems tackled in the presentations of Voice is shown by the categories listed in Table 2 below.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The seventh grammar (DP 01) is not listed in Table 2 as it does not feature an explicit treatment of the acquisition of the passive. What this book does include, however, is a set of short overviews of the grammars of Singapore English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay and Tagalog, i. e. the L1s of the students who this book's prospective readers are likely to teach. Although no explicit mention is made in these surveys of the specific learning problems that speakers of

	CMLF 83	M 96	L 96	CMLF 99	P 00	K 03
Comprehending the passive	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
Comprehending the passive in reduced relative clauses	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Using the passive appropriately	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Producing the correct form of the passive	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES

Table 2. Learning problems addressed in presentations of Voice in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers.

Although most of the presentations highlight the problems learners typically come up against in *producing* aspects of the passive, references to the difficulties involved in the *comprehension*, rather than the production of the passive, do also show up. P 00 points out that EFL/ESL students may not pick up on the morphosyntactic clues that single out a passive construction:

Learners may fail to recognize a passive construction, thinking that the subject of a sentence is the agent when it isn't. For example, in the following, they may understand that the man was the attacker: *A man was attacked by three women* (P 00: 294).

According to the author, this misunderstanding may be caused in listening by the (prosodic) non-saliency of the auxiliary or more generally by the ambiguity of form-function associations (the '-ed' form may signal past tense as well as past participle). Another possible circumstance that is said to give rise to this learning problem is semantic – when the fact that is being reported through the passive construction runs counter to normal expectations (e.g. a man being the victim of a violent attack carried out by women).

K 03 focuses on a more specific case, 'reduced relative clauses' which contain a passive verb. Due to the ellipsis of the auxiliary in these constructions, learners are prone to interpret the passive verb as an active voice past tense:

*People injured in an accident should not be moved until a doctor arrives.*

Learners may think that *injured* is an active finite verb (*People injured someone...*) instead of a reduced relative clause in the passive voice (*People who are injured...*) (K 03: 224).

It is apparent that comprehension-based problems that concern the passive are interpreted in pedagogical grammars from a general cognitive perspective. In other words, it is assumed that learners are facilitated in processing aspects of the input

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these four languages might come up against as a result of L1/L2 differences, it is obviously assumed that some influence over the process of acquisition of L2 grammar is exerted by the formal and functional organization of L1 grammar.

when these are perceptually salient and when the associations between form and function are unambiguous; if these conditions do not obtain, problems may arise. These are obviously universal processing requirements which are independent of the L1 of the learner.

In regard to the problems that EFL/ESL students encounter when attempting to *produce* the passive, a fair amount of space is granted in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers to the investigation of why the *pragmatics* of the passive is so difficult to master – why, for example, learners underuse the passive or avoid using it altogether. In several cases (CMLF 83, CMLF 99, L 96, P 00) this is done by invoking the phenomenon of negative transfer triggered by differences between English and the learners' L1s. CMLF 83 and CMLF 99 frame the issue like this:

For most English learners (...) the passive will occur more frequently in English than in their native language and there will be a wider variety of passive sentence types than in their own language (CMLF 83: 221).

Learning when to use the passive is a challenge to ESL/EFL students who will tend to over- or underuse it depending on its frequency of occurrence and its functions in their native languages (CMLF 99: 355).

The rationale behind this approach is that mismatches in the scope of grammatical areas in English vs. the learners' L1s may hinder the learners' acquisition of these areas. However, whilst an association is still established between *differences between L1 and L2* and *difficulty*, as in the traditional notion of language transfer, the perspective from which these 'differences' are viewed in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers is broader than that of Contrastive Analysis (cf. e.g. Stockwell, Bowen and Martin 1965). Indeed, Contrastive Analysis tended to focus on the formal differences between languages to predict areas of difficulty for the L2 learner. Pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers, on the other hand, highlight differences which have to do with the functional uses of the passive in English and its actual attestedness (its *frequency*). This is also a result of the departure from structuralist language descriptions, upon which contrastive analyses of the 60s were based, and the adoption of functional and corpus-based descriptive approaches in the pedagogical grammars in the sample.

Evidence for the reappraisal of the notion of contrastive analysis in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers is the reference to overarching typological features of the learners' L1s to account for the 'difficulty' they experience in acquiring the English passive. L 96, for example, suggests that the fact that languages such as Vietnamese and Spanish have alternative ways of expressing some of the functions fulfilled in English by the passive may lead their speakers to underuse the passive when speaking or writing in English. It is explained that, in order to thematize constituents, Vietnamese relies upon general topicalizing mechanisms involving pragmatic word order. Likewise, Spanish can shift word order fairly freely to place emphasis on the agent, without introducing changes in Voice.

In addition to cross-linguistic transfer, other processes are sometimes invoked in descriptions of the passive as a learning issue, which rest on universal features of language use. An apt example is provided by P 00 when presenting and commenting

upon a sample from a composition written by an EFL learner. The aim of this presentation is to illustrate the pragmatic effect that the learner's use of the active voice has engendered – the composition is formally correct but pragmatically inappropriate as the use of 'we' subjects plus active verbs lends an unwanted personal connotation to what is being described. What underpins this explanation is the theory that there exists a universal preference in language for presenting an action or event from the point of view of the agent and hence for the active voice (cf. Siewierska 1984). This would account for why learners, regardless of their L1, tend to overuse this construction.

While pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers tend to foreground the learning difficulties stemming from the complex nature of the *pragmatics* of the passive, typical problems which EFL/ESL students face when producing the different *forms* of the passive are also mentioned. What the grammars (M 96, P 00, K03) do in this case is present sentence-length examples from the interlanguage of EFL/ESL speakers containing mistakes in the passive verb form and discuss possible reasons for these mistakes. P 00's treatment is particularly exhaustive, featuring the following taxonomy of 'formal' mistakes: omission of the auxiliary, choice of wrong auxiliary, choice of wrong preposition (e.g. overuse of 'by'), choice of wrong type of verb, deployment of wrong word order, special cases (L1-specific errors). L1 transfer is only mentioned in passing as one of the possible causes of errors in handling the form of the passive. More usually, P 00 invokes intralingual phenomena, such as overgeneralization. It is, for example, pointed out that EFL/ESL learners may overgeneralize conventions of headline English with respect to omissions of auxiliaries to other registers of English, thereby producing deviant utterances:

Learners may leave out the auxiliary verb before the past participle.

\**England beaten by Costa Rica in the semi-final.*

\**Catherine loved very much by Mr Heathcliff.*

In some cases the learners may be misled by reading newspaper headlines, in which the auxiliary verbs are normally omitted (*England beaten by Costa Rica* in an acceptable headline).

This book also highlights, among the possible reasons for the overgeneralization of the use of 'by'-phrases, the influence of teaching materials – thus acknowledging that errors can result from what SLA theorists call *induced learning* (Ellis 1994: 60):

Because course materials generally pay a lot of attention to the use of *by* to introduce the agent in a passive construction, learners sometimes overuse it (P 00: 292).

K 03's attempt to account for morphological errors attested in the interlanguage of EFL/ESL learners refers to the deployment of general cognitive (information processing) mechanisms (cf. e. g. McLaughlin 1987) – i. e. the hypothesis that L2 learners are restricted in how much information from the input they are capable of processing and therefore only some of it becomes the object of selective attention. When processing capacity is limited, it is usually the meaning-bearing features of the message (e.g. lexical words, word order) that are attended to:

Because the active and passive voice involve major word order changes, learners often pay little attention to the grammatical forms, but concentrate on the lexical items and their positions. They may be shown that *rice absorbs water* is roughly similar in meaning to *water is absorbed by rice*, but then they confuse the form and produce sentences such as *water absorbs rice*, *\*rice absorb water*, *\*water is absorb rice*, *\*rice is absorb by water*, etc (K 03: 223).

### 3.2. The passive as a teaching issue

I would now like to shift the focus on to the representation of language teaching theory/research in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers. The issue of how the passive should be taught is dealt with in all the grammars in the sample. In several cases, some space is devoted to reviewing common approaches to the teaching of Voice. What emerges from these short surveys is the outright condemnation of the traditional ‘conversion’ approach<sup>2</sup> inasmuch as it disregards cotextual and contextual features which have a bearing on the use of the passive (L 96) and leads learners to view the passive as a deviation (P 00) or a mere stylistic variant of the active (CMLF 83, K 03). It is also remarked that this approach may actually lead learners to make mistakes as it involves a series of difficult steps (K 03). By way of general guidelines, grammars include exhortations to readers to present the agentless passive to their students as the default passive form (CMLF 83, 99) and to foreground the teaching of the uses rather than the form of the passive (CMLF 83, CMLF 99, P 00). P 00 encourages readers to view instruction in the passive as giving learners opportunities to both “notice and understand” (P 00: 287) the construction by exposing them to authentic texts as well as having them use it in context – in other words, what is advocated is an idea of grammar as both a *receptive* and a *productive* skill, and one which requires of learners to take cognizance, through the involvement of conscious attention (*noticing* – cf. Schmidt 1990), of patterns and meanings before they are engaged in productive practice.

Apart from providing general teaching guidelines, six of the grammars in the sample (CMLF 83, CMLF 99, M 96, P 00, DP 01, K 03) also illustrate specific teaching activities targeting some aspect of the passive. To facilitate comparison, I have categorized these activities according to the framework of methodological options in grammar teaching devised by Ellis (cf. Ellis 1997, 1998), reproduced in Figure 1 below.

According to Ellis (1997: 77), a methodological option is “a design feature that results in some form of classroom activity which teachers recognise as distinctive”. The methodological options that Ellis identifies for grammar teaching are psycholinguistically motivated, i.e. each option describes some kind of (teacher/learner) behaviour that is associated with a particular view of how the acquisition of L2 grammar comes about. In categorizing grammar teaching options, Ellis first distinguishes *feedback options* from *learner-performance options*.

<sup>2</sup> Criticism of this teaching practice has a long history; Allen (1959) famously called ‘grotesque monstrosities’ the kind of artificial sentences that are often produced in such transformation exercises. For a recent critique of active-passive transformations the reader is referred to Beedham (2005).

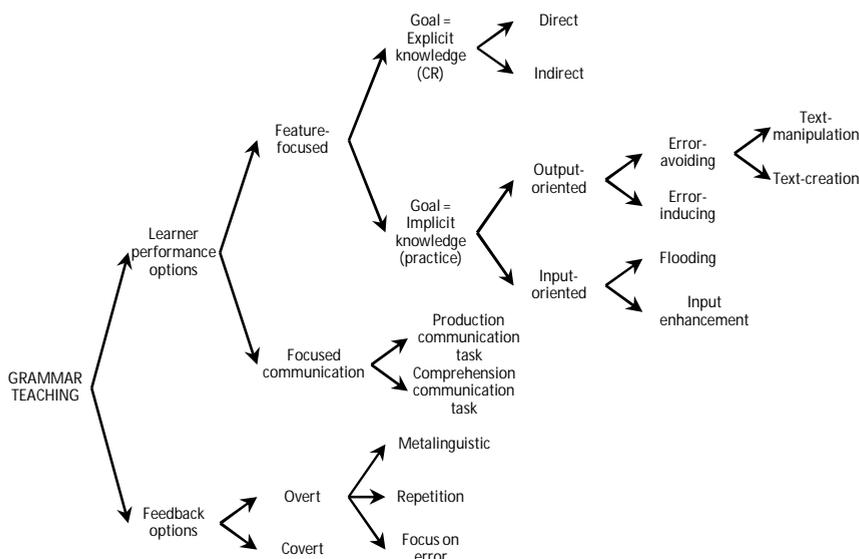


Figure 1. Methodological options in grammar teaching (adapted from Ellis 1997: 79).

Feedback options concern the different ways teachers provide feedback on the accuracy of learners' spoken or written output. Ellis makes a basic split between *overt* and *covert feedback options*. Both of them are aimed at the provision of negative evidence, but while overt feedback options involve the explicit correction of the learner's mistake, covert options simulate more closely what may happen in a communicative exchange when a breakdown occurs – e. g. the teacher asks the learner to clarify his/her utterance or recasts (reformulates) the learner's incorrect utterance in the context of a genuine dialogue.

Feedback options are dealt with in the error-correction sections/tasks that can be found in CMLF 83, CMLF 99, M 96, P 00 and DP 01. No mention is, however, made of the more indirect/covert ways of providing feedback; error-editing tasks appear to be viewed exclusively as a way of training readers in imparting overt feedback.<sup>3</sup> In particular, of the three possible ways it is envisaged in Ellis (1997) that overt feedback may be provided (cf. Fig. 1 above), two are featured in the presentations of the passive of pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers – i. e. *metalinguistic feedback* (the provision of rules) and *focus on error* (the explicit identification of the error). This is done in CMLF 83, CMLF 99 and DP 01 by asking readers to single out and correct mistakes (i.e. focus on error) in sentences produced by EFL/ESL learners and think of suitable explanations (i.e. metalinguistic feedback) to give to them. M 96 provides similar activities but additionally it includes an explicit heuristics for the correction of mistakes which encourages readers not to disregard the affective dimension in error correction, thus hinting at how sensitive an undertaking providing feedback may be:

<sup>3</sup> Error-correction exercises have appeared in grammar books for a very long time, as is evidenced by the 'false-syntax' exercises of the nineteenth century and earlier twentieth century American grammars mentioned in Algeo (1991).

We want to praise a language student for his or her accomplishments before we point out a mistake in the use of a rule of grammar (M 96: 104).

Hence, before homing in on the mistakes that a student has made, we are encouraged to draw attention to a number of linguistic areas that the student may have used correctly:

- (a) correct SUBJECT-VERB/AUX AGREEMENT
- (b) correct TIME (past, present or future)
- (c) correct ASPECT (simple, continuous, perfect, or perfect continuous)
- (d) correct POSSIBLE FORM (the form exists in English but it is not correct here)
- (e) correct VOICE (active and passive) (M 96: vi)

It is fair to add that although only the more overt feedback options are featured in the presentations of the passive in the sample, the introductory sections of M 96 and CMLF 99 note (by way of a 'disclaimer') that no implication should derive that these are the only possible or the most effective ways of responding to a student's mistake or indeed that all mistakes should be explicitly remarked upon at all times.

Let me turn to learner-performance options now. Following Ellis (1997), these can be divided into *feature-focused options* (which promote the *intentional* learning of grammar, through the development of either *explicit* or *implicit* knowledge) and *focused communication options* (promoting the *incidental* learning of grammar, i.e. learning grammar as a by-product of learning to communicate). The teaching activities featured in the presentations of the passive tend to fall mainly within the category of feature-focused options. Table 3 below shows how these can be subcategorised.

Explicit knowledge						
Intralingual						
Direct	X		X			?
Indirect			X			?
Interlingual						
Direct						
Indirect				X		
	CMLF 83	M 96	CMLF 99	P 00	DP 01	K 03
Implicit Knowledge: Output-oriented: Error-avoiding						
Text manipulation	X X X		X			
Text creation	X X		X X X X			
	CMLF 83	M 96	CMLF 99	P 00	DP 01	K 03

Table 3. Feature-focused activities in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers.

Five activities are aimed at providing *explicit* knowledge of grammar, i.e. declarative knowledge. In order to account for their differences as well as their similarities, I have added to Ellis' framework a further subcategorization concerning the *focus* of the knowledge that the activities are supposed to promote: is it *intralingual* knowledge (i.e.

knowledge of the workings of the passive in English) or *interlingual* knowledge (knowledge of how the passive is used in English vis-à-vis the L1)? Four of the tasks in the presentations of the passive focus on intralingual knowledge, while the activity presented in P 00 targets interlingual knowledge.

Another important distinction made by Ellis is between two modes of fostering the development of explicit knowledge: *direct* vs. *indirect*. This is illustrated in the two versions of a similar activity, targeting the pragmatics of the passive, presented in the first and the second edition of CMLF. In the 1983 edition, readers are invited to ask learners to

look for five examples of the passive in their textbooks, in the newspaper, in advertising (CMLF 83: 232)

and decide which of the generalizations about the uses of the passive they were presented with prior to the task applies to each example. In this case, learners are provided with declarative knowledge *directly* which is to be deployed deductively in the solution of the task. In its more recent version (CMLF 99), the activity is still aimed at promoting the development of declarative knowledge, but in an *indirect* fashion. Readers are instructed to find a short authentic article containing examples of the passive and ask learners to

read the article, locate the passive sentences, and say why they think the author used the passive. Also, they should try to explain why an agent has been mentioned, if it has (CMLF 99: 357).

Learners are thus expected to arrive at some new knowledge through close analysis of the data rather than just deploying the knowledge they have been provided with. This does not mean that CMLF 99 discourages the direct provision of declarative knowledge in all circumstances. The book features another task (intended to present and have students practise the form of the passive) with an optional stage where it is suggested that the teacher convey declarative knowledge directly to ensure learners' noticing of the regularities of form.

In K 03 we find a short remark about how to present the passive to EFL/ESL students that is not explicit as to whether illustration of examples is to be accompanied by the direct formulation of rules (K03: 223):

Some learners may find it easier to approach the passive through the already known SVC construction

	S	V	C
Beginners	I	am	cold.
	I	am	tired.
Intermediate	It	was	damaged.
	She	was	injured by broken glass.
Advanced	It	is	heated to 200°C.

Finally, P 00 features a task aimed at the development of explicit knowledge, but its focus is interlingual. The author suggests that speakers of European languages, which have a construction that is formally very similar to the English passive, might

benefit from comparing texts in English and their L1. The interlingual comparison would highlight mismatches in the two languages as regards the use of the passive voice. The fact that we come across only one reference throughout the sample to the process of comparing English and the learners' L1s in the teaching of the passive despite the emphasis that is currently placed on the role of the L1 in L2 learning and teaching (cf. Widdowson 2003) is perhaps evidence of the lingering influence that the ELT 'dogma' of monolingual teaching (cf. Phillipson 1992, Cook 2000) has on current TESL/TEFL practitioners and materials writers.

I have so far illustrated activities targeting explicit knowledge. Nevertheless, most of the activities presented in descriptions of the passive as a teaching issue promote *implicit* knowledge of the passive, i.e. procedural knowledge. Indeed, the introduction to CMLF 99 characterizes the general approach to grammar instruction endorsed in the book as "teaching 'grammaring'" (CMLF 99: 6, emphasis in original), to emphasize the fact that grammar is viewed primarily as a skill, not a body of knowledge.

To facilitate the proceduralization of knowledge, language teaching has traditionally relied upon output practice devised in such a way as to minimize learners' opportunities to make mistakes (what Ellis calls 'error-avoiding output practice'). In fact, all the teaching activities aimed at providing learners with implicit knowledge of the passive which are illustrated in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers are of this type – i. e. no examples of *input-oriented* or *error-inducing* activities were found.

Within the output-oriented error-avoiding option, Ellis further distinguishes *text-manipulation* from *text-creation modes* – the former involves mechanical transformation/reconstruction of data, whereas the latter has learners creating original data. It is possible to detect a marked decrease of text manipulation activities in the second vs. the first edition of CMLF 99, in line with the increased emphasis laid on learner-based teaching by TEFL/TESL methodology in the last few years. Whereas many of the activities in CMLF 83 include specific instructions to 'drill' aspects of the language, along the lines of the audiolingual tradition, in CMLF 99 there is a clear shift towards encouraging a more creative use of the language. Indeed, in the more recent edition, although repetition is still felt to be important, where the acquisition of the formal dimension of grammar is at issue, it is stipulated that it should be "purposeful not rote" (CMLF 99: 7).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In keeping with the hypothesis that the acquisition of the three 'dimensions' of grammar comes about via different processes, CMLF 99 proposes its own 'multifaceted approach' to the teaching of grammar, which consists of "using different teaching techniques for teaching different aspects of the three dimensions" (CMLF 99: 7). For the teaching of form, activities built around "purposeful not rote repetition of a particular syntactic pattern" (CMLF 99: 7 – underlining in original) are recommended. Teaching meaning only requires that students' awareness of the association between a given form and its meaning be raised. Use can be taught by engaging learners in activities which have them make choices among alternative structures and providing them with feedback on the appropriateness of their choices. The teaching suggestions included in each chapter of the book are classified according to whether they target the *form*, the *meaning* or the *use* of the grammatical structure under consideration.

To exemplify the changes in methodological orientation between the first and the second edition of CMLF, I shall illustrate an output-oriented activity that comes up in two different versions in CMLF 83 vs. CMLF 99. The aim of the task is to encourage “early use of the agentless passive” (CMLF 83: 233). The 1983 version has been classed as text-manipulation in that it involves the teacher giving commands to one student:

*T (to S1):* Tear up the letter  
and then asking another student to report the command that was carried out by the first student  
*T (to S2):* What happened to the letter? *S2:* It was torn up (CMLF 83: 233)

As is apparent, the students are expected to ‘operate on’ data that is provided to them – they do not create original text. In the 1999 version the activity (categorised as text-creation in Table 3) is provided with a definite context:

Tell students to imagine that they are children. They have had some friends over. The friends have left but the place is a mess. Their parents have returned, and the “children” have to explain what happened (CMLF 99: 357).

Moreover, the operations involve learners coming up with original data:

Give students a list of problems to explain or have them brainstorm a list themselves. Have them role play the parent-child interaction. For example:  
*Parent:* What happened to the curtain?  
*Child:* It got stepped on.  
*Parent:* And what happened to the rug?  
*Child:* It got spilled on (CMLF 99: 357).

Several other suggestions for *text creation* activities featured in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers are also aimed at highlighting the function of textual agent removal which is often deployed in descriptions of processes (making ice-cream, a ‘scientific experiment’) and changes (how a place has changed over time, as shown by two photographs).

Focused communication: production communication						
	X		X			
	CMLF 83	M 96	CMLF 99	P 00	DP 01	K 03

Table 4. Focused communication activities in grammar books for EFL/ESL teachers.

A few words about those activities that can be associated with Ellis’ *focused communication options* are also in order (cf. Table 4). As will be recalled, these options involve a shift of emphasis from learning grammar as an end to learning grammar as a by-product. Again, the tasks described in the grammars in the sample target language production rather than reception – they have thus been classed as “production communication”. They consist in “integrated writing practice” (CMLF 83: 233) activities

(drawing up a report of a small-scale survey and writing a newspaper article about an incident involving a fire) where use of the passive is a possible rather than an obligatory communicative option.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

What does the foregoing analysis tell us about the way second language acquisition and language teaching theory/research is mediated and operationalized for the EFL/ESL teacher? In regard to the acquisition issue, the overarching trend that has been singled out is that in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers acquisition is approached from the point of view of 'problems' that EFL/ESL students typically experience. 'Problems' do not necessarily coincide with 'errors', as what is traditionally meant by 'error' is a deviation from some standard norm as evidenced in oral or written production. In keeping with modern SLA orientations (cf. Ellis 1994), pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers display awareness of the fact that overt (production) errors are not the only way inadequate competence can manifest itself.

Theory/research in second language acquisition is introduced as a way of seeking out the causes of acquisition 'problems'. In doing so, pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers do not usually subscribe to only one of the accepted interpretations of second language acquisition processes, but rather adopt an eclectic stance. We thus find references to *transfer*, *intralingual* and *unique errors* (cf. Ellis 1994: 58) as well as difficulties accounted for through general cognitive and perceptual mechanisms. Unlike early language transfer studies, cross-linguistic transfer is not generally invoked to explain formal errors, but is associated with difficulties in the acquisition of the pragmatics of the passive. This is in keeping with recent research (as summarized in Ellis 1994) which has hypothesized that discourse features tend to be more prone to L1 transfer than formal features as learners usually have less metalingual awareness of discourse than syntax and are thus less ready to 'block' transfer (cf. Ellis 1994: 317). Overgeneralization is mentioned as a cause of intralingual errors, while previous formal instruction is acknowledged as the source of unique errors. Other sources of problems cited have to do with the perceptual non-saliency of some morphemes and the limitations of processing capacity from which low-level learners suffer.

While readers of pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers are afforded the chance to familiarise themselves with a wide range of recent perspectives on second language acquisition, there appears to be a more limited uptake of new proposals for the teaching of grammar in these books. Pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers operationalize language teaching theory/research through the provision of general teaching guidelines and/or the illustration of specific teaching activities. Some attempt to break from tradition is evident in the former (e.g. avoid mechanical active-passive transformations; grammar as a receptive as well as a productive skill), but when it comes to proposing actual teaching activities, grammars seldom stray from the 'tried-and-tested'.

It is, however, fair to say that changes in methodological fashion *can* be discerned if one compares the earlier and the more recent grammars in the sample – whereas the influence of the audiolingual method is still felt in the teaching sugges-

tions of CMLF 83, CMLF 99 features activities that often rely upon discovery- and learner-based teaching and the creative use of language. That said, it should also be pointed out that it is still traditional error-avoiding output practice that has the lion's share among the teaching activities featured in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers. Other grammar teaching options that second language acquisition research has brought to the fore in recent years (error inducing output-based options, input processing options etc.) are not included in the descriptions of the passive as a teaching issue. Likewise, there is little in pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers that attests to the current renewed interest in the role of the L1 in L2 teaching.

How can we account for the wariness with which pedagogical grammarians writing for EFL/ESL teachers tackle recent language teaching theory/research? It could be argued that this is a natural reaction to the tendency to fall prey to passing 'fads' that appears to have beset language teaching for most of its history (for a recent overview, cf. Rizzardi and Barsi 2005). Also, many of the newer SLA-based grammar teaching options have not yet been turned into mainstream practice materials – lacking these, it is unlikely that these proposals will have long-lasting practical impact.

Although limited in scope and exploratory in orientation, this study has shed some light on how theory/research in second language acquisition and language teaching is mediated and presented for the use of the language teacher. This issue is undoubtedly worthy of more detailed scrutiny – a fruitful avenue of further research could perhaps tap the interpretive frameworks that have been developed in recent research on the 'popularization' of scientific knowledge (cf. e.g. Myers 1990, 1992; Garzone 2005).

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## THE REFORMED SECONDARY SCHOOL AND THE NEW STATUS OF GRAMMAR

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to examine and explore the multidimensionality of grammar, emphasising flexibility and adaptability of different perspectives determined by the reformed school language curriculum, teachers and learners. Recent findings of language acquisition research have shed a new light on grammar in the classroom. Although grammar teaching has been a neglected, thorny issue, its importance has finally been recognised. The 'zero option', i.e. abandoning grammar instruction altogether, has been called into question as it does not lead to high levels of grammatical and sociolinguistic competence. Yet some teachers still decide not to teach grammar. Teachers who do teach it, however, are left with a real challenge as they have to take a number of decisions. The article investigates the reformed Polish secondary school curriculum in relation to the *Common European Framework* and recognises the new role of grammar teaching within language education. Because grammar is perceived as an important component of communication, this article also takes into consideration whether and how grammar should be taught.

### 1. Introduction

The implementation of the educational system reform was one of the key modifications to prepare Poland for access to the European Union. It started in 1998 and it focused first on decentralizing the whole system. Many significant changes were introduced, for example, the new Core Curriculum (*Podstawa Programowa*), the new school structure and externally graded examinations, the new Teacher Employment Act (*Karta Nauczyciela*), the Ministry-of-Education approved guidebook for the new *Matura* (secondary school leaving examination) and the cross-curricular approach (*Reforma ... 2000a*).

As far as enlargement of the European Union is concerned, there is a new policy toward promoting language learning and linguistic diversity. According to the new policy, learning and speaking other languages encourage communication with other

Member States and becoming open to their cultures and outlooks (EUC 2002). All Member States and candidate countries have identified improvement of foreign language skills as a priority. Thus, countries such as Poland should formulate language education policies that are coherent with the promotion of social inclusion and the development of democratic citizenship in Europe.

The aim of this article is to analyse the reformed Polish secondary school curriculum to see how it fits the *Common European Framework* and to recognize the new role of grammar teaching within language education. Because grammar functions as an important component of communication and the reformed curriculum promotes teaching language to accomplish a range of communicative purposes, it is necessary to find out whether and how grammar should now be taught.

## 2. The reformed language education

A radical reform in the Polish educational system has been embarked as a result of a national policy intended to adjust the whole system to the European Union requirements. The legal basis for school education is provided by the *Act on the School Education System* (1991), with its later amendments, the *Act of the Provisions of the Reform of the School System* (1999) and other necessary regulations from the Minister of National Education. In accordance with such legislation, since the end of the school year 1998/99, the education system has been organized to consist of the following stages (Jung-Miklaszewska 2000):

- (a) pre-schools,
- (b) 6-year primary schools,
- (c) 3-year junior high schools,
- (d) senior secondary schools:
  - 3-year specialised high schools,
  - 3-year comprehensive high schools,
  - 4-year technical secondary schools,
  - 2-3-year vocational schools,
  - 2-year supplementary comprehensive high schools,
  - 3-year supplementary technical secondary schools,
  - 2-year post-secondary schools.

A new type of secondary school is the specialised high school (*liceum profilowane*) first opened in September 2002. A newly enrolled junior high school graduate is offered the following sections (*profile*) organized within the specialised high school: academic studies, technical and technological studies, agriculture and environment, social sector and services, culture and arts (*Reforma ... 2000b: 13-21*). The academic section is an equivalent of the old comprehensive high school. From 2002, high school education lasts for 3 years and its graduates, after having successfully passed the new *Matura* examination, obtain the *matura* certificate, which allows them to apply for admission to academic institutions. Pursuant to the Act on School Education, both public and non-public schools have to implement their own curricula that are based on the Core Curriculum for general education. Additionally, all school educational institutions have to comply with the rules for pupil assessment, grading and progression, and for setting

examinations and tests as laid down by the minister responsible for school education (Jung-Miklaszewska 2000).

As far as language education is concerned, there has been a dramatic change in the attitudes toward this issue. Not only does the European Union highly regard linguistic abilities, but also considers them to be a key objective to develop the entrepreneurial spirit and skills of EU citizens. The current ideology is that:

Building a common home in which to live, work and trade together means acquiring the skills to communicate with one another effectively and to understand one another better. Learning and speaking other languages encourages us to become more open to others, their cultures and outlooks (EUC 2003).

It has to be mentioned at this point that the European Union recognizes the need for action to improve language learning. *Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity* (EUC 2002) and *Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity: an action plan 2004-2006* (EUC 2003) Consultation Documents are the European Commission's response to that need. Those two documents, previously consulted by relevant national ministries, set out the main policy objectives and identify three areas in which action should be taken: *extending the benefits of life-long language learning to all citizens, improving language teaching, and creating a more language-friendly environment.*

As is often pointed out, language competencies are part of the core skills for citizens, and language learning is a life-long activity. Following these arguments, it is proposed that two foreign languages should be taught from a very early age. Young children build up positive attitudes toward other languages and cultures, and the foundations for later language learning are laid (EUC 2003). In secondary education students should complete the acquisition of at least two foreign languages with the emphasis on the communicative ability. It means that a 'native speaker' fluency is not a must, but *adequate levels of reading, writing, listening and speaking are expected.* Students should be equipped with *intercultural competencies* and be able to *learn languages with or without the teacher.* In order to be provided with the opportunity to use genuine foreign language, students are encouraged to take part in exchange programmes such as *Socrates* and *Leonardo da Vinci*. Furthermore, secondary school students should be given the opportunity of learning a subject through the medium of a foreign language which is called *Content and language integrated learning* (CLIL) (EUC 2003). In this way students use the newly-learned language and are given exposure to it without requiring extra time in the curriculum. Additionally, a language-friendly school should be created. Through the cross-curricular approach of the mother tongue and other languages, multilingualism would be developed.

The responsibility for implementing the prerequisites discussed above lies with national regulations and ministries of Member States and candidate countries. The European Union's role is not to enforce the action but to support and supplement it, which is expected to develop quality language education (EUC 2003). English language teaching in the reformed Polish secondary schools is being organised to meet the European Union's postulates. It is a socio-pedagogical means to enhance the learning and teaching of foreign languages that suits the times, especially in correlation

with the labour markets, social cohesion and the changing needs of learners. Enforcing the reform, however, is a long and difficult process.

## 2.1. The Core Curriculum

The basic framework for teaching languages is given by the Core Curriculum, which includes several *key competencies* that learners should acquire. Among them are: the ability to search for information, the ability to organise work and take responsibility for learning and being independent (M. Ellis 2001: 3). It is more and more often suggested in the literature that the reform seeks not only to improve foreign language education, but also aims to instil new characteristics in learners (*Reforma...* 2000a; Komorowska 2000: 5-13).

An important aspect of teaching that enhances the acquisition of the key competencies is *promoting learning strategies in the classroom*. Learning strategies are defined as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford 1990: 8). What follows is a general typology of learning strategies students can be trained in:

- (a) *memory strategies* – help students to store and retrieve information;
- (b) *cognitive strategies* – enable learners to understand and produce new language;
- (c) *compensation strategies* – allow learners to communicate despite deficiencies in their language;
- (d) *metacognitive strategies* – allow learners to control, organise, plan and evaluate their own learning;
- (e) *affective strategies* – help learners to control emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values;
- (f) *social strategies* – help learners to interact with other people (Oxford 1990, cited in Richards and Lockhart 1995: 63-64).

Appropriate strategy training in the reformed classroom can help learners to become *self-reliant and promotes learner autonomy as the main goal*.

Another important aspect of teaching in secondary schools, related to the key competencies, is to achieve a range of goals stated in the Core Curriculum (*Reforma...* 2000b: 46). If students are to be independent and responsible for their learning, it is essential to *provide individual learners with feedback and nurture their self-confidence about their own language abilities*. This can be accomplished by helping with the take-up of language learning opportunities. Many available school exchange programmes and international exchange programmes improve access to genuine foreign language and encourage the production, adaptation and exchange of learning materials and information. Other important dimensions are the use of authentic materials in teaching and learning and the use of the foreign language in team or class projects (especially those of interdisciplinary importance). Language projects and assistantships supply learners with genuine opportunities to use language skills through contact with other learners. They also revitalise language lessons. What seems to be clear is the fact that all secondary schools should be encouraged to host staff from other countries and extend contact between pupils and teachers from neighbouring language communities (EUC 2003). The use of the media also provides language learning opportunities and may be moti-

ating. For example, access to the Internet is becoming more and more widespread and the potential of the Web modules can complement the work of a teacher or be exploited for independent study.

## 2.2. The *Matura* examination

Taking a closer look at English teaching at stage four, the new form of the final examination (the new *Matura*) and its standards cannot be neglected. Ministry-of-Education approved guidebooks are the source of extensive information on the subject and they include a thorough description of the final exam. The new *Matura* is designed to meet the European Union's examination format. The format is set forth in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Language* and the *European Language Portfolio* which provide a foundation for schemes describing an individual's language skills in an objective, practical and portable manner (EUC 2003).

In the reformed secondary schools two foreign languages are taught. In addition, since 2005 in high schools and 2006 in other secondary schools a foreign language has been an obligatory *Matura* subject for everyone. Students are to declare which level they are going to take: either advanced (*poziom rozszerzony*) and/or basic (*poziom podstawowy*). Presented below is a general overview of the differences between the old and new *Matura* language examination (M. Ellis 2001: 3):

### The old *Matura*:

- (1) there are two different kinds of *matura* exams: oral and written;
- (2) there is no foreign language obligatory *matura* subject, some students have to take the oral *Matura* and only a small number of students decide to take the written one;
- (3) there is one level of the written exam;
- (4) exams are conducted by a school's given exam board;
- (5) exams are not coded.

### The new *Matura*:

- (1) there is a foreign language obligatory subject for secondary students;
- (2) the exam contains written and oral parts;
- (3) there are two levels: basic and/or advanced (the decision which one to take is up to the examinee);
- (4) there is a listening comprehension task;
- (5) the exam is coded.

It seems to be clear from the comparison that the new exam is intended to be better organised and much more objective.

The new ideas, however, are not so easily implemented. Lack of information on the reform and negative attitudes to it make teachers sceptical of Personal and Social Education Programme (PSE), the Core Curriculum, the new approach to assessment, external examinations, pupil self-assessment, the cross-curricular approach, theme paths, and the New Teacher Employment Act. In his investigation of English language teachers' attitudes to the reform, Alexander (2001) points out that nearly 70% of teachers neither support nor oppose the reform but are rather open-minded about

it. The underlying assumption is that the whole process of the reform is complex and difficult to accomplish. However, although the European Commission's *Action Plan* ended in 2006, it does not mean that changes cannot be extended in time. The year 2005 in Poland was not a deadline for the secondary school reform to stop. Further steps need to be taken, for example amending the New Teacher Employment Act, making reform-related information more available, providing more information on the English language *Matura*, and making the Core Curriculum more applicable to Polish school reality.

### 3. The status of grammar in the reformed secondary school curriculum

The primary goal of reformed language education is to help students develop the necessary skills to be able to use a foreign language, which means the ability to communicate. A major shift in perspective within language education evolves from a change of emphasis from presenting language as a set of forms to presenting language as a functional system to fulfil a range of communicative purposes. However, despite the impact communicative approaches have had on methodology in recent years, the majority of learners continue to learn from the instructional materials in which the principles of organization and presentation are grammatically based.

Grammar has always been one of the most controversial and least understood aspects of language (Hinkel and Fotos 2002: 10). Although every human language has quite a lot of grammar (Trask 1999: 27-28), any attempt to define it is difficult because the term is multifarious in itself. The place of grammar has been changing through history and various perspectives have emerged. For example, grammar, in formal terms, is comprised of syntax and morphology, operating within the sentence and also beyond it. Two steps are usually distinguished in the study of grammar. The first is to identify units such as *word* and *sentence*; the second serves as the investigation of the patterns into which these units fall and meanings they convey (Crystal 1988: 88). Thus, the grammar of a language is the description of the ways in which words can change their forms and can be combined into sentences in that language (Harmer 2001: 12). Grammar can be seen as *descriptive* – the concern of reference grammars and linguistic theory – or *pedagogical* – the task of lessons and textbooks (Tonkyn 1994: 1). There is an important distinction between describing a language from a syntactic or traditional point of view and effective teaching of that language. Opinions whether or not to implement grammar in the curriculum are divided. If teachers decide that it is worth providing grammatical instruction, they have to look at grammar from a learner's perspective. It is frequently noted that grammar for learners should be practical and task-oriented (Leech 1994: 17-30) as learners employ the knowledge of grammar to solve drills, write essays and converse. The *zero option*, i.e. abandoning grammar instruction in language courses, has been called into question as it has not guaranteed effective language learning (Murkowska 2000: 30). The justification for teaching grammar emerges from specific arguments such as acquisition theory, the learner, language pedagogy, and the new *Matura* examination.

### 3.1. Acquisition theory

According to Hammerly (1991), despite the fact that second language learners have a long span of exposure to genuine language, they are not successful in achieving high levels of grammatical competence. Hammerly comments that it is very difficult for those naturalistic learners to reach a higher level than the second on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages scale of proficiency. Other studies offer similar insights. Kowal and Swain (1997) and Swain (1985), for example, recognise the drawbacks of Canadian immersion programmes. Although Canadian immersion learners pick up the target language through instruction on other subjects and in this way achieve high discourse and strategic competence, they present inability as far as grammatical distinctions are concerned.

Presented below is a list of possible reasons for learners' low level of grammatical competence (R. Ellis 2002: 18):

- (1) age and the critical period hypothesis: after the age of 15 it is hardly possible to achieve full grammatical competence;
- (2) communicative sufficiency: learners' communicative needs may be accomplished without the use of target language norms;
- (3) limited opportunities for pushed output: the contact with the second language may be limited to classroom learning as learners use their mother tongue in the outside environment;
- (4) lack of negative feedback: positive input offered by natural language learning may not guarantee the acquisition of some grammatical structures.

A newly enrolled student of secondary school is over 15. It would mean that the age barrier is an additional difficulty for a language teacher. However, there is an ongoing debate on the validity of the critical period hypothesis. Many dedicated and motivated learners are able to master target language norms above the age of 15 (Ellis 2002: 19). Second language acquisition research also suggests that any second language learner passes through developmental stages as they acquire the grammar of the target language (Richards 1997: 148-150). These developmental orders in the emergence of grammatical competence are taken as evidence of a refining of the learner's capacities to package communicative meanings and intentions. It is often noted that developmental orders prove the claim that: "(...) learning is a creative construction process, in which learners construct their own interlanguage systems" (Richards 1997: 149). As far as communicative sufficiency and limited pushed output are concerned, many language programmes with the early emphasis on comprehensible communication result in successful but grammatically inaccurate learners. Thus, there may be a demand for some kind of focus on grammatical accuracy in the curriculum. Richards (1997: 157) indicates, for example, that by being focused on grammatical accuracy learners become more engaged in pedagogic tasks and learning experiences which develop monitoring, revision and editing capacities. In order to improve both communicative and pushed output needs, the reformed curriculum should attribute a significant role to communicative tasks that are linguistically demanding. Ellis (2002: 19) sees yet another solution to communicative needs and output opportunities enhancement. He claims that learners' attention should be focused on grammatical form

through grammar teaching. Moreover, Ellis views grammar teaching as a means of obtaining negative feedback in the acquisition of difficult structures.

From what has been stated above, grammar teaching may have an impact on language learning. As Ellis (2002: 19-20) underlines, the most crucial research findings about teaching grammar are as follows:

- (1) it aims to enhance successful L2 acquisition;
- (2) it brings good results only if learners are at a right stage of the developmental order, allowing them to process the target structure;
- (3) it has little significance in the spontaneous use of difficult structures;
- (4) it develops implicit knowledge of simple grammatical rules;
- (5) it develops explicit knowledge of grammatical features;
- (6) it is the most effective if it is supplied with opportunities for natural communication.

Taken together, second language acquisition research findings clearly demonstrate that it is worth implementing grammar instruction into the classroom as it can have a remedial effect on interlanguage development (Doughty and Williams 1998: 1-11).

### 3.2. The learner

Even stronger arguments for teaching grammar than those based on the acquisition theory may come from the learners. In recent years great importance has been placed on *learner-centredness* which makes the learners' needs and experience central to the educational process (Harmer 2001: 56). Thus, students' powerful perceptions about the form language learning should take cannot be neglected. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the learning process. A very important reason for including grammar in the reformed curriculum is simply that many learners expect it. It is advocated that grammar may be recognised as the central component of language and learners may make strenuous efforts to understand the grammatical features they notice (R. Ellis 2002: 20-21). Numerous studies of written diaries conducted by Ellis emphasise the significance of grammar teaching. Learners are particularly engaged to understand grammatical rules, even if the rules are explicitly taught. To write school compositions learners need the knowledge of grammar. Words and sentences do not exist in isolation, but their meanings are related to other words and sentences to form a cohesive whole. What is more, newly enrolled secondary students are used to an educational setting where teachers overtly teach grammar.

Because learners differ with respect to their needs and expectations, the aim of grammar teaching is twofold. Some learners are likely to learn grammar and some favour communication. However, according to Ellis (2002: 21), many successful students actively focus on form. For those learners there is a need to teach grammar communicatively, which means focusing learners' attention on form in a series of communicative tasks.

### 3.3. Language pedagogy

The failure of the notional/functional syllabus is attributed to the fact that it does not lead to a full development of grammatical and sociolinguistic competences (Swain

1985). Notions and functions are not generative in the way grammar is. Task-based or thematically-based syllabuses are also criticised as they lack systematic coverage of grammar. Learners performing the tasks may avoid the use of difficult structures (Ellis 2002: 21). By contrast, a structural syllabus offers detailed coverage of grammar. Learners, however, may not become fluent and may sacrifice communicative abilities in using the language in order to try to achieve formal accuracy. A combination of different types of syllabuses is then a reasonable solution to the problem as it is likely to equally develop communication and grammatical abilities of learners.

### 3.4. The new *Matura* examination

Considering a number of reasons why grammar should be included in a language curriculum, the reformed secondary school English teaching has to be examined. To achieve the goals set by the Core Curriculum, teachers have to prepare their students to successfully pass the new *Matura*. The first step a teacher has to take is to use a MEN-approved guidebook. The guidebook together with the exam requirements (*standardy wymagań*) contain a list of exemplary topics, grammar, lexis and exam strategy training. It would mean that students should possess grammatical knowledge on the items from the guidebook. However, M. Ellis (2001: 4) reports that: "grammatical knowledge, as such, has been subsumed by the ability to communicate a message effectively". Grammar in the reformed curriculum is not seen as the central organizing principle of communication, but, rather, as an important component of communication. Grammar skills interact with other language skills and together determine what learners can do and how well they can do it. One of the basic reasons to teach grammar together with communication is the fact that all secondary school students have to learn to write irrespective of the new *Matura* level they take. Ellis (2001: 5) goes even further claiming that the time previously spent on doing only grammar exercises needs to be spent on communication exercises as well. In order to be communicative, learners need to know structures, but they also need to have extensive vocabulary knowledge. By integrating grammar instruction, lexis and communication in the classroom, teachers will meet learners' expectations and the curriculum requirements. Learners' communicative abilities can be improved by the interactional opportunities they experience. As Ellis (2002: 19) puts it, learners' communicative needs are enhanced within a curriculum of communicative tasks and by focusing learners' attention on grammatical form through grammar teaching.

## 4. Conclusion

The school reform modifications are necessary to prepare Poland to become a member of United Europe. However, there are still reform-related issues that need attention. Teachers in the reformed school are very often overloaded with such problems as low payment, bureaucracy, and the ineffectiveness of the promotion process. A considerable drawback of the language curriculum for secondary schools is lack of consistency. The prerequisites for language teachers change too often and teachers are

left with no information. In addition, there is no extensive and detailed information on the new *Matura* examination.

Despite many negative sides of the reform, the changes are bringing new insights into language teaching and learning. Education becomes a creative process which is constantly put under analysis. The reform gives rise to ambitious educational innovations making the learner the most important in the process. There is a place for flexible teachers who seek to develop themselves and their practice. The reformed school does not hinder teachers, but it is challenging and gives them unlimited choices in the classroom.

This article has sought to make a case for implementing grammar into the reformed curriculum. Although grammar instruction is sometimes circumscribed, it is worth attention. It is being proposed that the grammar component should be used alongside a communicative task-based component. Grammar should be taught interactively and focus on those areas that cause particular problems to learners. A successful combination of grammar and communication is likely to bring better effects of both teaching and learning.

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