Second Language Acquisition & Pedagogic Grammar

Some theories of second language learning cast doubt on the teachability of grammar, arguing that learning does not become acquisition, or that the learner's syllabus constraints on what can be taught and learned at a given time. In spite of this grammar books which aim at explicit teaching continue to be popular. What role, if any, do you think such books have in the classroom?

Fuyuko Kato

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1 Introduction

Some language learning theories in the past, which still have some influence on recent teaching methods, cast doubt on the teachability of grammar. The first half of this paper looks back the history of language teaching methodology regarding grammar teaching, referring to the main stream in linguistics in those days. Krashen's Monitor Theory and Ellis' second language acquisition (SLA) theory are mainly examined, especially focusing on the relationship between 'acquisition' and 'learning'.

On the premise that the main role of grammar books is explicit grammar instruction, the latter part of the paper deals with what role a grammar book has in the classroom. Explicit grammar instruction is examined to see whether it can help learners construct explicit knowledge which can be converted into implicit knowledge under a specific circumstance, referring mainly to Ellis' SLA theory. Furthermore, rules which require direct instruction are looked at through the studies by Rutherford and Shortall. Also, suggestions about grammar teaching are discussed, referring to a survey by Chalker as well as from my classroom experience.

2 Language Teaching Methodology and Grammar Instruction

In the last 100 years, the language teaching methodology has changed in approach and method of grammar teaching. From the mid to late 19th century, the dominant trend was a non-communicative approach. With the Grammar-Translation Method, grammar was taught deductively in an organized and systematic way, by studying of grammar rules, which were practiced through translation exercises. The Direct Method, best exemplified by the Berlitz Method, reflected the Reform Movement

after the age of the Grammar-Translation Method. Grammar was taught inductively and correct grammar was also emphasized under the Direct Method.

The Audiolingual Method in the 1950s derived from structural linguistics in the United States. In structural linguistics, an important tenet is that the primary medium of language is oral. The linguistic system is pyramidally structured: phonemic systems led to morphemic systems, and these in turn led to the higher-level systems of phrases, clauses, and sentences (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 49).

Tonkyn (1994) describes the decline of grammar:

> If mainstream linguistics had a somewhat equivocal effect on the status of grammar within language teaching, sociolinguistics may be said to have been a major influence in its dethronement. (p. 3)

Sociolinguists, such as Hymes, offered to language teaching the notion of 'communicative competence'. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which aims at focusing on communicative proficiency by replicating contextual and purposive features of real communication in the classroom, has expanded since the mid-1970s. Comparing CLT to the Audiolingual Method, Finocchiaro and Brumfit interpret as one of the primary characteristics of CLT that the target linguistic system is learned best through the process of struggling to communicate.

Not only sociolinguistics but also psycholinguistics played an important role in the decline of grammar in language teaching methodology. Chomsky's conception of the child acquiring its mother tongue as being equipped with a language acquisition device (LAD) has provided great influence on Krashen's Input Hypothesis:

> Krashen's view of the second language acquisition process, according to

which an inbuilt acquisitional mechanism would operate under the right conditions of comprehensible input and low affective filter, marginalised the role of form-focused instruction. (Tonkyn 1994: 4)

However, the rediscovery of grammar has been observed both in mother-tongue teaching and teaching English as a second/foreign language since the mid-1980s. Krashen's approach to the learner's internalized language has been questioned, and the importance of externalized language or formal instruction has been acknowledged instead. According to Tonkyn (1994), Ellis has suggested that dimensions such as the complexity of processing operations and of form-function relationships may explain the degree of teachability of different grammatical forms and posits the necessity of formal instruction so that premature fossilization may be prevented. Also, in the interview (Ellis and Hedge 1993), Ellis comments that consciousness-raising (CR) may help learners to construct their own explicit grammar.

3   Second Language Acquisition Theories and Teachability of Grammar

Richards and Rodgers (1986: 18) consider that the nature of language learning should respond to two questions: (a) What are the psycholinguistic and cognitive processes involved in language learning? and (b) What are the conditions that need to be met in order for these learning processes to be activated? The following part of this section introduces the language theories of Krashen and Prabhu which cast doubt on the teachability of grammar, as well as the recent trend of the SLA theory, noted by Ellis, which places importance on grammar teaching.

3.1   Krashen's Monitor Theory

One of the best known and most influential language theories is Krashen's Monitor

Theory, which accounts for second language acquisition from both the process and conditions aspects. As explained by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), Krashen's Monitor Theory first started as a model of second language performance. Krashen being influenced by Chomsky, his interest started with the relationship between the appearance order of certain English grammatical morphemes in the learners' language and conditions of exposure, as well as disturbances observed in this 'natural order'. According to Terrell (1991), who published *The Natural Approach* with Krashen in 1983, Krashen did not think that explicit grammar instruction was a major factor in the order of acquisition of grammatical forms or structures.

Krashen claims that there are two separate knowledge systems: the acquired system and the learned system. The acquired system consists of subconscious knowledge of second language grammar as being obtained naturally as the child acquires its first language grammar. He supposes that second language learners acquire grammatical morphemes in the following order: pronoun case, progressive (-ing), contractible copula ('s), plural (-s), article (a, the), contractible auxiliary ('s), regular past (-ed), irregular past, long plural (-es), possessive ('s), and 3rd person (-s). The learned system is the product of formal instruction, for example by classroom language teaching, so that the knowledge is a conscious one. The 'natural order' is the surface manifestation of the acquired system and the order is disturbed when learners use their learned system, which Krashen names as 'Monitoring'. If they use their acquired system (small 'm' 'monitoring'), on the other hand, they will be able to self-correct their errors. Therefore, 'Monitoring' and 'monitoring' are pretty different cognitive processes. Krashen claims that knowledge from the learned system cannot be passed into the acquired system.

According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, and the Monitor Hypothesis handle the issues in the original Monitor Model. From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, the Monitor Model went through a number of modifications and the Monitor Theory was finally induced as a second language acquisition theory. The famous Input Hypothesis is the central claim of 'Extended Standard' Monitor Theory, and explains how learners acquire a second language:

> Progress along the 'natural order' is achieved when a learner at some stage, i, of IL [interlanguage] development receives CI [comprehensible input] that contains structures (lexis, sounds, morphology, syntax, etc.) one step beyond the current stage, or structures at '$i + 1$'. (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991: 242)

In this case, Krashen places the major premise on learners' heavy innate endowment for second language acquisition, supporting Chomsky's notion of an LAD.

The other central claim is the Affective Filter Hypothesis. The various affective factors which hinder acquisition by preventing comprehensible input from reaching the LAD include lack of motivation, low self-esteem, and anxiety. Therefore, in order to lower the affective filter, teachers should consider creating a positive affective classroom climate, which, however, Krashen sees as necessary but not sufficient for second language acquisition. According to Terrell (1991), Krashen understands that learners can have access to 'monitoring' when they have enough time to think about applying the grammatical rule to the output.

3.2   Prabhu's Learning Theory

According to Willis (1997), Prabhu claims that focusing on a descriptive grammar is

likely to inhibit learners' language acquisition. His claim is based on two hypotheses. When comparing learners' internal grammar with any pedagogic grammar, (a) the former must be much more complex and comprehensive than the latter, and (b) there is no parallel between learners' developing interlanguage grammar and the organization of the descriptive grammar. Therefore, we cannot suppose that we can offer learners grammar teaching. Teaching a descriptive grammar may inhibit the development in the learners' interlanguage by encouraging them to operate consciously with a description. Prabhu thinks that:

> Grammar-construction by the learner is an unconscious process which is best facilitated by bringing about in the learner a preoccupation with meaning, saying or doing. (cited by Beretta and Daview 1985 in Willis 1997: 114)

3.3   Ellis' Second Language Acquisition Theory

Regarding Krashen's powerful second language acquisition theory and Prabhu's learning theory in the 1980s, Ellis (in Ellis and Hedge 1993) sees some kind of comeback of grammar teaching, which, however, is not the same approach as the one through the PPP (presentation, practice, production) approach before the 1980s. He suggests the necessity of an approach to grammar that is compatible with how one views second language acquisition.

When considering how learners acquire grammatical rules, Ellis (1997) claims that not all of the learners follow the 'natural order' as Krashen's posits. Referring to researchers who criticized the universal natural order, he points out that it may be wrong to assume that the order of accuracy is the same as the order of acquisition and that the order varies somewhat according to the learners' first language, and claims the need to consider the sequence of acquisition. When examining a particular

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grammatical structure, for example an irregular past tense 'ate', learners are likely to transit through different stages until they acquire the native-speaker rule: (1) 'eat', they fail to say the correct past tense, (2) 'ate', they begin to produce the correct form, (3) 'eated', they over-generalize the regular past tense form, (4) 'ated', they sometimes produce a hybrid form, and (5) 'ate' they acquire the correct form. Here, Ellis reveals the fact that using a correct form in the middle of the stages does not suppose the acquisition of the form. Rutherford (1987), as well as Ellis, refers to the phenomenon that learners follow a U-shaped course of development by moving through the stages in acquisition. This fact explains that learners reorganize their existing knowledge to accommodate new knowledge.

In order to see whether formal instruction has any effect on the orders and sequences of acquisition, Ellis refers to a study by Teresa Pica, who compared the accuracy order of grammatical features among three groups—an untutored group, a tutored group, and a mixed group—and found out that instruction had had little overall effect on acquisition. However, she further suggested from the observation that the effects of instruction might depend on the target structure that was being taught. From this, Ellis concludes that instruction may be effective in teaching items when they are particularly complex. Regarding the effect of instruction on the sequence of acquisition, he refers to a project known as ZISA (Zweitspracherwerb Italienischer und Spanischer Arbeiter), which suggested that the instruction had had no effect on the processing strategies involved in the acquisition of German word-order rules. However, even though the instructed learners seemed to follow their own syllabus, they proceeded through the syllabus more rapidly than the untutored ones.

3.3.1 Interlanguage Development and Grammar Instruction

Ellis' other concern is with learners' interlanguage development — that is, how learners acquire a second language, and how explicit grammar instruction has an effect on it. All language users have both implicit and explicit knowledge. According to his definition, the former is the second language knowledge which a learner is unaware of and therefore cannot verbalize. The latter is the one which a learner is aware of and can verbalize on request. These two concepts seem to correspond to Krashen's 'acquisition' and 'learning' respectively. While Krashen hypothesizes that learning cannot become acquisition, Ellis supposes that explicit knowledge may aid learners in developing implicit knowledge and a direct interface may exist between the two systems under a specific circumstance. Irrespective of whether learners receive explicit knowledge implicitly or explicitly, explicit knowledge may convert into implicit knowledge when learners are at the right stage of development, that is, learners may incorporate explicit grammar instruction into their implicit knowledge.

3.3.2 Explicit Knowledge and Consciousness-Raising

Explicit knowledge may help learners with developing their interlanguage. Learners can receive explicit knowledge not only through explicit instruction but also through consciousness-raising activities. As recent trends show, consciousness-raising (CR) is getting more attention in grammar teaching than before. Through consciousness-raising activities, learners become aware of language features, are encouraged to think about language and to draw their own conclusions about how the language works (Willis and Willis 1996). Ellis defines the notion of consciousness-raising as a type of form-focused instruction designed to make learners aware of a specific linguistic feature.

Ellis summarizes his idea by saying that direct instruction can help in many ways: for example, it may improve language accuracy, facilitate interlanguage development, and destabilize interlanguage grammars that have fossilized. However, there are constraining factors such as the nature of target structures and learners' stages of development. Direct instruction can be an aid to language acquisition, but it is not sufficient by itself. Ellis additionally suggests input in the form of input-flooding, which supplies learners with plentiful positive evidence of a specific linguistic feature. Input-flooding will not lead to fossilization of interlanguage grammars, provided that explicit instruction and negative feedback are given.

4 Role of Explicit Grammar Instruction

Terrell (1991) as well as Ellis comments that explicit grammar instruction (EGI) is not a major factor in the order or sequence of acquisition of grammatical forms or structures, referring to a number of researchers including VanPatten, Long, and Pienemann. In spite of this, Terrell proposes that EGI can affect the acquisition process in three different ways: (a) as an advance organizer; (b) as a meaning-form focuser; and (c) as monitoring. Taking these one by one, the advance organizer is intended to give learners information about target language forms and structures that will aid comprehending and segmenting input. Meaning-form focuser should aid learners in comprehending a meaning-form relationship for morphologically complex forms. For example, if a learner expresses a past event and uses an adverb which denotes the past (for example, yesterday), the verb in the past form is a redundant past marker. Terrell is concerned with how learners become aware of this kind of redundant grammatical meaning-form relationship. Last, monitoring may help

learners produce more accurate and complete utterances. Krashen also suggests that 'monitoring' is effective for self-correcting and improving accuracy. Terrell explains Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis as an explicit knowledge of grammar by adults that may be useful in only one way — as a 'monitor' for self-correction. Krashen also suggests that grammar study may lower the affective filter for some adults and indirectly contribute to the acquisition process. Terrell goes further and hypothesizes that if learners' output can also serve as input to the acquisition process, monitoring might directly affect acquisition. On the other hand, Krashen claims that speaking cannot be the cause of acquisition. According to Ellis (1997), Merrill Swain is also positive about the effectiveness of output on acquisition. She suggests that: (a) output can serve a consciousness-raising function by helping learners to notice gaps in their interlanguage; (b) output helps learners to test hypotheses; and (c) learners sometimes talk about their own output, identifying problems with it and discussing ways in which they can be put right (Ellis 1997: 49).

Peter Skehan (1994) takes the same viewpoint as Ellis that there is no direct correspondence between teaching and learning. Learners assimilate language features in their own good time. He also refers to Long who said that although his study suggested that instruction did not have direct and immediate effect, it did have some. It is important to provide instruction for learners, but one should not expect to see the immediate and specific impact of any particular 'bit' of instruction on any particular 'bit' of language (p. 19).

5   Target Structures of Explicit Grammar Instruction

Which grammar rules require explicit instruction? Ellis (1997) refers to the study of

markedness in Chomsky's Universal Grammar (UG) theory, which term is mainly used in linguistics and refers to the idea that some features may be more 'basic' or 'natural' than others. Unmarked features are governed by UG and are universal and innate so that they could be acquired naturally. However, marked features are outside UG, therefore, they require explicit instruction. Ellis also suggests that learners' errors should be targeted as the forms for instruction (Robinson 1998).

Pinker (1994), a cognitive scientist, claims that people do not think in their individual languages; they think in a language of thought (in his term 'mentalese'). Then how do people translate a language of thought into strings of words? Pinker supposes that there may be just one pair of super-rules for the entire language, where the distinctions among nouns, verbs, prepositions, and adjectives are collapsed and all four are specified with a variable like 'X'. According to his X-bar theory, the properties of the whole phrase in human languages are determined by the properties of a single element, the head, inside the phrase. Some languages including English have the head come before its participants which define a state or relationship, whereas in other languages including Japanese, the head comes after its participants. What makes a difference between languages is the parameter setting. Since English and Japanese are looking-glass versions of each other, you can switch from 'head-first' to 'head-last' or vice versa.

Shortall's comment (1996) that adult Japanese learners of English can reset parameters at an early stage of learning without any overt rule-teaching suggests that they acquire the basic structural rule of English grammar unconsciously. Shortall also refers to the idea of the head parameter and distinguishes between core and peripheral

features of language, suggesting that structures which relate to the core grammar do not need explicit teaching and only the peripheral features may require instruction such as language-specific aspects of structure, for example, the article system, the auxiliary system, language-specific lexical patterns including collocations, and whether the sentence structure is subject+predicate or topic+comment.

Rutherford (1987) shows an example of the interlanguage development by watching through the process of achieving linguistic features with the help of grammatical rules. When you compare the sentence structures of Japanese and English, the former is analyzed as topic+comment and the latter as subject+predicate. Conversion from the topic+comment relation to subject+predicate relation, although it is rather over-simplified, is made by means of extra grammatical 'machinery'. Regarding the reorganization between the two different types of constructions, Rutherford refers further to the relation between theme/rheme and the determiner system, and suggests that learners need to distinguish the features of the target language whether they are controlled by discourse or by syntax. He claims that consciousness-raising may contribute a lot to contrast the differences between the learners' mother tongue and the target language.

Last, not only Ellis but also Pinker and Shortall state in their writings that they refer to Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory on examining the target features which require explicit instruction. However, Ellis strongly suggests that UG does not claim to account for the whole of a language or even the whole of the grammar of a language.

6   Considerations in Grammar Books from the Learner's Viewpoint

One of the roles of grammar books is description of grammar, that is aiming at explicit grammar instruction. Chalker (1994) indicates that there are more functional and meaning-based descriptions of grammar in recent grammar books; however, some users think that a dictionary is easier to use than a grammar book.

In considering grammar books as reference and practice books, one of the most important aspects is to know what learners want to know from grammar books. Chalker comments that both learners and teachers want to know how the grammar contributes to meaning. From a survey of a number of grammar books, she suggests that grammar books should not be merely a collection of *ad hoc* rules. Grammar books usually illustrate rules by isolated sentences, which may cause learners to ignore the use in context. She claims that what is grammatically correct out of context may be virtually unacceptable in context. Besides contextualization, she is concerned with the organization of grammar books. Most of them are arranged in a linear way, presupposing that learners have other knowledge to refer to. Such looks usually put verbs or nouns at the beginning and leave difficult and longer structures to the end, which often gives learners the impression they should work from the beginning. Her suggestion reminds us of Prabhu's understanding of the relationship between learners' developing interlanguage grammar and the organization of the descriptive grammar. Chalker is also concerned about using grammar books separate from coursebooks, which may use different terminology in explaining the same rules, sometimes under different categories. However, she claims that this can be turned to advantage to raise learners' awareness that language may be analyzed in different ways.

7   Conclusion and Implications for Grammar Teaching

Although the second language acquisition theories previously observed are not proved, the concept of the theories and related suggestions are very impressive. Among them, Rutherford's comment on the different sentence structures between English and Japanese, further suggesting the relation between theme/rheme and the determiner system is inspiring. I feel that most Japanese teachers of English pay less attention to the structure of their mother tongue. I do not support the idea of contrastive analysis; however, the knowledge of Japanese structure may provide teachers with some ideas on teaching methods. For example, in the Japanese context, subject can be a topic or a person/thing that predicates the following verb. One of the textbooks teaching Japanese to non-Japanese learners refers to the claim made by Mikami that the term 'subject' is confusing and ambiguous, and therefore it should be replaced with 'topic' and 'subject' as in English for clear distinction (Yoshikawa et al. 1987).

A look at the history of language teaching in Japan shows that grammar teaching has always been popular at school in Japan, contrary to the cases observed in the books referred here. According to the recent newspaper article (*Chunichi* 1998), the advisory committee of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science reached a consensus in favor of more focus on oral communication than on grammar and vocabulary teaching at school. This agreement is due to numerous and strong voices that conventional teaching methodology has had little effect on communication. However, as a number of researchers indicate that formal instruction may be necessary, the approach should be modified. I understand that grammar instruction

itself is not the vice but the approach to grammar teaching at school had some problems.

Most students in my language school claim that they have little communicative competence due to the heavy grammar-centered curriculum at school. Although some of them have enough knowledge of grammar, they often fail to express themselves orally. If you take Ellis' word that EGI may take the role of a direct interface between learning and acquisition, there must be something wrong with the grammar taught at school. One of my students indicates clearly that the way grammar was approached at school was just like solving a mathematic equation, and in most situations context was little considered. Another student in an elementary-level class failed to understand the meaning of a sentence including the word *won't* due to the stereotyped translation of *shinaide-shou* in Japanese. Her comment was that the translation didn't seem to fit well in the context. I presume that she has learned at school that *will* corresponds to *...de-shou* and vice versa. I explained that *will* can be also used when you decide to do something at the time of speaking and emphasized as well that you should not tell the usage of a word in one particular way. In a different class, which is a private one, I take a piece of simple text from the Internet for grammar teaching. We also use a grammar book *English Grammar in Use* (Murphy 1985) as a reference and do some related exercises if necessary. The aim of using an authentic article and writing a summary besides using a grammar book is that she may not only become conscious of syntax and the usage of language specific features such as the article system but also try using a grammar form which she has learned through a coursebook or grammar book. Since I strongly feel that grammar is not a square system but a flexible organic system, I believe that the concept of contextualization

should be more emphasized in grammar teaching.

To summarize, grammar teaching has been treated in many different ways in the past decade, and at present, some researchers give a favorable account of explicit grammar instruction. It may help learners with their language acquisition in various ways including construction of explicit grammar, rapid learning, improvement of language accuracy, development of interlanguage, and prevention of early fossilization. It can affect the acquisition process as an advance organizer, as a meaning-form focuser, and as monitoring. It may be effective in teaching marked and peripheral features and on learners' errors. As explicit grammar instruction is the main role of grammar books, they should be more utilized in learning the target language. However, they need to be adapted to focus on form-meaning relationship and contextualization. From my classroom experience, I feel strongly that becoming conscious of a form may be necessary to acquire the form, however, it is not sufficient by itself. Teachers are required to create a chance of real communication in the classroom so that learners can actually use the target grammar form in a meaningful way. Last, teachers should not expect any immediate and direct result from grammar teaching, as Skehan claims. Some grammar features may be easy, and others not. Some learners find a rule easy, but others don't: learners differ in their language competence.

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