Effective Approach to Implicit and Explicit Grammar Instruction*

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Jeong, Sooyeong. 2008. Effective Approach to Implicit and Explicit Grammar Instruction. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal, 16*(3), 43-59. The question of how to teach English grammar in the school system has been a subject of study for English scholars. Several years ago there was the suggestion that to instruct English grammar in the Korean EFL situation was useless, but it is not possible to speak without English grammar. Fluency is very important in speaking English, yet fluency with correctness is better. In the traditional way, teachers have taught English grammar explicitly to make students learn grammar, but students do not apply grammar in discourse situations. Nowadays, instead of teaching English grammar explicitly, teaching English grammar unconsciously and implicitly or accidentally and intercommunicatively is focused on more in education mixed with English speaking education. This implicit and unconscious English grammar instruction is more effective in innated students grammar teaching and lasts long in the memory. I will introduce traditional grammar teaching methods and teaching grammar implicitly in the present English curriculum and in English speaking education, and explain how to apply it in the school system.

Key Words: implicit, explicit, focus on form, focus on forms, obtrusive, deductive, metalinguistic, communicative, content-based

1. Introduction

Among the prominent issues in the foreign language classroom is the debated and controversial question of whether or how to teach grammar

in second language instruction. To what extent or degree and which linguistic features should be taught to learners are other issues. The role of grammar in language lessons is salient enough. The theories and techniques of grammar teaching have changed for centuries and run to opposite ends of the continuum, necessary and unnecessary, for items such as the phonics approach and the whole language approach in language education. Grammar education in communicative content-based teaching has long been through memorization. Since grammar is required in producing output, grammar has long been internalized in the case of communicative lessons, rather than grammar lessons in isolation. When linguistic rules are focused on in grammar lessons incidentally, teacher and student negotiation occurs.   Grammar is required in language teaching.

Long (1997) has proposed that instructional options can be of three types, a focus on meaning, a focus on forms, and an integration of both meaning and form, According to him, instruction with focus on meaning posits that exposure to rich input and meaningful use of the second language can lead to incidental acquisition of the L2 system. Instruction with focus on forms in isolation assumes that the target forms need to be taught one by one in a sequence externally preplanned. The final instruction type in Long's categorization has learners focus on forms integrated in meaning and capitalizes on brief, reactive intervention. The learner's attention is drawn to a linguistic feature which causes trouble in completing classroom tasks and is learnable within the learner's internal development stages.

The term form-focused instruction was proposed by Spada (1997) characterize a wider range of instructional types, embracing the role of consciousness and attention in L2 learning, regardless of whether they are reactive or proactive, or obtrusive or unobtrusive. The purpose of such form-focused instruction interventions is to foster learner's focal attention to particular forms within a meaningful context with a predetermined linguistic syllabus in mind, if needed.

Doughty and Williams (1998) suggested definitional criteria for focus on form instruction: engagement with meaning occur before attention to

the linguistic code; the instructional treatment is decided on the basis of the analysis of leaner needs, reactively or proactively; and learner's focal attention is drawn to form briefly and overtly.

In addition to the categorization of instructional types, specific instructional treatments should be addressed to investigate the relative effectiveness of different types of L2 instruction. The treatments may be selections and combinations of related instructional features which constitute more specific classroom techniques. Important issues related to the treatment may be the respective roles of deductive, explicit and product-oriented approaches on the one hand, and inductive, implicit, and process became the main focus of the research. Researchers and teachers were interested in to what degree the intervention should be designed in order to trigger or complement the natural language leaning process

2. Traditional Grammar Teaching

In traditional English classes in Korea, knowing a language meant mastering grammar, not the spoken language form. The focus was not on being able to communicate with speakers of English, but rather to be able to translate written materials. Classes focused strictly on grammar instruction. Korean teachers have overemphasized the analysis of sentence level grammar and underestimated the essential role of discourse-level grammar in language learning and teaching.

Traditional methods involved were the Skinnerian method of learning through instrumental conditioning by immediate reenforcement of the right response. The audio-lingual method is based on mechanical drills. Traditional drills are mechanical ones based on the assumption that language learning is habit formation and is the automatic use of manipulative patterns.

Tradition methods of teaching grammar also included deductive reasoning with the direct explanation of rules instead of inductive reasoning. However, grammar instruction in the past didn't work. The

semantic level of a language is crucial for fluency. There were several reasons why it didn't work.

First, it needs to have inductive reasoning. Most evidence in communication second language points to the superiority of an inductive approach to rules and generalizations. Language is generative and the students need to be able to discover the rules themselves, and apply them to their knowledge of the language.

Second, the procedure, principles, and inner logic of school grammar are lacking in validity. For example, mechanical drills do not allow the students to express their own ideas fluently because utterances can vary. There is no one single correct way to answer. Futhermore, English is not monosystemic but polysystemic. One can not find a single pattern of structure at work but there is a considerable range of overlapping patterns which operate at different times or may operate simultaneously. There are a variety of different sentence combinations. In addition, the method of instruction may adopt an analytical presentation which may aid the student in grasping the structure of ready – made sentence patterns but which is of little value or use for the construction of such phrases.

Researchers have had different views about the efficacy of grammar instruction. Much research has been published about the negative effects of grammar instruction. Especially Krashen (1981) did not think grammar instruction was an important factor in language acquisition since learners automatically proceed along their built – in syllabus if comprehensible input is given with abundant motivation. Terrel (1991) suggests grammar instruction is indeed helpful in the acquisition process and proposed three roles for grammar instruction: first, as an advance organizer to help leaners make sense of input; second, as a meaning-form relationship, and third, as a monitoring tool, which helps learners to produce more accurate and complete utterances.

Traditional grammar teaching doesn't show the students how to put together all constituents correctly in their variant combinations, nor how to construct complex sentences. The semantic level of a language is crucial for fluency. Knowing vocabulary, and grammar and discourse

rules does not mean one can automatically and freely put a sentence together.

Traditional grammar relates to the accuracy of structure, including morphology and syntax, whereas the communicative and discourse approach is concerned with the appropriateness of utterances given specific situations, speakers, and content. There is a relationship between what learners notice and what they acquire, and a difference between what learners know and what they utter. Even advanced language learners often show a marked imbalance between their grammatical and their pragmatic knowledge.

The main difference between this modern approach and traditional views is that the communicative approach teaches grammar implicitly while focusing on the whole message or content rather than on form or structure. More emphasis is put on the process rather than on the product.

3. Focus on Forms/Focus on Form

Currently, the communication approach to language teaching is popular among researchers and learners. Recently, researchers say "form" and a linguistic feature in Grammar. Long (1991) distinguished between the terms "Focus on Forms" and "Focus - on - Form". Focus on forms means a synthetic or integrated approach to language teaching which accumulates linguistic elements such as grammar and expressions. That means grammar or linguistic features are extracted from context or communicative activity; focus on meaning is excluded. In "Focus - on - Forms" lesson, grammar is taught in isolation. The "Focus - on - Forms" approach is similar to rather traditional grammar lesson in that meaning or communication is ignored in the class whereas "Focus on Form" involves meaning and linguistic features.

In "Focus - on - Form" lessons, student attention is drawn incidentally to linguistic features and the lesson is focused on meaning and communication rather than the linguistic features themselves.

In the "Focus - on - Form" lesson, when students produce their

output, students or teachers or a partner of a student recognize their problems. The recognition of their problems triggers correction of their problems by teachers or a partner in such forms as negative feedback or interaction. In this situation, students necessitate correction by communicative demand. Learners voluntarily need language use for communicative purposes rather than it being imposed externally and compulsorily by teachers. Learners holds this language use in their memory for further production.

Table 1. Degree of Obtrusiveness of Focus on Form

	unobtrusive						obtrusive
Input Flood	×						
Task-essential language	×						
Input enhancement		×					
Negotiation		×					
Recast			×				
Output enhancement			×				
Interaction enhancement				×			
Dictogloss					×		
Consciousness-raising tasks					×		
Input processing						×	
Garden path							×

Generally, researchers favor unobtrusive techniques which are input flood, task essential language teaching, input enhancement and recast. They are on the most implicit end of the "Focus – on – Form" continuum. Researchers, however, avoid any technique of form teaching that is highly explicit and in isolation. Between explicit and implicit learning, DeKeyser (1998) argued that explicit learning is more effective in the case of abstract grammar rules.

Many researchers favor a more form-focused approach than a purely communicative approach, since activities which focus solely on the message are inadequate to develop an accurate knowledge of the language. Unlike the structural language approach where the primary focus of classroom activity is on language forms rather than the

meaning they convey, some kind of form-focused activities needs to be incorporated into communicative classroom contexts so that students can be naturally exposed to the target language forms and meanings. Fotos and Ellis (1991) assert the effects of from-focused instruction on interlanguage development. In contrast, Lightbown and Spada (1993), Lightbown (1992) and Ellis (1994) advocate formal instruction prior to meaning-focused activities maintaining that such instruction helps activate their previous knowledge of the target language structures and promotes their attention to the forms they will encounter.

When students and teachers focus on form, some questions still remain; when and how learners get a great advantage on Focus on Form, and how to focus on form is accomplished in pedagogical view.

4. When to Focus on Form

DeKeyser(1998) argued that when learners have already built or set up their "declarative knowledge" of certain features in their mind, they easily produce procedure or their knowledge of certain form in their communicative output. Learners must develop in advance this knowledge which is not synthesized in meaningful communication. Then learners have to have enough time to serve or assimilate this memory of knowledge, before they produce it as communicative output.

That is to say, learning and acquisition are another problem. According to Krashen(1981), learning is a conscious and systematic process for the purpose of knowing language, whereas acquisition is an unconscious and natural process. Even though learners know some linguistic features, they may not use or produce these features in their communication. When learners use these linguistic features unconsciously in their production, that is the stage of acquisition.

Declarative knowledge is saved cognitively and then learners' acquisition reflect their linguistic features through their utterance production. When to focus on form is divided into two main questions; 1. Is it effective to focus on form when learners arrive in the

developmental stage?   2. Is it effective to focus on form when learners are instructed in advanced at the curriculum?

Both in first language acquisition and foreign language acquisition, there are sequences or stages in the development of particular linguistic features. Some linguistic features are at a developmentally early stage and other features are at a later stage.

Frequent use of certain features and developmental stages are not equivalent. For example, English articles such as *a, an, and   the* are very frequently used in sentences, that is, have high frequency of their use. However, English articles are most difficult and are a late linguistic feature which foreign language learners master in their language acquisition.

In first and second language acquisition, there are systematic and predictable stages of language acquisition which is developmental stage. For example, specific grammatical features are hierachical. In case of grammatical morphemes, the following are listed in order of development by Roger Brown.

Present Progress	-ing
Plural	-s
Irregular past forms	
Possessive	's
Copula	
Articles	'the' and 'a'
Regular past	-ed
Third person singular simple present	-s
Auxiliary	be

Valdman (1975) suggested that teaching might be most effective if learners were exposed to those features that were developmentally "next." Krashen developed the "Input Hypothesis" which means that if the learner learn linguistic features just beyond the learner's level of competence in language, both comprehension and acquisition will occur. Krashen calls that "comprehensible input" or i+1. If the instructional invention for a lesson by teachers is too high or to low, it's too

difficult or confusing for learners to acquire.

According to him, learner first "learn" some linguistic features, "acquire" through "comprehensible input," and then "monitor" them in their output. This means, according to Dekeyer that learners first grasp the "declarative knowledge," second they practice or proceduralize the declarative knowledge; and then automate the declarative knowledge.

When learners learn linguistic features which are developmentally ordered through the teachers' guidance, effectiveness increases. The Integration of linguistic features through the teacher's guidance into communication activities is most effective in focus on form. Teachers give students implicit correction when students make errors in their communicative utterances. Learners think of this implicit correction as a continuation of the conversation. This implicit correction is provided without students' noticing the error correction. That is why the implicit correction of the Focus – on – Form lesson does not make students discouraged or interrupted.

Some researchers suggest non-linguistic teacher intervention in students' utterance, for example, eyebrow raising, hand signals, or rising intonation without any oral comments.

Student : *I don't speak very well English.*
Teacher : *You don't speak English very well?*
Student : *No.* (Schachter, 1981)

The more unobtrusive the intervention is, the more likely learner involvement will be in the meaning and function.

5. Explicit Focus on Form

Explicit focus on form means drawing learner attention to grammar in isolation. When teachers give lessons to learners, learners are directed to some linguistic features by metalinguistic rule explanation. Explicit teaching focuses on accuracy rather than fluency. In an explicit Focus

on Form class, language is the object of a classroom rather than the means. Researchers supporting explicit focus on form teaching techniques worry that implicit Focus – on – Form techniques may not be enough to get learners to notice linguistic forms and across the gap between interlanguage and target language.

In explicit Focus on Form techniques, certain linguistic features have great advantages for acquisition, but some do not. For instance, linguistic features such as participial adjectives are good examples to learn through explicit Focus on Form techniques since participial adjective are very clear-cut or transparent for explanation by metalinguistic rules. However, in the case of passives, they are not appropriate for learners to notice since passives are not easily explained. Williams (1995) explained that forms that are easily misinterpreted or misanalyzed by learners, but also easily explained, are excellent candidates for instruction containing more explicit focus on form, including the use of negative evidence.

Another thing in regard to explicit focus on form techniques is student readiness. When students already notice the gap in interlanguage form and target language form, it is very easy for learners to acquire certain linguistic features. However, when students do not notice a linguistic feature difference between interlanguage form and target language form, it is harder for learners to acquire that form easily. This means that learners are ready to learn a feature, it is easy for them to acquire certain linguistic features.

Some techniques of explicit focus on form are metatalk. consciousness-raising tasks and input-processing instruction. First, metatalk is the explanation of linguistic rules with the teacher or pair's talk like traditional grammar teaching. In metatalk, the teacher explains a grammar rule to students with a metalinguistic explanation. Next, conscious-raising allows students to notice a linguistic feature covertly through pedagogically designed materials such as pictures, flash cards, or rule- explanation charts. These pedagogical materials highlight a linguistic feature in the classroom. The last one is input processing, which ultimately helps learners to recognize the difference between input

and their interlanguage. In input processing, production does not occur, the learner only recognizes or notices the gap mentally. Therefore, input processing derives not from learner language production but from learner attention to hear the correct form.

6. Implicit Focus on Form

Implicit focus on form prevents teachers from using metalinguistic rule explanation or interrupting students' communicative and meaningful production. Implicit focus on form is fluency - centered rather than accuracy - centered. Fluency is the main aim of the communicative approach in the classroom. In implicit focus on form class, language is the means of a classroom instruction. That is why the purpose of the implicit Focus on Form classroom is not distracting students' attention from their communication, focusing on a linguistic feature implicitly, incidentally, or interactionally since the purpose of implicit focus on form is not some linguistic feature but to communicate meaningfully. Generally, grammar is not the main subject of the class, but rather mathematics, science, arts, or culture. We call this content-based class.

In implicit Focus on Form(FonF) class, teachers incidentally give students some negative feedback such as eyebrow raising, and rising intonation. Some researchers argue that giving negative feedback or evidence via recasting does not stop student's communication.

Corrective Recasting
A : *I think that the worm will go under the soil.*
B : *I think that the worm will go under the soil?*
A : (No Response)
B : *I thought that the worm would go under the soil.*
A : *I thought that the worm would go under the soil.*

This corrective recasting made a linguistic feature's input salient without interrupting main content-based class. Doughty and Varela (1998) conducted a study. Arguments against explicit grammar teaching

procedures center around the likelihood of preventing fluency which has been the major advancement of communicative approaches to classroom language acquisition, since in explicit procedures language becomes the object rather than the means of discussion. Thus, the focus must occur in conjunction with communicative interaction incidentally in the classroom.

In Doughty and Valera's article, Focus on Form was carefully and implicitly operationalized and implemented into an authentic content-based ESL class in the United States. The purpose of the study was to determine whether and how learners' attention can be drawn to formal features without distracting them from their original communicative intent. The subjects were 34 ESL students in grades 6 through 8.

After the students performed a simple science experiment, they were asked to report past experiment events and to explain a prediction that was made prior to conducting the experiment. They needed to use the past and conditional past tenses for time reference naturally. For example, the report questions included "What problem did you try to solve with this experiment?" And what steps did you follow for this experiment?" These questions were designed to elicit the -ed past tense. The teacher also asked students in a small group questions like, "What did I think would happen before we did the experiments?"

What was different from other ordinary science classes was that the teacher gave the students feedback not only on the science content but also on the forms of the past tense. Whenever past tense or conditional errors occurred in speaking or writing, the teacher drew attention to the problem, and then immediately provided corrective feedback in the form of a repetition or recast which provided correct target forms.

The results showed very significant and large gains in the experimental group, while the control group showed no change. It surely showed that learners could make some progress on their own without attention to linguistic forms. The results indicate that the implementation of the focus on form into the communicative science curriculum was more effective than leaving students to their own

devices to develop target-like ability in past time reference.

Since the primary aim was to overcome the current communicative language teaching prohibition against any attention to linguistic forms at all, the relatively implicit focus on form technique turned out to be task natural and reasonably incidental to science teaching. Because explicit grammar teaching prevents fluency, and communicative language teaching hinders learning grammar.

Table 2. Implicit and explicit language learning (Doughty and Williams, 1998)

Domain	Implicit	Explicit
IL Knowledge (Mental representation)	·Innate (universal) ·Intuitive ·Example-Based	·Explicit(Analyzed, Language Specific) ·Rule-Based
Access to and/or Use of IL knowledge	·Automatic(Effortless) ·Fluent, Skilled	·Deliberate(effortful) ·Halting
Learning Analysis Hypothesis Testing Cognitive Comparison Noticing Gaps or Holes Restructuring	·inductive ·incidental ·inherent ·unaware ·imperceptible	·Deducive ·Intentional ·Aware ·Noticed
Attention	·Attracted ·Unconscious	·Directed ·Conscious
Development of Control	·Experiential ·Automatized	·Practiced ·Proceduralized
Teaching Intervention	·Unobtrusive or None	·Overt ·Obtrusive ·Metalinguistic

7. Conclusion

Focus on Form is combined with meaning and language use (function). Focus on form is actually an implicit focus on form technique. Focus on Forms techniques are sorts of explicit grammar

teaching in isolation. Then, how should these two ways of teaching a lesson be reflected in a classroom.

Some researchers suggest that the explicit Focus on Forms technique should be in advance to ensure learner recognition for some linguistic features rather than implicit Focus on Form. Lightbown (1997) considers that forms which focus on grammar in isolation and next, the FonF implicit focus on form with communicative and meaningful authentic content-based instruction is appropriate. Since explicit focus on form at the beginning of meaningful communicative content-based instruction make some linguistic features salient to learners, explicit focus on form prior to implicit focus on form would be better.

However, when teachers give instruction to students on grammar, it should be brief so that learners recognize a feature in the communication lesson when students do not know certain linguistic features.

Another question for the FonF class is whether Focus on Form is separate to focus on meaning or whether focus on form is integrated with focus on meaning. Most of second language researchers propose that integrating focus on form and focus on meaning are more effective than isolating focus on forms themselves.

In Focus on Form instruction, teachers experience various consideration such as; Should Focus on Form be taught in advance or incidentally? Should Focus on Form be explicit or implicit? How is one to choose forms, how should Focus on Form play a role in the curriculum?

There is not and never will be any single solution to the complicated problems of how to implement focus on form in communication classrooms. There is growing evidence of the effectiveness of a more flexible curricular approach involving a variety of successful task-technique combinations. Neither Focus - on - Forms nor Focus - on - Form instruction alone may lead to complete foreign language acquisition. Communicative language lessons and grammar in isolation are not mutually exclusive.

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