

How Can Language Teachers Develop Their Professional Competence?

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چکیده: معلمان زبان انگلیسی باید دارای مهارت‌ها و دانش فراوانی در رشته‌ی خود باشند. به نظر می‌رسد روش‌های گذشته و معلمان سنت‌گرا دیگر نمی‌توانند جوابگوی نیازهای به سرعت در حال تغییر دانش‌آموزان باشند. اما معلمان زبان چگونه می‌توانند خود را با نیازهای متغیر فراگیران وفق دهند؟ پاسخ این سؤال ارتقای حرفه‌ای یا ارتقای شغلی است. ارتقای حرفه‌ای تنها با مفاهیمی مانند دوره‌های ضمن خدمت و یا کارگروه‌های آموزشی محدود نمی‌شود؛ بلکه علاوه بر موارد بالا می‌توان آن را فرایندی دائمی، انفرادی یا جمعی به‌شمار آورد که از طریق آن معلمان می‌کوشند تا دانش و مهارت‌های خود را با نیازهای دانش‌آموزان تطبیق دهند. اقدام‌پژوهی، گروه‌های مطالعاتی، و آموزش متقابل همکاران از جمله راهکارهای ارائه شده است که می‌تواند معلمان را در راه کسب مهارت حرفه‌ای یاری بخشد.

کلیدواژه‌ها: ارتقای حرفه‌ای، دانش حرفه‌ای، اقدام‌پژوهی، گروه‌های مطالعاتی، آموزش متقابل همکاران، آموزش معلمان زبان انگلیسی، آموزش معلمان

Abstract

Foreign language teaching has become a challenging task in today's world. Language teachers should be equipped with different competencies and skills because their students have access to different and varying sources of development. It seems that students' needs have elevated from what traditional views to language teaching have predicted. How can English language teachers adjust themselves with the changing needs of their students in today's world? The answer is in professional development. Professional development is not limited to getting higher degrees or attending in-service courses and workshops. In addition to including such concepts, professional development should include an ongoing, individualized and/or choral process during which teachers try to adjust their knowledge and skills with students' needs. Some techniques and activities including action research, study groups, and peer coaching are most useful in helping language teachers in their quest for professional competence.

Key Words: professional competence, professional development, action research, study groups, peer coaching, teacher education, foreign language teacher.

to produce the features in a controlled context. For the most part C-R is seen as an innovative approach that is a part of task-based language teaching (Skehan, 1996; Willis J et al, 1996) and challenges the traditional grammar instruction (Ellis, 2004).

We can perhaps draw one cautious conclusion: to the degree that C-R activities de-emphasize forms of productive practice, students may indeed be expected to respond negatively to classrooms where consciousness raising is the sole means of grammar instruction, since they come to class expecting opportunities to use what they have learned and may feel frustrated if these are not provided.

We might consider, for example, a combination of approaches: a teacher introduces a new linguistic form via a C-R approach and reinforces it with productive practice exercises. This, as you might have noted, is thought to be what many teachers already do. An alternative might be to use practice exercises for revision in subsequent lessons.

Perhaps one way to think about consciousness raising, is not as a blueprint for a new paradigm of grammar teaching, but rather as one more very useful tool we can add to our toolboxes.

Notes

1. Richards et. al define the teachability hypothesis as “the idea that the teachability of language is constrained by what the

learner is ready to acquire. Instruction can only promote acquisition if the interlanguage is close to the point the structure to be taught is learnable without instruction in natural settings”.

2. Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4153473.stm> BC News

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Aid agencies have called on Jakarta to set up official camps which meet international standards of hygiene, and the government said on Friday that dozens of such camps would be operational within a week. The camps will be a start, but it will take years before things return to normal.

How were by, in, and on used? Write the number next to the definition.

1. Through the agency or action of: *was killed by a bullet.* ☐
2. With the use or help of; through: *We came by the back road.* ☐
3. Within the limits, bounds, or area of: *was hit in the face; born in the spring; a chair in the garden.* ☐
4. From the outside to a point within; into: *threw the letter in the wastebasket.* ☐
5. Used to indicate location at or along: *the pasture on the south side of the river* ☐
6. Used to indicate occurrence at a given time: *on July third* ☐
7. Part of the idiom: *turn on, stand by, fill in* ☐

This activity is similar to an ‘interpretation task’ (Ellis, 2004) in that it “obligate(s) learners to process a specific feature in oral or written input.” and is typical of C-R in that it does not require that learners produce the target.

Conclusion and Implications

The ultimate goal of teaching grammar is to provide the students with knowledge of the way language is constructed so that when they listen,

The purpose of C-R activities is to provide learners with activities which encourage them to think about samples of language and draw their own conclusion about how the language works

speak, read and write, they have no trouble applying the language that they are learning. Language teachers are, therefore, challenged to use creative and innovative attempts to teach grammar so that such a goal can successfully be achieved. Using C-R activities to teach grammar, I think, is an example of such innovative attempts which I believe is worth considering.

It implies that learners should be aware of the structure, but not expected to produce accurate sentences using the structure. The long term advantage of C-R is that learners will internalize the knowledge of the structure when they are internally ready.

The use of C-R activities can help students develop an ability to form their own hypotheses about grammar in the process of learning, and can be considered as a good facilitator of language acquisition. According to Dave & Jane Willis (1996) the benefits of C-R activities are that they ‘encourage students to observe and analyze language for themselves’. The proponents of the use of C-R activities in teaching grammar argue that students who are aware of a grammatical feature are more likely to notice it when they subsequently encounter it, hence they suggest that teachers should focus more on raising students’ consciousness of the grammatical features than their ability

pedagogical device to direct learners' attention to specific L2/FL forms while they are communicating in the L2/FL. Such a linguistic focus can be achieved by designing a task so that the productive or receptive use of certain target structures is *natural, facilitative or necessary* for task completion (Eckerth, 2008).

The purpose of C-R tasks is to help learners gain explicit knowledge about a feature, and it is believed that explicit knowledge aids the acquisition of grammar. Ellis (2004) defines a C-R task as a task that engages learners in thinking and communicating about language, and so C-R tasks make language itself a task. Ellis (2004) believes that the 'taskness' of C-R tasks lies not in the linguistic point that is the focus of the task but rather in the task learners must engage in order to achieve the outcome of the task. In C-R tasks, although there is some linguistic feature that is the focus of the task, learners are not required to use this feature, only to think about it and discuss it (Ellis, 2004), and so C-R tasks provide opportunities for the learners to engage in communication via discussions about the grammatical feature.

A Sample C-R Activity

This activity was a focus on form follow-up to a jigsaw reading task, and took place in two stages. Learners first read an authentic text describing Kofi Annan's visit to Aceh, Indonesia, the area worst affected by the tsunami, and

numbered the prepositions 'by', 'in', and 'on' in the text. The next stage involved them comparing the usages in the text with definitions and example sentences of several different usages of 'by', 'in', and 'on' found underneath the text. Learners simply needed to place the number of the proposition within the text into a box next to the definitions and example sentences found below the text:

Mr Annan said he was "shocked" by the devastation, having toured the west coast of Aceh by helicopter. "It's a tragic event. We've seen miles and miles of destroyed shoreline", he told reporters in the western town of Meulaboh. He said Meulaboh, which was particularly badly hit by the earthquake and tsunami, was beginning to get back on its feet but that it was still in dire need of support. "There we saw people begin to pick up the pieces and get on with their lives and of course it shows about the resilience of the human spirit. And I believe that in time, given the support and efforts by the government and the international community, the people will be able to pick up and carry on."

For the moment, much of the survivors' rehabilitation is taking place in informal refugee camps as aid workers have only managed to so far bring a limited amount to Meulaboh, and have not yet reached other communities on the west coast. UN emergency relief co-ordinator Jan Egeland said that there may be some 200 improvised camps in Aceh, with hundreds of thousands of people in them.

an intellectual effort to understand the feature

- deliberate attempt to involve the learner in hypothesizing about the target structure
- the clarification in the form of further data and description in case there is misunderstanding or incomplete understanding of the feature
- the possibility that students articulate the rule describing the feature

As is clear, in this framework there is no requirement for the students to produce the targeted feature and the aim is to promote some kind of awareness with the intention of promoting explicit knowledge which will be integrated to the learner's interlanguage when the learners are ready developmentally.

According to Ellis (2002) the acquisition of explicit knowledge involves:

- noticing (the learner becomes conscious of the presence of the linguistic feature in the input)
- comparing (the learner compares the linguistic feature noticed in the input with her mental grammar, registering the gap between the input and her grammar)
- integrating (the learner integrate a representation of the new feature into her mental grammar)

Ellis (2002) believes that C-R activities contribute to the processes of noticing and comparing and results in explicit knowledge (see also Ellis, 2004) and may contribute to the process of integration only when the learner is developmentally ready. That

is to say, if L2/FL learners have explicit knowledge of a certain feature of the L2/FL, they are more likely to notice its occurrence in the communicatively embedded input they receive. Explicit knowledge of this sort may then make it easier for them to carry out "cognitive comparisons" between their internal interlanguage norms and the target norms exemplified by the available input, or indeed via feedback. So it is not so much the explicit knowledge *per se* which contributes to second language acquisition. It rather initiates a process which starts with the detection of L2/FL features (Echerth, 2008). This suggests that formal instruction should be targeted at explicit rather than implicit knowledge because, while formal instruction may affect the acquisition of simple grammatical structure / structures that the student is developmentally ready for, it is difficult to determine when the student is ready to learn that structure. Instruction should also be aimed at making the students aware of the structure so that they are able to monitor it and correct their own errors; they do not necessarily have to be able to use the structure immediately. The most effective approach to grammar teaching is to focus on awareness raising rather than practice (Fotos and Ellis, 1991 cited in Ellis 2004).

Consciousness Raising in Task-based Language Teaching

Within the framework of task-based language learning and teaching (TBLT), form-focused tasks are used as a

about grammar and being able to explain the rules. Because implicit knowledge is acquired much more slowly and is tied to a student's internal syllabus, explicit knowledge is much easier to teach and should be the target (Ellis, 2004).

What is the connection between explicit and implicit knowledge? Are they distinct or does one change into the other? Ellis and Fotos (1991 cited in Ellis 2004) believe in a relationship somewhere between these two perspectives. Their position is based on studies that have investigated the role of formal instruction on the acquisition of grammatical knowledge. There are psycholinguistic constraints that determine whether attempts to teach certain grammar rules result in implicit knowledge. If the students are in the appropriate stage in development where they are ready to process the structure it will be successful. It will not succeed if they are not at the right stage.

Also, practice will not overcome the students' internal syllabus. There is no research that shows having students practice the target structure results in implicit knowledge and, formal instruction aimed at difficult grammatical structures does not change performance in spontaneous language use. However, Ellis and Fotos (1991) do believe formal instruction helps to promote L2/FL acquisition and ultimately promotes higher levels of L2/FL achievement. They have found formal instruction works best in promoting acquisition when accompanied by opportunities to use the language, and

that it is effective in developing explicit knowledge of grammatical structures. Also, it is possible that direct instruction targeted at simple structures will be successful in developing implicit knowledge because simple structures do not require the mastery of complex processing operations. In support of this, Ellis (2002) states that the way formal instruction works, is by developing explicit knowledge of a grammatical structure, which helps the learner acquire implicit knowledge.

Explicit knowledge leads to acquisition in two ways. The first one is that knowing about a structure helps the learner notice the feature during input and therefore to acquire it as implicit knowledge. However, it doesn't become implicit knowledge until the students are ready to integrate it into their interlanguage system, which is determined by their internal syllabus. Secondly, explicit knowledge can be used to construct planned utterances; for example, when a student has time to think about what they are going to say. Formal instruction can increase knowledge while not contributing directly to implicit knowledge of specific structures (see Ellis 2002).

Ellis (2002) characterizes C-R activities as follows:

- an attempt to isolate a specific feature for focused attention
- the provision of data which illustrate the targeted feature and provision of an explicit rule describing the feature
- the requirement that learner undertake

the PPP approach using practice (e.g drills). Consciousness-raising activities constitute activities which attempt to equip the learners with an understanding of a specific grammatical feature. Dave Willis and Jane Willis (1996) state that the purpose of C-R activities is to provide learners with activities which encourage them to think about samples of language and draw their own conclusion about how the language works. A language learning program, says Ellis (2002), “should seek to draw out learners’ conscious attention to problematic grammatical features, not with the expectancy that they would master these features and use them in communication immediately: but, rather, the expectancy would be that they learn what it is that they have ultimately to master”.

There are a variety of ways in which C-R might achieve this. Willis and Willis (1996) list seven categories of consciousness-raising activity types:

- identify and consolidate patterns or usages;
- classifying items according to their semantic or structural characteristics;
- hypothesis building, based on some language data, and then perhaps checked against more data;
- cross-language exploration;
- reconstruction and deconstruction;
- recall;
- reference training

Rather than production, teachers should aim only at drawing learners’ attention to important features of the form under study

in other words, raising their consciousness. In C-R activities the learners are not expected to produce the target structure, but only to understand it by formulating some kind of cognitive representation of how it works (Ellis 1994). According to Ellis (2004) the desired outcome of a C-R task is awareness of how some linguistic features work.

Willis and Willis (1996) argue that the rationale for the use of C-R activities draws partly on the hypothesized role for explicit knowledge as facilitator for the acquisition of implicit knowledge. Bialystock (1978 cited in Ellis 1994) believes there are two types of knowledge: explicit and implicit. Implicit knowledge is intuitive; it is not consciously available. It is knowledge that we have but are unable to explain. For example native speakers are able to speak using grammatically correct structures but usually have trouble explaining why they use them. Implicit knowledge is knowing the rules that allow you to produce the grammar accurately in a conversational situation, but not necessarily being able to explain them. This knowledge is acquired gradually and is connected to the students’ internal syllabus. Instructors should consider learner’s developmental readiness when deciding whether a focus-on-form approach is appropriate in a given context.

Explicit knowledge is knowledge that is explainable. If they need to, learners are able to explain what they know. Having explicit knowledge of grammar is knowing

structures taught in such a way that they can be used in everyday communication (Ellis, 2002). In this view, a focused presentation stage is followed by practice activities which are designed in such a way to fulfill this requirement. In the production stage opportunities are provided for the learners to use language freely and flexibly to consolidate what is being taught (Skehan, 1996).

Skehan (1996) rejects such a view in teaching grammar due to the lack of the impressive evidence in support of such an approach as well as poor levels of attainment of the students, since according to Skehan (1996) students leave school with very little in the way of usable language. Dave Willis (1996) describes as a fallacy the idea that controlled practice leads to mastery of grammar.

A further attack on controlled practice has centered on studies which have demonstrated that it is impossible for the practicing of any particular grammatical item to lead to the acquisition of that item (see Ellis 1994). Ellis (2002) claims that research in the field is not encouraging for that supporters of practice. According to Ellis (2002) studies which have investigated whether practicing a specific structure results in its acquisition provide evidence to suggest that practice does not result in the autonomous ability to use the structure. Ellis (2002) cites several studies which suggest that practicing of different features does not result in their acquisition.

There are, in fact, authors who support the use of practice in the grammar teaching

process. DeCarrico and Larsen-Freeman (2002) for example, argue that since language is a skill, overt productive skill is needed. They, however, believe that this practice must be meaningful, in such away that students are required to engage in a communicative task where it is necessary to use certain structures to complete it. Nunan (1999) puts forward the idea that in order to maximize the effects of grammar instruction, learners need opportunities to use the structures they are learning in communication interaction.

The effect of practice activities has been questioned (see for example Ellis 2002 and Ellis (1994). Ellis (2004), however, believes that practice activities may help learners to automatize forms that they have not full control over. Nunan (1999) cites a study by Montgomery and Eisenstein (1985) which supported the idea that opportunities to practice the language in communicative activity was important for language acquisition.

The review of the literature reveals the fact that using practice activities in teaching grammar does not live up to the expectations and a reconsideration of the approaches to grammar teaching is needed.

Teaching Grammar through Consciousness Raising activities

Consciousness raising, like many innovations in ELT, originated from dissatisfaction with ideas that preceded it; Namely dissatisfaction with the outcome of the grammar teaching through

production activities (e.g. repetition drills). Next, the learners are given practice activities which allow them to “gain confidence” with the new language, while still focusing on form instead of meaning. Finally, in the production stage, control is relaxed in “free practice” activities which prompt the learners to engage in meaningful exchanges via tasks which elicit use of the target form (see Ellis, 1994).

Ellis (2002) identified a number of features of language practice as follows:

- there is some attempt to isolate specific grammatical features
- learners are required to produce sentences containing the target structure
- the learners will be provided with opportunities for repetition of the targeted feature
- there is expectancy that the learners will perform the grammatical feature correctly
- the learners will receive feedback on their performance of the grammatical feature (see also Ellis, 2004).

In this PPP approach, it is believed that practice will result in implicit knowledge (see below), and it is generally accepted that practice can facilitate accuracy and fluency. In this regard, accuracy focuses on correct use of language (for example, rules of language). This can be achieved through controlled and semi-controlled activities or practice of grammar, for example. In fluency, after learners have mastered the rules of language, they are required to apply the rules of language in the form of

spoken or written language fluently.

PPP has enjoyed, and still enjoys today, great popularity among teachers and teacher trainers but it has come under heavy criticism recently. The basis of much of this criticism is the notion that an important gap exists between teaching and learning. Students may be able to demonstrate a good grasp of a particular form during classroom activities but later, when once again operating under the pressure of real-time communication, they no longer exhibit the same control. Theories for the origin of this gap center on the idea of the internal syllabus, the natural order of acquisition of linguistic structures which people must go through when learning a language. PPP is seen as an attempt to ignore or contravene this natural order. Furthermore, Ellis (2002) believes teachability¹ hypothesis is one of the strong theoretical explanations for the failure of practice in promoting acquisition (see Ellis, 2002 & DeCarrico, et al, 2002). This hypothesis states that learners cannot be taught structures they are not ready to acquire.

Another major flaw in PPP, some claim, is its excessive emphasis on productive practice. Asking students to use new grammar immediately may not only be unnecessary but “counterproductive, in that it may distract attention away from the brain work involved in understanding and restructuring” of the learner’s interlanguage (Thornbury, 1999).

The main purpose for using practice activities is to help learners internalize

Abstract

Grammar teaching has always been one of the most controversial issues in English Language Teaching (ELT), and views of grammar teaching have changed over the years. However, the common consensus is that the so called focus on form activities do play a role in language acquisition. The traditional approach to grammar teaching is PPP: Presentation, Practice, Production, but the research in the field has demonstrated the shortcomings of this approach. The prevailing view today is that students must notice what they are to learn. The ‘noticing’ is accomplished through the activities known as “Consciousness Raising” or briefly C-R activities. The implication is that learners should be aware of the structure, but not expected to produce accurate sentences using the structure. The long term advantage of C-R is that learners will internalize the knowledge of the structure when they are internally ready. This article tries to present an overview of the rationale behind the use of C-R activities in teaching grammar.

Key Words: consciousness raising, internal syllabus, explicit knowledge, implicit knowledge, noticing.

Introduction

Grammar teaching has always been one of the most controversial issues in English Language Teaching (ELT), and views of grammar teaching have changed over the years. Some authors like Krashen (1982) deny the role of teaching in the acquisition of grammatical features (cited in Ellis, 2002), while others like Ellis (2002) argue that grammar teaching aids L2/FL grammar acquisition. Ellis maintains that the formal grammar teaching has a delayed rather than immediate effect on language acquisition; However, the common consensus is that the so called focus on form activities do play a role in language acquisition (see Ellis 1994).

The traditional approach to grammar teaching is PPP: Presentation, Practice, Production, but the research in the field has demonstrated the shortcomings of this approach.

The prevailing view today is that students must notice what they are to learn.

The ‘noticing’ is accomplished through “consciousness raising” activities or briefly C-R activities. It implies that learners should be aware of the structure, but not expected to produce accurate sentences using the structure. The long term advantage of C-R is that learners will internalize the knowledge of the structure when they are internally ready. This article tries to present an overview of the rationale behind the use of C-R activities in teaching grammar.

Teaching Grammar through Practice

The traditional approach to grammar teaching is PPP which signifies the “presentation, practice, production” sequence for organizing activities in a lesson. In a PPP lesson, the teacher introduces a new linguistic form to learners via a focused presentation, which often includes contextualization of the new form, a deductive explanation or “elicitation” of how it works, and some tightly controlled