Repercussions of Teaching Grammar in Second Language Learning

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ABSTRACT	Published Online: February 19, 2026
Several studies have shown the importance of teaching grammar in learning a second language. This article investigates the effects of teaching grammar in that process. This study provides a review of the literature regarding the concept of grammar, different grammar approaches, and prevalent studies related to this topic. The primary objectives of this study are (1) obtaining a concept of grammar; (2) examining the difference between language acquisition and language learning; (3) exposing different grammar approaches in teaching a second language; (4) reviewing relevant studies that evaluate the role of grammar in teaching a language; (5) obtaining a series of conclusions on the implementation of grammar in second language learning. The literature review shows that teaching grammar in second language learning enhances and refines L2 output; prevents bad habits and practices in L2 output; it is beneficial from the early stages of the L2 learning process; it promotes self-motivation, independent learning, discovery and production of own learning; and it enhances communication, not prevents it.	**KEYWORDS:** Second language learning; Second language teaching; L2 grammar.

1. INTRODUCTION

At this time, learners worldwide are immersed in the process of learning an L2. Many scholars have been debating on the necessity and importance of teaching grammar in second language (L2) learning. Should we teach grammar? Some argue that it is not essential and that it is possible to learn an L2 without the explicit teaching of grammatical rules or structures (Benati, 2020; Krashen, 1981; VanPatten, 1993,1996). On the other hand, other researchers posit that the teaching and learning of grammar is essential to learn an L2 (DeKeyser, 1998, 2003; Ellis, 2002, 2006; Jean and Simard, 2011; Nassaji and Fotos, 2004). We want to investigate the role of grammar in learning an L2, its repercussions and consequences, its benefits and accomplishments. To do so, this study aims to examine the concept of grammar, the difference between learning and acquisition of an L2, different approaches on grammar teaching and learning, and the most relevant studies in the literature. The goal is worth it: many learners and instructors may benefit from this endeavor by obtaining an L2 learning and teaching process more effective and appealing.

2. LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF A SECOND LANGUAGE

It is important to distinguish between these two concepts: language learning and language acquisition. Language learning is a conscious language learning (Krashen, 1981). This type of learning happens most often in a formal setting like a classroom, where there is an explicit teaching of rules and mechanisms to learn the second language. Language acquisition, on the other hand, does not occur in a formal setting. It happens in an environment where that L2 is predominantly used by most people. According to Krashen (1981), language acquisition is similar to the learning process of children when learning their first language. In case of language acquisition, the learning process is implicit. Thus, acquisition of a language happens in an environment in which students learn the L2 surrounded by that language. They acquire the L2 by experiencing it in their daily lives: they have to listen to it, read it, use it, being exposed to it regularly (Leow, 2015). In this article, we focus on second language learning, when its processing is largely conscious.

3. TEACHING GRAMMAR IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

3.1. GRAMMAR CONCEPT

It is important to know the concept of grammar to evaluate its repercussions in L2 teaching and learning. Weaver (1996) gives four meanings of grammar: "1. Grammar as a description of syntactic structure; 2. Grammar as prescriptions for how to use structures and words; 3.

Grammar as rhetorically effective use of syntactic structures; 4. Grammar as the functional command of sentence structure that enables us to comprehend and produce language.", p. 18. Thus, grammar is considered as a group of rules that determine the structure, meaning, and disposition of words into phrases with coherence and meaning, and becomes a key element of L2 proficiency.

3.2. GRAMMAR APPROACHES IN TEACHING A SECOND LANGUAGE.

In the literature, there are different views regarding the need or the role that grammar may have in learning and teaching an L2.

3.2.1 The Grammar-Translation Method. (1800's). This method was born in Prussia in the late 18th century to teach Latin and Greek. In the United States, it was known as the Prussian Method. Johann Valentin Meidinger is the most renown advocate while Karl Plötz, Johann Heinrich Philipp Seidenstücker, Johann Franz Ahn, and Carl Julius Ploetz are considered influential on its development. Grammar is a key element in teaching and learning an L2. Learners are taught explicit grammar rules to understand the functioning and dynamics of the L2. Instruction is focused on form. Grammar is understood as an essential pillar in learning an L2 so that learners can understand the language and be able to produce output based on that understanding. The main emphasis is on reading and writing, while listening and speaking are not key elements.

3.2.2. The Direct Approach. (1900's). This approach was first established in England around

1900. Later on, in the 1970s, this method was used by important international language schools such as Berlitz or Inlingua. It is based upon the exclusive practice of the L2. The L1 is recommended not to be used at all. The development of oral skills, learning vocabulary through visuals and gestures, implicit teaching of grammar, and emphasis for a native-like pronunciation are key features of this approach. Krause (1916) is the most eminent representative of this method.

3.2.3. The Audio-Lingual Approach. (1940's). This method was designed by a group of linguists and behaviorist psychologists. Charles Fries and Leonard Bloomfield are two key representatives of this language approach. L2 teaching is highly focused on listening and speaking. Writing and reading are still practiced. The L2 is taught through repetitions, drills, dialogues, and language memorizations. Grammar is an important element of the teaching and learning process, which represents a tool to understand the L2. However, there is not explicit teaching of grammar.

3.2.4. The Humanistic Approach. (Mid-20th Century). This approach of teaching an L2 took place during 1960s and 1970s. The main focus of this method is the learner's emotional and psychological comfort while learning the L2. In this model, learners are considered in a holistic approach, as L2 learners but also as human beings (Berges-Puyó, 2022, 2023a, 2023b). Therefore, it is concluded that in order to

teach successfully an L2, instructors need to consider a variety of factors, such as academic, pedagogical, social, cultural, and human factors.

3.2.5. The Communicative Language Teaching Approach (1970's onwards). The main goal is to achieve a certain grade of effective communication among the different actors involved. Grammar has not a major role in this approach. Learning of grammar is expected through implicit teaching and interaction among learners. Being able to understand one another is prevalent over the incorrections or grammatical inconsistencies during communication. Main representatives of this model include Dell Hymes, D. A. Wilkins, Christopher Brumfit, and D. A. Candlin, among others.

3.2.6. Post-Communicative Methods (1990's onwards). This approach is characterized by utilizing a compendium of different and multiple methods, which are tailored to the learners' individual differences. It represents a view where flexibility, learners' needs, and teachers' judgment are integrated to create success opportunities for students. In other words, this approach can be referred as holistic and integrative.

3.3. STUDIES

There are several studies worth mentioning:

Macaro and Masterman (2006) investigated the effects of explicit grammar instruction on grammatical knowledge and writing proficiency on a group of students of French in their first year at a UK university. Their results showed that explicit instruction led to gains in explicit grammar knowledge and in specific grammar-related tasks.

Scheffler and Cinciala (2010) investigated the effectiveness of explicit and implicit grammar instruction to a group of 20 upper-intermediate Polish learners of English. In their empirical study, they examined to what extent learners could identify and comprehend grammatical structures they created orally in a free-basis production. Results showed that in most cases learners could explain grammatical rules out of their oral production but could not know grammatical structures as a result of the implicit grammar instruction.

Akakura (2012) examined the effectiveness of explicit instruction on L2 learners' implicit and explicit knowledge of English. Results showed that the explicit instruction produced durable effects on both, explicit and implicit knowledge. Therefore, we can state that explicit instruction has significant and positive effects on implicit and explicit knowledge (Ebadi et al., 2014; Michaud and Ammar, 2022).

Berges-Puyó (2017) conducted a study with 45 learners of Spanish as an L2. The participants were divided into two groups of lower and higher proficiency. One group were taught explicitly and another one implicitly. The learning object were L2 Spanish determiners. Results showed that the explicit method of instruction was more effective than the implicit method of instruction, especially regarding the participants of higher level of proficiency. Also, higher proficiency learners performed better in all measures of implicit and explicit knowledge.

Qasserras (2023) reviews the implementation of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method in language education, claiming that it is imperative the addition of explicit language instruction (Ellis, 2015) to this approach to be effective. Also, this scholar claims that the CLT method holds difficulties in its application, especially those concerning language accuracy. This CLT method has received critics (Swan, 1985; Bax, 2003) based upon practical and theoretical deficiencies such as the belief that learners cannot use L1 communicative skills or that context learning is not even considered as a factor in the learning process.

4. DISCUSSION

Several findings have been obtained after the literature review that has been carried out.

(1) Explicit grammar instruction is effective on explicit knowledge and helps with writing proficiency. Explicit grammar instruction gives learners tools to understand how an L2 works (Ellis, 2006). In other words, explicit grammar instruction consolidates learners' knowledge of specific grammatical rules of the L2. Once the rules are assimilated, learners of an L2 can use them to produce an enhanced output. Macaro and Masterman (2006) confirm this regarding writing proficiency stating that explicit grammatical instruction helps learners improve their writing skills. Practical implications of this finding in the classroom are the need to Focus on Form (Long, 2011) and teach grammar rules explicitly. This is going to enhance the learners' output not only regarding writing proficiency but also in the other three components of a L2 learning: reading, speaking, and listening. Knowing that explicit grammar instruction is effective on explicit knowledge and that learning grammatical L2 rules helps in understanding how the L2 works, takes us to the corollary that the explicit grammatical methods may support L2 learners' independent learning and self-taught L2 skills. One practical example is that if a learner knows the L2 conjugation rules, he will be able to produce, identify, and understand L2 verbal forms, whether in writing, listening, reading, or speaking. Further research is needed with regards to independent learning and self-mastery of L2 forms out of explicit L2 knowledge.

(2) Explicit teaching is more effective than implicit teaching. Norris and Ortega (2000) corroborated this finding in their research synthesis and meta-analysis of 49 studies that targeted the effectiveness of L2 instruction. Other scholars (Berges-Puyo, 2017; Ellis et al., 2006; Housen and De Graaf, 2009; Spada and Lightbown, 2008) support this claim following their studies. This finding has important practical implications in the classroom. The most important one is that grammar must be taught in the process of L2 learning. We agree with Ellis (2006, p. 85): "there is now convincing indirect and direct evidence to support the teaching of grammar". And this grammar must be taught explicitly by emphasizing its concepts, rules, and functioning. It is important to note how some schools, in their advocacy for the communicative approach, renege of the importance and need of teaching grammar in L2 learning. This is a mistake for several reasons. To name a few: not teaching grammar creates a lack in learners' understanding of how the L2 works; a lack in verbal and written accuracy; a dependence to keep learning, and a lack of self-mastery and self-growth (Bax, 2003; Swan, 1985). All of this creates bad habits in L2 learning, since learners do not know the rules, the concepts, and the functioning of the L2. Once learners have consolidated bad habits, they will have difficulty correcting them and substituting them with correct habits (Brooks, 1960).

(3) Explicit instruction develops both explicit and implicit L2 knowledge. (Akakura, 2012). It is important to proceed with the distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge. According to Ellis (2006, p. 95), explicit knowledge "consists of the facts that speakers of a language have learned". In contrast, implicit knowledge "is procedural, is held unconsciously, and can only be verbalized it is made explicit". In terms of L2 learning this means that the explicit teaching of grammar creates the conditions for learners to learn specific L2 grammatical rules but also to be able to understand how the L2 works. This implicit L2 knowledge out of the explicit teaching helps in developing competence in an L2, as a result of being able to access this knowledge quickly and easily, incorporating conditions for a smooth communication. Practical implications of this finding have to do with the effectiveness of the L2 teaching and learning. Teaching explicitly L2 grammar facilitates knowledge of L2 rules, norms, and processes, which develops accuracy, good output habits, and deeper understanding of the L2. This exposure of L2 learners to explicit grammar also helps in improving the understanding and competence of the L1, which is referred as bidirectional transfer (Pavlenko and Jarvis, 2002; Brown and Gullberg, 2008). Further research is also needed in this area.

(4) Explicit instruction is more effective with higher proficiency learners. Berges-Puyo (2017) found that explicit instruction is effective with all learners, being more effective with those with higher proficiency. This does not mean that we should not teach grammar to low proficiency learners or in the initial states of L2 learning. In this sense, N. Ellis (2005) and Lightbown (1991) advocate for teaching grammar to beginners. They argue three main reasons: (1) to ensure that learners develop correct output habits; (2) building pillars of knowledge that learners can use and apply in a meaning-based approach; (3) the form-focus approach represented by explicit representations of linguistic forms is considered the first step of learning, which then is developed through implicit learning. Thus, teaching grammar facilitates learning by providing L2 learners with "hooks". We agree with these scholars, and also add three more reasons: (4) learners are able to self-create their L2 knowledge; (5) learners become independent learners; (6) learners develop extrinsic and intrinsic motivation based upon their L2 understanding and

self-teaching. Further research is advised on effects of early grammar teaching in learning an L2.

(5) Communicative Learning Teaching (CLT) method needs a grammatical base to be effective since it holds difficulties regarding accuracy and understanding of grammatical structures and language (Qasserras, 2023). This grammatical base is justified by Terrell (1991) who claims that the explicit teaching of grammar in an L2 can serve as an organizer element to help better understand the L2 knowledge. Also, this grammatical base can make the communication more effective by recognizing the form of elements in that exchange of information; lastly, this scholar emphasizes the effectiveness of monitoring grammatical elements so that learners build their own output which, as we mentioned earlier, help learners become independent and create their own knowledge from that learned grammatical base.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Learning an L2 holds important benefits (Abbott, 2018): it stimulates the brain; it develops creativity; it improves the capacity for attention; it widens the spectrum of careers to choose from; it helps understanding the first language; it decreases cognitive decline; it helps developing multitasking skills; it improves memory; it boosts one's self-esteem. Considering these benefits and the large community of L2 learners around the world, it is essential to provide the best possible learning experience for them. To do so, the role of grammar cannot be ignored. Related to it, a series of important conclusions are detailed below:

(1) The explicit teaching of grammar in L2 learning produces an enhanced and refined L2 output. Learners know and understand grammatical rules which has positive repercussions in producing a higher quality of the L2 (Macaro and Masterman, 2006). This knowledge and understanding help learners improve their L2 output (De Graaf and Housen (2009) since they assimilate the functioning, processes, and logic of the L2.

(2) Explicit teaching of L2 grammar improves the effectiveness of learning and at the same time, prevents bad habits and practices in the L2 output. L2 learners need those grammatical hooks (Lightbown, 1991) provided by grammar teaching and learning so that the L2 production can be enhanced. On the contrary, the absence of an explicit grammar teaching leads to a poor grammatical accuracy and neglection of the L2 rules that result in the underdevelopment of the L2 proficiency (Hammerly, 1991; Swan, 1985). If we want to prevent bad habits in L2 output, grammar teaching becomes essential.

(3) Explicit grammar teaching is beneficial from the early stages of L2 learning for students with low proficiency. This conclusion has to do with when should grammar be taught? The answer is from the beginning of the L2 learning experience. An early L2 grammar teaching and learning helps learners develop correct habits in the first place. Also, it builds the foundation for a meaning-focused approach (Ellis,

2006). Therefore, starting the L2 learning with the teaching of grammar creates a solid base with which learners can improve their implicit knowledge, competence, and proficiency. This explicit teaching grammar should continue throughout all the L2 learning experience, enhancing and improving that base. Further research is needed as to investigating the relationship between mass or distributed, intensive or extensive grammar teaching and levels of L2 proficiency.

(4) Teaching L2 grammar promotes self-motivation (Dornyei, 2009), independent learning, discovery, and production out of their own learning. Knowing the L2 grammatical rules makes learners self-motivated, and eager to keep learning and discovering the target language. Once learners assimilate and understand the L2 rules, they keep producing and presenting a high-quality output. They become pro-active instead of passive learners. Their eagerness to keep learning makes them feel confident to practice their output and taking risks. This process of self-motivation through one's own L2 production, generates a positive influence in the learning group. In this sense, further research is necessary regarding self and group-driven motivation in the context of L2 learning and on the relationship between L2 grammar learning and self-motivation.

(5) Explicit teaching of grammar enhances communication, not prevents it (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Grammar along with other elements such as phonology and lexis help in creating meaning that enhances the communication process. Thus, teaching grammar works in developing the implicit knowledge necessary for reliable communication (Ellis, 2006). This grammatical instruction needs to be connected to meaning to develop understanding and socially motivated communication. The zero-grammar approach connected to CLT cannot be efficient since many and essential elements are marginalized. Without them, learning an L2 properly and efficiently, cannot be possible.

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