

ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OPTIONS IN GRAMMAR TEACHING:
TRANSLATING THEORY AND RESEARCH INTO
CLASSROOM PRACTICE

MIROSLAW PAWLAK

Adam Mickiewicz University, Kalisz

ABSTRACT

For many years the role of grammar instruction in foreign language pedagogy has been subject to considerable controversy. Apart from generating a diversity of theoretical positions and models, the issue has resulted in a number of empirical investigations, which have clearly demonstrated that teaching grammar is helpful, or even necessary, as it not only accelerates the process of language development but also leads to higher levels of ultimate achievement. In addition to contributing to our knowledge concerning the effectiveness of formal instruction, the studies conducted to date have enabled researchers to suggest preliminary guidelines concerning the choice of grammatical structures to be targeted by pedagogic intervention as well as the timing and intensiveness of such intervention.

What is particularly important from the teacher's point of view, research into form-focused instruction has provided us with important information on the effectiveness of different techniques and procedures that practitioners have at their disposal when teaching grammar. The present paper aims to discuss such methodological options in the light of current theoretical positions and research findings, evaluate their usefulness in the Polish educational context, and suggest a handful of tentative recommendations concerning their most beneficial application in the foreign language classroom.

1. Introduction

The question as to whether the teaching of linguistic forms, or, to be more precise, grammatical structures, should be incorporated into language instruction remains one of the most controversial issues in second language acquisition (SLA) theory and research as well as language pedagogy.¹ The last thirty years

¹ Although in this article, the term 'form' is primarily used to refer to grammar, it is also frequently used more generally to refer to such aspects of the language code as phonology, lexis or graphology (cf. Ellis 2001).

have seen a heated debate concerning this issue and numerous studies have been conducted which sought to determine the effectiveness of grammar instruction either to develop and test SLA theories or, less frequently perhaps, to identify what constitutes effective pedagogic practice (cf. Ellis 2001). Although caution has to be exercised about the findings of this research due to the methodological problems from which it suffers and the conflicting nature of the results obtained to date, such studies have brought us closer to understanding the place of grammar instruction in second language development. In particular, empirical investigations have provided us with important insights into the choice of linguistic forms to be taught, the timing and intensity of instruction as well as its place in the curriculum, and the effectiveness of different pedagogic options in teaching grammar (cf. Doughty and Williams 1998; Ellis 2001, 2002).

While acknowledging the significance of research contributions in all of these areas, the present paper focuses on the one that appears to be of greatest relevance to practitioners, and aims to present the options in grammar teaching that researchers have shown to be worthy of incorporation into classroom practice, evaluate their usefulness and, ultimately, offer a handful of tentative suggestions on how they could be combined to enhance the effectiveness of teaching grammar in Polish schools. For the sake of clarity and completeness, the discussion of the pedagogic options in form-focused instruction is preceded by a brief presentation of the changing views on the role of grammar teaching and the reasons why it should be included in the curriculum.

2. From grammar-translation to communicative language teaching

For centuries foreign language pedagogy relied on a sequential presentation of linguistic forms or functions, pre-selected and graded according to their perceived difficulty, frequency or usefulness, and, thus, embodied what Wilkins (1976) terms the *synthetic approach* to syllabus design. In addition, there was a belief that teaching the selected forms explicitly and more or less in isolation would result in the mastery of the target language, and, therefore, the predominantly *analytic teaching strategy* was applied, where “the learner (...) pays attention to formal and functional features which are deliberately abstracted at least to some degree from the living context” (Stern 1992: 301).² Obviously, teaching of this kind took various forms in different teaching methods, but what all of them had in common was a linear presentation and sequencing of the material, and the belief that learning would closely reflect teaching. This also applies to more recent func-

² In fact, in his discussion of teaching strategies Stern (1992) does not view the analytic and explicit approaches as synonymous, but admits that the latter very often constitutes a characteristic part of the former.

tional-notional approaches, which organize content on the basis of the forms needed for particular communicational or situational activities, but still focus on specific language features, sequence them in a linear fashion and stress immediate production of correct forms (cf. Stern 1992; Hinkel and Fotos 2002).

In the 1970s the traditional synthetic syllabi and teaching procedures were questioned as SLA researchers came to realize that such instruction did not work and was at odds with the natural processes of language development. Confirming what many teachers were well aware of, it was found that knowing grammar rules does not guarantee being able to use language spontaneously, that learning does not mirror teaching, and even when it does, its effects wear off relatively quickly. More generally, it became clear that acquisition is not a process of accumulating entities (Rutherford 1987). Equally influential were research findings showing the existence of a natural order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes as well as a number of developmental stages in the acquisition of certain areas of syntax (e.g. negation), and the necessity of being developmentally ready before the next stage in a sequence can be acquired (Pienemann 1984). Doughty (1998: 134-135) summarizes the reasons for the inadequacy of the traditional approaches as follows: “(...) because traditional language teaching isolates linguistic form, provides no opportunities for the development of fluency, misconstrues the notion of complexity, and ignores the existence and ordering of natural acquisition processes, it has not been an effective way to promote classroom language acquisition.”

The numerous shortcomings of traditional language teaching methodology, its failure to foster language development and the mounting empirical evidence that learners followed their own internal syllabus resulted in the emergence of communicative, natural or procedural approaches. Such approaches attempted to replicate in the classroom the conditions of naturalistic language acquisition in accordance with the belief that language can be learnt incidentally from exposure to target language samples. This meant adopting what Stern (1992: 301) calls the *experiential teaching strategy*, which “invites the learner to use the language for a purpose, and to focus on the message rather than any specific aspect of the code”. In the case of many variants of communicative methodology this entailed espousing the so-called ‘zero option’, or the proposal to abandon grammar instruction and error correction in favor of meaningful language use (e.g. Krashen 1985, Prabhu 1987). The rationale for such a position originated from Krashen’s (1985) Monitor Model, which provided the theoretical underpinnings of communicative pedagogy and significantly contributed to its rise.

3. The need for grammar instruction

With time, however, it turned out that the complete rejection of formal instruction might have been premature and in the 1990s grammar was rehabilitated and

recognized once again as an essential component of language learning. Obviously, the revival of interest in form-focused instruction was not tantamount to reverting to the discredited teaching practices of the traditional approaches as is evident, for instance, in Long's (1991) proposal to distinguish between *a focus on forms*, based on the structural syllabus and explicit instruction, and *a focus on form*, where learners' attention is drawn to linguistic features when they are engaged in meaningful language use. Although this and other recently offered suggestions concerning the most beneficial type of grammar teaching are not necessarily compatible, it is crucial that at present few researchers would dispute the usefulness or even indispensability of form-focused instruction. In fact, there are several important reasons why they should adopt such a stance.

One of the most compelling arguments against purely communicative approaches is that learners often fail to achieve high levels of grammatical competence even if they learn the language naturally or have plentiful in-class exposure to comprehensible input as well as opportunities for meaningful language use. A classic example of such a situation is Canadian immersion, where native speakers of English receive the same kind of instruction as they would in the regular English program, but the school subjects are taught in French. Research into such programs has shown that although learners attain high levels of discourse and strategic competence, and are able to communicate fluently, even after many years of study they fail to acquire basic grammatical and sociolinguistic distinctions, and, generally, do not achieve high levels of grammatical accuracy (cf. Swain and Lapkin 1989; Tarone and Swain 1995). Poor quality of learners' output has also been reported in purely communicative or task-based programs (e.g. Lightbown and Spada 1990), and led Higgs and Clifford to comment that in instruction of this kind "communicative competence is frequently [used as] a term for communication *in spite of language*, rather than communication *through language*" (1982: 61). According to researchers, such problems can only be tackled by drawing learners' attention to language forms by means of *preemptive* (e.g. rule explanation) or *reactive* (e.g. error correction) *negative evidence* (i.e. information about what is not possible in a language), or designing linguistically demanding communicative tasks (cf. Skehan 1998; Ellis 2002).

Another important reason why grammar instruction should be included in the language curriculum is that it speeds up acquisition and leads to higher levels of ultimate achievement (cf. Ellis 1994). Research evidence (e.g. Mackey and Philip 1998) convincingly shows that even though there may exist a natural order of acquisition which is immune to instruction, attention to form can assist learners in moving from one stage to another more rapidly, an effect that is no doubt more than welcome by language teachers. Researchers also argue that some form of negative evidence may be necessary to make learners aware of the exis-

tence of structural differences between the L1 and L2, a task that cannot be accomplished by means of exposure to comprehensible input alone (e.g. White 1991). As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 304) comment, "(...) while comprehensible input may be necessary and sufficient for SLA, instruction may simplify the learning task, alter the processes and sequences of acquisition, speed up the rate of acquisition and improve the quality and level of SL ultimate attainment."

What also has to be taken into account are learners' preferences, which is in line with the principles of learner-centered instruction, one of the tenets of communicative methodology. But once such a perspective is adopted, the beliefs of communicatively-oriented teachers are bound to clash with those of their learners, many of whom expect to be taught grammar and will go to great lengths to understand it (cf. Ellis 2002). In such cases, it appears reasonable to assist students in their efforts rather than insist that they acquire grammar subconsciously. Taking a more pedagogical perspective, it should be noted that neither notional-functional nor task-based syllabuses allow a systematic coverage of target language grammar, and this can only be ensured if a structural syllabus is adopted to complement meaning-based instruction. Besides, it "provides teachers and learners with a clear sense of progression – something that (...) is missing from both notional and task-based syllabuses" (Ellis 2002: 21).

Last but not least, the place of grammar teaching in the curriculum has to be viewed through the prism of the educational context in which instruction takes place. The fact is that communicative methodology has been much more influential (and successful!) in second language contexts, where learners have access to the target language outside the classroom, and has had only a marginal impact upon language instruction in foreign language settings, with their limited out-of-class exposure, insufficient number of language lessons and examination requirements (cf. Fotos 2002). In such contexts, structural syllabuses, explicit grammar instruction and error correction have never been abandoned, and, due to their inherent limitations, it is very unlikely that they ever will. Rather, what is needed is adding a communicative dimension to traditional grammar teaching, which could for example be accomplished by providing corrective feedback during communicative activities, or using tasks where a focus on meaning and attention to language forms are simultaneously fostered.

4. Options in grammar teaching

Since the time it was realized that the concept of method is too crude to provide a basis for either research or teaching, and foreign language pedagogy entered the *postmethod condition* (Kumaravadivelu 2001), there have been several attempts to view differences in instruction in terms of options. Stern (1992), for example, talks about teaching, social and timing strategies, which can be combined in vari-

ous ways. The present section focuses on the first of these, that is teaching strategies, and, more specifically, on those that are relevant to teaching grammar.

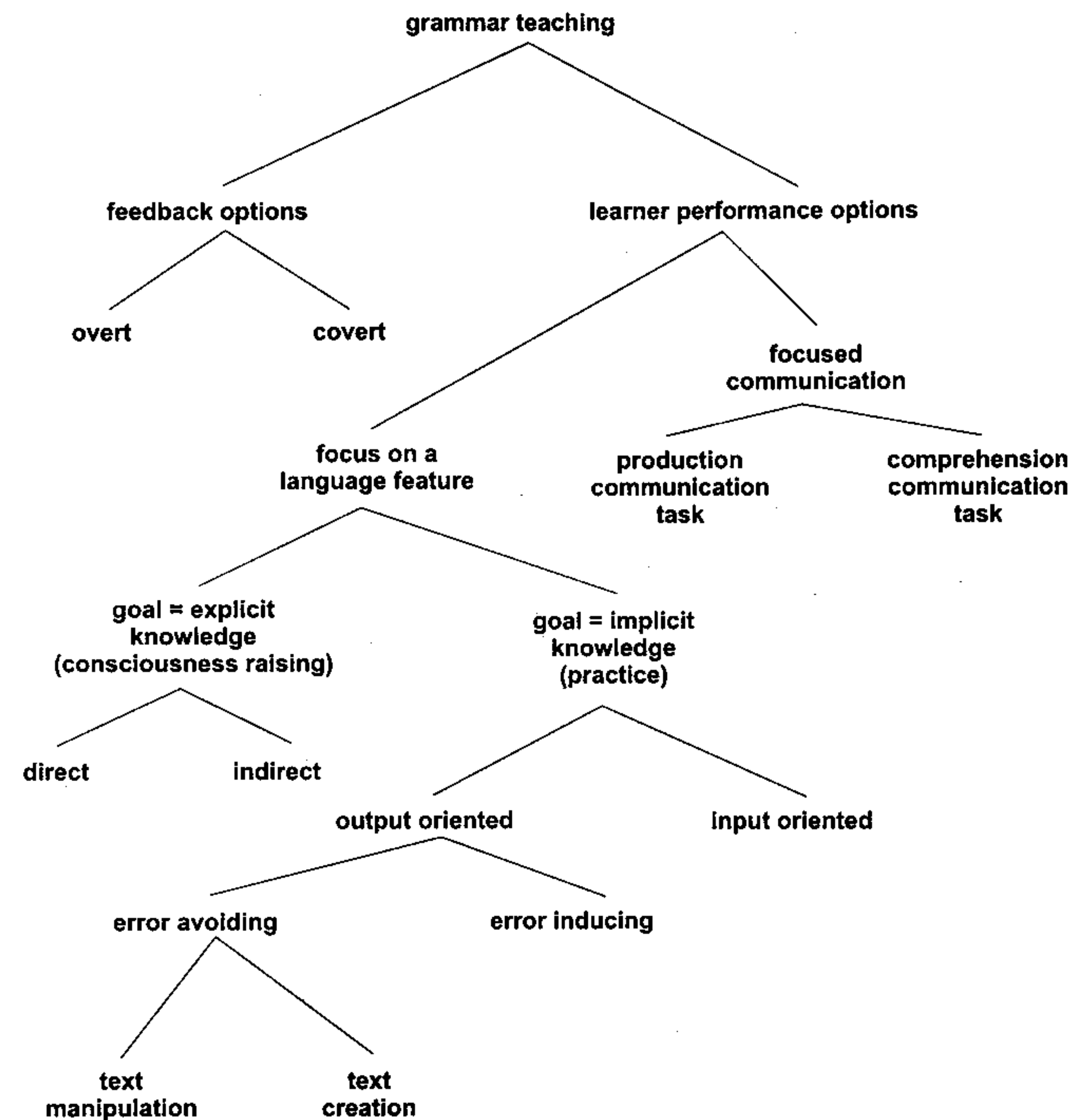
The researcher who has provided detailed classifications of the options in grammar teaching is Ellis (1997, 1998, 2001). The present paper draws on his early taxonomy (Ellis 1997), as it is the most comprehensive, most practical and, most reflective of what can happen in the language classroom. However, while Ellis (1997) emphasizes relating the different techniques and procedures to the psycholinguistic processes relevant to language acquisition and providing a basis for research into their effectiveness, the following discussion will mainly focus on what theory and research have to say about the value of each instructional option as well as an evaluation of its usefulness in the Polish educational context. It should be noted that the options described are not mutually exclusive as different combinations thereof are feasible in language lessons, and that the model is not exhaustive since future research is likely to add even more detailed distinctions. Also, for the sake of clarity, the model presented in Figure 1 is a simplified version of the one Ellis (1997) proposed, with some categories omitted and others given new, but in the opinion of the author, more comprehensible labels.

4.1. Feedback options

According to Ellis (1997: 78), “feedback options refer to the various devices available for providing learners with information regarding their use of a specific grammatical feature”. A basic distinction here is between *overt feedback*, where learners’ attention is deliberately drawn to a specific grammatical error, and *covert feedback*, which resembles the feedback that caretakers provide to children, and thanks to its implicitness does not interrupt the flow of communication. As research indicates, overt corrective feedback can be provided by means of *explicit correction*, where the teacher supplies the correct form and makes it clear that what the learner said was incorrect, or the use of *elicitation*, *metalinguistic clues*, or *repetition*, all of which involve an attempt to more or less explicitly get the learner to self-correct and fall into the category of *negotiation of form* (cf. Lyster and Ranta 1997; Lyster 2001). As for covert feedback, it typically takes on the form of a *recast*, which involves implicit reformulation of all or part of a student’s utterance in accordance with target language norms (cf. Ellis 1998; Lyster 2001), or a *clarification request*, which is intended to elicit a self-correction and, therefore, constitutes another example of negotiation of form (Lyster 2001).³

Although a number of recent studies have shown that providing students with corrective feedback, particularly in the context of communicative activities, is likely to have a positive effect on acquisition (e.g. Doughty and Varela 1998; Han 2002; Pawlak 2003), relatively little is known about the effectiveness of the micro-options presented above. One study that has shed some light on this issue was

Figure 1: Methodological options in grammar teaching (adapted from Ellis 1997: 79).



conducted by Lyster and Ranta (1997), who found that in immersion classes it was elicitation and metalinguistic clues that resulted in the highest incidence of students’ *uptake* (i.e. attempts to self-repair an utterance), while recasts, which the teachers were observed to use the most frequently, were the least likely to get the learners to self-correct. A subsequent reanalysis of the data revealed that recasts

were the most common and, at the same time, the least successful form of feedback in the case of grammatical errors, mostly due to the fact that they were perceived as providing positive rather than negative evidence. This led Lyster (2001: 291) to conclude that “perhaps teachers could draw more frequently on the negotiation of form in response to grammatical errors.”

All in all, there appears to be a role for both overt and covert feedback and the micro-options they subsume in the language classroom, but with such scant research findings, it is difficult to make definitive pedagogical recommendations. What teachers should keep in mind is that the value of a particular feedback option depends to a large extent on the learners’ level of proficiency, their familiarity with the form in question, or the objectives of a particular lesson or task. One procedure that could perhaps be particularly recommended in the Polish context is the provision of corrective feedback during meaning-focused activities, as this can help learners notice how language forms are associated with meaning and use, a goal that is seldom accomplished in the foreign language classroom.

4.2. Learner-performance options

In the words of Ellis (1997: 78), “learner-performance options refer to the various devices available to the teacher for eliciting different language behaviors that include the use of a specific grammatical feature”. In other words, they encompass the activities that teachers can employ with the purpose of familiarizing their students with a particular structure or providing them with practice in its more or less deliberate use. Learner-performance options are further subdivided into those that focus on communication and those targeting a specific language feature. Both of these options are discussed below.

4.2.1. Focused communication tasks

A *focused communication task*, or a *structured-communication task*, as Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1990) prefer to call it, is an activity that is intended to ensure a certain degree of focus on form while learners are primarily engaged in conveying messages, and can involve either production or comprehension of a particular grammatical structure (cf. Ellis 1997). A production task of this kind is designed in such a way that learners are requested to perform an activity that meets Skehen’s (1998) criteria for a communicative task (e.g. primacy of meaning, relationship to real-world activities, assessment in terms of outcomes, etc.), but, at the same time, they are expected to use a specifically-targeted feature of language.

Beyond doubt, tasks of this kind are extremely useful not only because they integrate form and meaning, thus enabling learners to pay attention to the interfaces between the two, but also because they ensure the conditions for produc-

ing the form in real-time, which is likely to lead to its more confident and correct use (cf. Johnson 1996). Although focused communication tasks can be put to many uses, the author believes that they naturally lend themselves to review work or dealing with forms that are particularly problematic, and are much more beneficial and engaging than the more or less controlled exercises frequently used for this purpose. One problem with such activities is that they are difficult to design as it is hard to ensure the use of a language feature without making the task less communicative, and learners are adept at avoiding the structures they are expected to employ. A potential solution could be complementing the use of such tasks with corrective feedback or explicit instruction, both of which are likely to get the learner to notice the form in question (e.g. Samuda 2001). Obviously, such problems are much easier to avoid in comprehension tasks, where learners are exposed to texts containing examples of the target form and are expected to comprehend them with the assistance of the teacher or some instructional materials (cf. Doughty 1991).

4.2.2. Focus on a language feature

Although all of the methodological options discussed above can be successfully utilized in teaching language forms, grammar instruction is typically associated with those where the teacher focuses on a particular feature of language and the learning is intentional in the sense that learners are aware that they are studying grammar (cf. Ellis 1997). All feature-focused options are examples of Stern’s (1992) analytic teaching strategy, and they are frequently subdivided into those that employ *explicit instruction*, or *consciousness-raising*, and those in which *implicit techniques and procedures* are used. A discussion of the two options follows.

4.2.2.1. Explicit instruction

As Stern (1992: 334) puts it: “Advocates of an explicit teaching strategy assume that second language learning is, for many people, a cognitive process leading to an explicit knowledge of the language. Such learners focus on the characteristic features of the language, (...) make an effort to acquire a conscious and conceptual knowledge, (...) want to know how the language functions, how it hangs together, what words mean, how meaning is conveyed and so on”. In other words, *explicit instruction* mainly aims at the development of *declarative knowledge*, or the knowledge *about* language rules. The value of this kind of instruction, according to Ellis (1997, 2002), lies in the fact that it is not constrained by developmental sequences and learnability limitations postulated by SLA theory and research (e.g. Pienemann 1984).

Explicit grammar teaching can be *direct* and *indirect*, or *deductive* and *inductive*, to use the terms commonly employed in methodology textbooks. *Direct*

(*deductive*) instruction involves oral or written rule explanations, usually at the beginning of a lesson, and then learners are typically instructed to apply, complete or amend a given rule in a task of some kind. For example, the learner can be provided with a more or less technical metalinguistic explanation concerning the use of reflexive and reciprocal pronouns, and then given a set of sentences, and instructed to complete gaps in those sentences with appropriate pronouns. In the case of *indirect (inductive) instruction*, or *discovery learning* as Thornbury (2001) prefers to call it, “learners are provided with data which illustrate the use of a particular grammatical structure which they analyze in order to arrive at some generalization that accounts for regularities in the data” (Ellis 1997: 86). For instance, students could be given a text containing a lot of examples of the past simple tense and asked to identify the rule concerning the formation of that tense depending on the type of verb used (e.g. regular vs. irregular).

Discovery activities can be much more motivating than those which require the application of the rules provided, and, additionally, the rules and patterns students discover by themselves are likely to be more meaningful, memorable and serviceable, the mental effort invested ensures deeper levels of processing, and the development of learner-autonomy is fostered (Thornbury 2001). Indirect consciousness-raising tasks become even more valuable when learners work in groups and have to solve grammatical problems interactively, as in such situations they take on a communicative dimension, with students using the target language to reflect on its use. One example of such an activity is a *dictogloss*, where the teacher reads a short text containing a lot of examples of a specific grammatical structure and students jot down familiar words and phrases. Subsequently, they are asked to work in pairs or groups and reconstruct the text using their shared resources, and, in the last stage, the final versions are compared and analyzed. Research shows that tasks of this kind not only foster metatalk, which enables learners to notice gaps in their interlanguages and test hypotheses, but also that conscious reflection on language use may be a source of learning (Swain 1998).

It has to be pointed out, however, that indirect explicit instruction is not without its problems, as getting students to discover a rule takes up a lot of valuable classroom time and, in itself, does not guarantee that the right rule will be hypothesized, both of which impose severe limitations on the frequency with which such activities can be used. Additionally, not all rules are equally amenable to such treatment, the challenge posed by discovery activities may not be compatible with the learning styles of some learners, and the demands on lesson preparation and planning may be unacceptable for many teachers (cf. Thornbury 2001). What also has to be taken into account are research findings which, despite being somewhat mixed, strongly indicate that learners who are taught deductively outperform those who search for rules by themselves (e.g. Robinson

1996; Erlam 2003). Consequently, there is a need to strike a balance between direct and indirect ways of developing learners' explicit knowledge, as both of them can prove effective depending on the language form targeted, learner characteristics, or such practical considerations as the intensity of instruction and the time available for lesson preparation. It is perhaps safe to say, as is the case with other pedagogic options, that variety is at a premium where the value of particular choices cannot be unequivocally determined.

4.2.2.2. Implicit instruction

According to Stern (1992: 339), implicit teaching techniques “encourage the learner to approach the new language globally and intuitively rather than through a process of conscious reflection and problem solving”, the rationale being that language is too complex to be fully described and that conscious knowledge cannot provide a sufficient basis for efficient learning. Thus, *implicit instruction* fosters the ability to use language forms automatically in communication, and, thus, it is directed at the development of *procedural knowledge*. As depicted in Figure 1, implicit instruction includes *input-oriented options*, which “enable learners to perceive, discriminate, understand and interpret grammatical features” (Ellis 1997: 87), and *output-oriented options*, where learners are engaged in tasks requiring them to produce the target feature accurately.

Teaching involving the use of *input-oriented options*, also known as *comprehension-based instruction* (VanPatten and Cadierno 1993), involves designing grammar tasks which, rather than requiring learners to engage in production of targeted language forms, “focus their attention on specific structures and help them to understand the meaning(s) which these structures realize – to induce them to undertake a kind of form-function analysis of the structure, as this is exemplified in input that has been specifically contrived to illustrate it” (Ellis 1997: 87). One example of such an activity could be having learners listen to sentences containing examples of the present perfect simple and progressive tenses and choose the ones that illustrate situations displayed in a series of pictures. Learners could also be provided with a number of statements containing examples of the target structure and just indicate their agreement or disagreement with the propositions expressed. The idea behind activities of this kind, sometimes called *interpretation tasks* (cf. Ellis 1997), is that thanks to being exposed to a lot of exemplars of a particular structure, learners will be provided with data necessary to construct or reconstruct their interlanguage systems.

The teacher can ensure that learners are provided with sufficient data containing the targeted structure in at least two ways. The examples of activities given above are representative of *input flooding*, where learners are provided with numerous opportunities to encounter the target structure but no efforts are made to direct their attention to it in the hope that the sheer frequency of the lin-

guistic feature in the input will result in noticing it and, thus, foster acquisition. Alternatively, the teacher could opt for *input enhancement*, where the prominence of the target structure is increased either by means of topographical alterations such as highlighting, color-coding, underlining or font-manipulation, or with the help of a task that requires learners to pay attention to the structure, as when they have to answer text-related questions of a specific kind. Using such tasks not only provides an interesting and stimulating alternative to the more traditional ways of teaching grammar, but also receives support from SLA theory which states that noticing features in the input is not subject to the same developmental constraints as being able to produce them in real time (cf. Ellis 1997). Research suggests, however, that the relative implicitness of the input-oriented options may preclude learners from paying attention to the targeted features, which considerably reduces their effectiveness, particularly when it comes to more complex structures, and indicates that they should be supplemented with explicit instruction (cf. White 1998). Another reservation is related to the fact that while comprehension-based instruction may enhance comprehension of the targeted structure, it may have much less effect on learners' ability to produce it (cf. DeKeyser and Sokalski 2001). Thus, it appears reasonable that at some point input-oriented teaching should be complemented with *output-oriented teaching*, or *production-based instruction* (VanPatten and Cadierno 1993), to which we now turn our attention.

SLA theorists and researchers are rather skeptical about the value of the techniques involving production practice, pointing out that learners require time to incorporate new grammatical structures into their interlanguages, the acquisition of many structures involves passing through a series of transitional stages before target-like use is possible, and teaching learners structures that they are not ready to acquire may be ineffective or even deleterious (cf. Ellis 1998). Even though such reservations should be heeded, output-oriented techniques undoubtedly remain among those employed most frequently in foreign language contexts, including our own, and, therefore, it makes more sense to suggest the ways in which they can be used more profitably rather than recommend their outright rejection. Besides, as some researchers claim, language learning involves both a skill aspect and a knowledge aspect (Schmidt 1994), and, thus, it can be argued that "although production practice may not enable learners to integrate entirely new grammatical structures into their interlanguages, it may help them use partially acquired structures more fluently and more accurately" (Ellis 1998: 51), a proposition that has found support in research findings (e.g. DeKeyser and Sokalski 2001).

The aim of most production-based activities is to help language learners *avoid making errors* involving a specific feature of language, which means that they are designed in such a way that learners produce grammatically correct sen-

tences. Such techniques range on a continuum from highly-controlled *text-manipulation activities*, where learners are supplied with a set of sentences and instructed to fill in the blank, substitute one item for another or transform them, and *text-creation activities*, in which learners produce their own sentences using the target structure, and which are similar to focused communication tasks discussed above with the important difference that students are fully aware that the aim is to practice a particular structure rather than engage in meaningful interaction (cf. Ellis 1997, 1998).

Much grammar teaching is based on the well-established methodological principle that instruction should begin with text-manipulation tasks and gradually move to text-creation activities in the hope that controlled practice will ultimately result in the automatic use of the target structure and implicit knowledge will be developed. It is this assumption that underlies the still ubiquitous presentation-based approach, known as the PPP (i.e. presentation, practice, production) model, where a contextualized presentation of a single point of grammar is followed by controlled practice activities, and, finally, the production stage, where learners are expected to use language more spontaneously. Although the durability of this approach might seem surprising in the face of the current theoretical positions and research findings, it is largely due to its ease of implementation, the unproblematic evaluation of its instructional outcomes and the lack of a clear alternative for pedagogy (cf. Skehan 1998). In fact, as long as a viable alternative framework is not presented, the PPP will likely remain the procedure of choice for many teachers, and, as such, it should be viewed as an important tool for grammar instruction. Also, it should not be forgotten that production practice can profitably be used outside presentation-based approaches, as evident in the fact that some methodologists see a role for it in the post-task stage of task-based learning (e.g. Willis 1996).

The other output-oriented option, which is much less popular in teaching practice, is based on the assumption that *error-inducing* is more likely to benefit language development than traditional error-avoiding instruction. For example, students could be asked to judge the performance of several actors in a show and provided in advance with carefully ordered adjectives for that purpose. For example, if several short adjectives like *cute*, *sexy*, *witty* were followed by a long adjective like *beautiful*, the ordering would lead students to overgeneralize and say **the beautifullest*, and then the error would be explicitly pointed out. Research into the effectiveness of such *garden-path techniques* has produced rather mixed results, with some studies confirming their effectiveness (e.g. Tomasello and Herron 1989) and others failing to demonstrate such an effect (e.g. Ellis, Rozell and Takashima 1994). Undoubtedly, the error-inducing option is an interesting focus-on-form technique but irrespective of future research findings, it is likely to play only a marginal role in grammar instruction as few forms are ame-

nable to such treatment, and it could hardly ensure a systematic coverage of target language grammar.

Notwithstanding the reservations voiced by theorists and researchers, implicit instruction techniques and procedures focusing on a particular feature of language have always been, still are, and will likely remain important pedagogic devices in the repertoire of a language teacher. With largely inconclusive research findings and mostly theory-grounded prescriptions to go by, perhaps the best solution is to draw upon both comprehension- and production-based approaches together with the micro-options they encompass, as dictated by diverse pedagogic goals, classroom realities and learner characteristics.

5. Implications and applications

The discussion of methodological options in grammar teaching presented in this paper clearly demonstrates that form-focused instruction has an important role to play in classroom language development, as evidenced by the amount of research done in this area and its overall encouraging findings. It also shows that we have gone a long way since the days of the grammar-translation method in that teachers not only have more techniques and procedures at their disposal but can also be guided by the constantly increasing body of research into their effectiveness. It should be made clear, however, that the usefulness of research-generated knowledge is often of limited practical value as researchers and teachers pursue very different goals, with the former advancing *technical knowledge*, which is explicit, deliberately acquired and not readily applicable to specific situations, and the latter requiring and developing *practical knowledge*, which is implicit and intuitive, obtained through experience, fully expressible only in practice and available for dealing with particular cases (cf. Ellis 1998). This gap is clearly visible in the case of grammar instruction, where the researcher is often interested in the contribution of a single option in order to test specific hypotheses, whereas the language teacher inevitably draws upon a combination of different techniques and procedures to provide effective instruction. Besides, research findings are too sketchy and obtained from too few subjects to be universally applied, with the effect that the value of particular methodological options will have to be explored by teachers themselves, who will either informally try them out on a daily basis or engage in context-sensitive action research.

A question of particular import to the practitioner is how the different options discussed in this paper can be combined to make the teaching and learning of grammar more effective. As Ellis (1997: 91) writes: "The construction and implementation of a grammar lesson or even a grammar task is likely to involve the selection of several options from the two major sections of the system – learner performance options and learner feedback options". If, for instance, the teacher wishes to conduct a lesson devoted to the passive voice, he or she could

start off with an explanation concerning the form, meaning and use of the structure (direct explicit instruction), and then the students could be provided with a text containing a lot of examples of the passive which would be typographically enhanced (input enhancement), and instructed to answer text-related questions which would require the use of the target structure (a technique combining elements of text-manipulation and text-creation). Subsequently, the learners could be asked to engage in a communicative task which would call for the use of the passive voice (focused communication), and, when reporting its outcomes, they could be provided with overt or covert corrective feedback addressing all errors involving the structure. Finally, as a homework assignment, they could be asked to work on an exercise in which they would have to transform a set of sentences from active to passive voice (text-manipulation).

Obviously, as repeatedly pointed out throughout this paper, not all of the options depicted in Figure 1 will be equally suitable for all teaching contexts and situations, as the effectiveness of many of them will be constrained by the learners' level of proficiency, the amount of time teachers have at their disposal or the inherent properties of the language form being taught. Taking our educational context as an example, it would be difficult to see how focused communication tasks could be used to introduce a new grammatical structure to beginners, or how input-oriented options alone could result in the acquisition of relative clauses when instruction is limited to just three lessons a week. Also, some activities and procedures, such as the dictogloss or focused communication tasks are more likely to be effective in the case of structures with which the students are already partly familiar and can profitably be used for remedial purposes. Others, such as interpretation tasks or error-avoiding activities, can have wider applications and be employed when introducing completely new constructions. On the other hand, even when students are familiar with the target structure but they share their mother tongue and are not used to working in groups, they can frequently fall back upon it during such activities as the dictogloss or focused communication tasks, rendering them totally ineffective. All of these considerations point to the fact that the choice of a particular option or set of options has to be informed by the knowledge of the local teaching context and cannot simply be based on research-generated recommendations.

On a more general level, an important question to ask is whether it would be possible to do without the structural syllabus, and, as suggested by Long (1991), adopt instead a task-based one, where learners work on a series of communicative tasks and a focus on form only occurs in response to specific language problems. Attractive as such an alternative may seem, it is bound to be unfeasible if we take into account such characteristics of our educational setting as the low intensity of instruction, the extremely limited opportunities for out-of-class exposure, the existence of external requirements in the form of examinations, the

availability of the shared L1, and, finally, the fact that most teachers have deeply-ingrained beliefs about how languages should be taught and few of them would seriously contemplate abandoning the PPP model. Rather, what needs to be done is adding a communicative dimension to traditional instructional practices by, for example, placing more emphasis on comprehension-based grammar instruction or focused communication tasks. Also, it appears reasonable to use a combination of structural and task-based syllabuses, but, contrary to what Ellis (2002) suggests, it is primarily the former that should be used at the beginning of instruction, and it should not be confined to developing learners' explicit knowledge.

After all, as Ellis (1997) himself shows in his discussion of how work on innovation can be applied to language teaching, innovative proposals are inherently threatening and their success depends, among other things, on the aspect of pedagogy to be affected, with such areas as methodological practices and teachers' underlying pedagogical values typically the most impervious to change. Thus, if it is not to result in a complete failure, any attempt to change the ways in which grammar is taught in Polish schools should be evolutionary rather than revolutionary, sensitive to practitioners' belief systems, and based on interaction and communication with teachers rather than an imposition of proposals generated by theorists and researchers who have little or no familiarity with the local educational context.

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