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A Study on the Reorganization of the Teaching of English Grammar in Japan:

From the Viewpoint of Communication Strategies

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1. Introduction

As Richards and Rogers mention, since we have adopted communicative language teaching (CLT), English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers have been questioning "whether it requires existing grammar-based syllabuses to be abandoned or merely revised" (1986: 83). Doughty and Williams also say that second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have raised "the controversial question of whether and how to include grammar in second language (L2) instruction" (1998: 1). On the other hand, to the suggestion that "L2 teaching such as CLT that is primarily meaning-focused could be improved with some degree of attention to form", the responses "have ranged from outright rejection by teachers whose orientation is wholly communicative, to an eager embrace by others as justification for a return to explicit, discrete-point grammar instruction" (ibid.: 2). Therefore, in this study, we try to find a workable solution for meeting twin goals that are often viewed as contradictory in teaching EFL: improving students' ability to use target language (TL), English, communicatively, and improving their mastery of English grammar, particularly, a core set of English syntactic patterns.

2. Background to the study

2.1 Problems with the teaching of English grammar in EFL settings

Ellis points out that "a structural syllabus consists of a list of grammatical items, usually arranged in the order in which they are to be taught", adding that "this kind of syllabus is probably still the most common in language teaching today" (1997: 135). One of the problems with the traditional instruction of English grammar is that "the traditional notion of *formS* always entails isolation or extraction of linguistic features from context or from communicative activity" (Doughty & Williams 1998: 3, their own emphasis). As Doughty and Williams mention, "in order to prevent a misguided swing of the pedagogical pendulum back towards the teaching of linguistic forms in isolation" (ibid.: xiii), we should look for another option to replace the traditional grammar teaching methods.

2.2 Acquisition-compatible teaching of English grammar

There are a good few methodological options in grammar teaching (see Ellis 1997, Figure 3.1, for a survey of these options). When we choose one of them, as Ellis has pointed out, we should evaluate it "in the light of SLA research" (ibid.: 77). At the same time, as he claims, "given that a gap exists between SLA and language

pedagogies, the question arises as to how the gap can be bridge" (ibid.: 7). To try to answer the question, we can find a vital clue in *process instruction* advocated by VanPatten and Sanz (1995). They define it as "an explicit focus on form that is input based" (VanPatten & Sanz 1955: 169). According to them, "its purpose is to direct learners' attention to relevant features of grammar in the input and to encourage correct form-meaning mappings that result in better intake" (ibid.: 172). The next question working within these perspectives is: what kind of input in English grammar teaching EFL teachers should deal with in focus on form (FonF) instruction; in other words, what kinds of grammatical features, especially syntactic structures EFL learners should pay attention to.

Doughty and Williams argue that, in the FonF instruction, "meaning and use must already be evident to the learner at the time that attention is drawn to the linguistic apparatus needed to get the meaning across" (1998: 4). Furthermore, Doughty claims that "the key cognitive construct in focus on form is focus, or more specifically, selective attention" (2001: 210). To pursue the line of their arguments, first of all, we have to decide what kind of syntactic patterns should be paid attention to, and then, after choosing these syntactic patterns, we should determine how these patterns can be embedded in FonF instruction in EFL settings such as in EFL class in Japan, where the traditional instruction prevails.

2.3 Grammatical competence in relation to strategic competence

In order to search for grammatical features, more concretely speaking, syntactic patterns, to begin with, we should reexamine grammatical competence in a SLA framework.

According to Skehan (1998), Bachman has let strategic competence play a lynchpin role in communicative language ability. Strategic competence "is no longer seen as compensatory, only achieved when other competences are lacking" and instead, "it is central to all communication" (ibid.: 161). Therefore, when grasping grammatical competence in Bachman's framework (see Bachman 1990, Figure 4.1, for more details), that is to say, when letting our attention center around strategic competence, we can look at grammatical competence within a SLA framework. In order to look at grammatical competence in a SLA framework from the pedagogical viewpoint, the next thing we have to do is to review communication strategies (CS) themselves.

2.4 CS viewed from FonF instruction perspective

Doughty argues that "learners must notice the difference between what they themselves can or have said (or even what they know they cannot say) and what it is that more competent speakers of TL say instead to convey the same intention under the same social conditions" (2001: 225). She also claims that "focus on form pedagogy recommends drawing learners' attention to gaps", arguing that "this implies IL[1]-TL mismatches are noticeable" (ibid.: 228-229). On the other hand, Tarone defines CS as "mutual attempts of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (1980: 420).

Taking their ideas into consideration, when we compare the linguistic features of CS used by non-native speakers (NNS) of English with those of CS exploited by native speakers (NS) of English, we can find out the differences between them and let EFL learners draw their attention to the gaps. As a result, even when teaching English grammar to EFL learners, we can introduce the rules of grammar to them as not discrete ones but the ones

embedded in strategic communication. In addition, as Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) claim, "all CS are helpful for acquisition because they enable learners to keep the conversation going and thereby provide more opportunities for input" (cited in Kasper & Kellerman 1997: 6).

Kellerman et al. make the assumption that "different (sub)strategies simply reflect the differences between referents themselves" and "the attributes of the referent itself will have a crucial part to play in its realization" (1987: 104-105). On the other hand, Tarone and Yule argue that the essential structures "used by native speakers may be employed as a norm against which to measure the performance of the learners" (1989: 117). If we happen to find out a relationship between linguistic expressions and attributes of referents, we can say that linguistic realizations themselves reflect the cognitive processes as Kellerman et al. mentioned above. Moreover, in accordance with Tarone and Yule's argument above, the essential structures elicited from CS used by NS of English in this study can become the norm for EFL grammar teaching when we reorganize the traditional grammar instruction into another new one within a SLA framework.

3. Purpose

We try to find out the relationship between linguistic realizations and the referents' attributes. Then, we make use of these linguistic realizations, that is, syntactic patterns as a baseline to reorganize the teaching of English grammar in EFL contexts.

First of all, we elicit and analyze the main syntactic patterns used by native English speakers in compensatory strategies (CpS), which is the Nijmegen project taxonomy of CS (see Kellerman et al. 1987, Poulisse 1990, for more details), as they refer to items that their interlocutor, a non-native speaker of English, does not know the names for. Then, we try to find out whether there is a statistically significant relationship between these patterns and referents' attributes. When we discover a close relationship between two categories, we can not only prove the assumption of Kellerman et al. but also make good use of this discovery at EFL classrooms and transform "the traditional forms-in-isolation type of grammar teaching" into the "cognitive processing" one (Doughty & William 1998: 3).

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

A total of 30 native speakers of English, all undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Minnesota participated in the study. The participants were evenly divided by gender (i.e., 15 males and 15 females), and ranged in age from 18 to 56 (mean age = 22.6 years). These students had a variety of majors at the university, most in the liberal arts with a few science majors.[2)]

4.2 Data Collection

Data were elicited in oral interviews. Participants were given 15 short descriptions of various social situations, which included 17 items that the participants would need to refer to in their responses. These items were chosen to

include a range of types of referents, and are listed as follows [*Referent types* – Items]:

Human beings – bursar, caretaker; *Animals* – rhinoceros, ostrich, sea urchin; *Plants* – oak, lavender; *Instruments* – pliers, thermostat; *Food* – pasta, punch, nectarines; *Clothes* – coveralls; *Machines* – furnace, carburetor; *Vehicles* – ambulance; *Buildings* – laboratory.

The participants were told to role-play a series of 15 situations in which they were interacting with a Japanese man whose English vocabulary was limited (see Appendix). In each situation, they needed to refer to the above items, but had to use alternative expressions because the Japanese man did not know the right words. They were told not to use mime or body language.

The researcher was present during the interview and played the role of interlocutor for the speaker by saying 'uh huh' or 'yeah' with a nod or smile in order to make this interview somewhat more natural and interactive. The data were collected and audio-taped on seven different days in November 1999 in a room at the campus of the University of Minnesota. A compact cassette tape recorder was in plain view. Each interview was 20-30 minutes in length.

4.3 Data Analysis

The syntactic patterns each subject used when she/he referred to each item fell into five types as follows:

Subject (S) + Verb (V) + Premodifier (PrM) + Superordinate Term (ST)
(e.g., An ostrich is a very large bird)

S + V + ST + Postmodifier (PoM) (e.g., Bursar is a person who works with accounts)

S+ V + PrM + ST + PoM (e.g., A rhinoceros is a big animal with a horn on its nose)

S + V + ST (e.g., Punch is a drink)

Other Structures (e.g., If somebody encounters an emergency, you should call an ambulance for her).

The attributes each speaker mentioned when referring to each of the 17 items fell into seven categories: *function*; *appearance* (including *touch* such as *its skin is rough* or *the surface is smooth*); *location/habitat/origin/occasion*; *growth/nature*; *recipe*; *taste/smell*; and *other attributes* (e.g., physical actions). Using Microsoft Excel 2000, the frequency of the five syntactic patterns and the seven types of attribute was calculated, then using SPSS 1999, a Kendall's tau correlation[3] was calculated in order to discover the relationship between the five syntactic patterns and the seven attribute categories.

5. Results

Table 1 below shows that there were some strong correlations between reference to particular types of attributes, and the type of syntactic pattern used. There was a strongly positive correlation between S + V + ST + PoM in CpS referring to attributes of function ($\tau = .717, p < .01$), and a significantly positive correlation between S + V + PrM + ST in CpS referring to attributes of appearance (including touch) ($\tau = .571, p < .01$). There was also a significantly positive correlation between S + V + ST in expressions referring to attributes of taste and smell ($\tau = .598, p < .01$). There was a modestly positive correlation between S + V + ST in CpS referencing attributes of

appearance (including touch) ($\tau = .368, p < .05$), and a fairly positive correlation between Other structures in CpS referencing attributes of function ($\tau = .390, p < .05$) (see Konishi 2001, for more details).

Table 1: Kendall's tau Correlation between linguistic structures and attributes

Attributes / Linguistic Structures	Function	Appearance including Touch	Location / Habitat / Origin / Occasion	Growth / Nature	Recipe	Taste / Smell	Other Attributes
S + V + ST + PoM	.717**	-.691**	-.015	-.217	-.186	-.322	-.326
S + V + PrM + ST	-.693**	.571**	-.069	.267	.314	.378	.307
S + V + PrM + ST + PoM	-.187	.322	.183	-.078	-.078	-.376	.149
S + V + ST	-.415*	.368*	-.141	.032	.336	.598**	.275
Other Structures	.390*	-.313	.128	-.180	-.147	-.434*	-.070

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ $-1 \leqq \tau \leqq 1$

6. Discussion

The findings in Table 1 above show us that each subject (henceforth referred to she or her) does not pick up some linguistic structures at random, but chooses them psychologically or cognitively, that is to say, taking account of the attributes of each referent.

The CpS used by her "can be explained in terms of two general principles of communication: the Principle of Clarity (*PCL*) and the Principle of Economy (*PEC*)", as Poulisse points out (1997: 49, emphasis added). When talking in our native language, we usually give PEC priority over PCL because there is little room for misunderstanding. From PEC viewpoint, needless to say, the best choice is using the referent's name itself because it requires little processing effort. However, when L2 learners use TL, or when NS of TL speak to L2 learners, they usually give PCL priority over PEC (and sacrifice PEC for PCL) in order to avoid misunderstanding. In this study, it is almost certain that she goes through the following decision-making or selection processes when using CpS: (1) in order to follow PCL, she considers what kinds of attributes are the most suitable ones for referring to each item in her mind because she thinks that "the attributes of the referent itself will have a crucial part to play in its realization" as Kellerman et al. claims (1987: 105); (2) after choosing one or more attributes of each referent, she tries to find out the most suitable syntactic patters to express the attributes; (3) after selecting syntactic patterns such as S + V + ST + PoM, she puts linguistic expressions into these patterns; (4) she sees whether her linguistic expressions are clear enough to her interlocutor (in this case, a NNS of English); (5) unless she is sure of her success, she returns to the previous processes (1)/(2)/(3)/(4). She follows "general principles of communication", as Poulisse points out, and "makes *her* references as informative as necessary (so as to be clear); at the same time *she*

also makes them no more informative than necessary (so as not to waste effort)" (1997: 50-52, emphasis added).

Some psycholinguistic researchers (e.g., Bialystok 1990; Kellerman, Bongaerts & Poulisse 1987; Poulisse 1990) claim that "though observable linguistic differences exist between in using the L1 and in using the L2, the underlying cognitive processes are the same" (Konishi & Tarone, forthcoming). However, it is clear that using CpS in L2 places much greater processing burden on L2 learners than using in their mother tongue. Moreover, syntactic structures between two different languages are more or less different from each other when referring to attributes. In order to look at these processes more concretely, we now focus on the linguistic structures of CpS to express the attributes of function below.

As shown in Table 1 above, most of NS of English tend to use a syntactic pattern of S + V + ST + PoM (e.g., It is a tool used for cutting something), even though PoM tends to be long and complex. This is mainly because they give PCL priority over PEC and regard a syntactic pattern of S + V + ST + PoM as eminently suitable for explaining the details of the attributes of function. It is also partly because "English has a strong preference for END-WEIGHT in message organization" (Yule 1998: 257). On the contrary, when referring to attributes of function, Japanese EFL learners tend to use S + PrM + ST + V (e.g., *Sore ha mono o kiru dogu desu* [It + used for cutting something + a tool + is]), because Japanese language has a "preference for beginning-weight in sentence organization" (Konishi & Tarone, forthcoming). In addition, PrM in Japanese is often long and rambling, which is highly against principles of communication, that is, PCL and PEC. Therefore, the instruction focused on a syntactic pattern of S + V + ST + PoM can help Japanese EFL learners lift processing burden from them. In other words, "encouraging Japanese EFL learners to use end-weight, with sentence structures such as S + V + ST + PoM makes them communicate smoothly" (Konishi &Tarone, forthcoming). In the rest of the section, we would like to propose concrete grammar teaching centered around CS.

In Japanese EFL settings, grammatical items or rules are usually presented and explained discretely, which is partly because of the following two reasons: English grammar has been studied "in order to pass benchmark proficiency exams", and most of the learners "believe classroom communicative activities are a waste of time" (Konishi & Tarone, forthcoming). Naturally enough, such instruction has little to do with communication activities. In order to steer the current grammatical instruction towards communicative instruction, we here illustrate four concrete examples extracted from CpS used by the interviewees to examine English grammar items within a CS framework.

(1) A bursar is a person *who works at college*;

(2) Thermostat is a tool *used for* keeping your house at the right temperature;

(3) Pliers are tools *to pull out* nails.

In the case (1) above, at a traditional grammar lesson in Japan, L2 learners are asked to combine 'A bursar is a person' and 'He works at college', and to make a sentence (1), using a relative pronoun 'who'. Instead, we can treat (1), (2), and (3), that is to say, the relative clause, the past-participle phrase, and the infinitive phrase above together as several of the representatives of PoM showing attributes of function. Then, in the minds of L2 learners,

these syntactic patterns are accepted as not discrete grammatical items but as a tool for showing attributes of function, which can help L2 learners look at English grammar from communicative perspective. In other words, the English grammar teaching can be embedded in a SLA framework.

Let us see the fourth example below.

(4) If somebody encounters an emergency, you should call an ambulance for her.

This interviewee also thinks that it is the best way to refer to attributes of function in order to explain what an ambulance is, but this time, instead of using PoM, she uses an alternative way, that is, an if-clause as a syntactic pattern used for referring to attributes of function. However, in Japanese EFL settings, an if-clause is usually treated within the framework of a grammar-translation method. Moreover, the Japanese translation of 'if', that is, *moshi*, sounds "the remoteness of the possibility of the event" (Yule 1998: 125). Consequently, EFL learners in Japan try to remind themselves to use past tense forms in an if-clause, often out of context. Although they have knowledge of the English grammar itself, it is almost always too difficult for them to use an if-clause appropriately in the real situation; it seems to be the last thing for them to use an if-clause as showing the attributes of function. Only when they use an if-clause as a syntactic pattern of CpS representing the attributes of function, they can realize that syntactic patterns themselves come from a cognitive sphere and are useful for real communication.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to propose a specific syllabus for English grammar in order not to teach Japanese EFL learners English grammar items discretely and explicitly but to teach the learners these items more communicatively. Through embedding the teaching of English grammar within a CS framework, we can reorganize the current syllabus for English grammar into a more communicative one.

Bialystok claims that "what one must teach students of a language is not strategy, but language" (1990: 147). We agree on her claim, that is, not teaching strategy but language, because, the same as in studies of error analysis, we have no choice but to look at the linguistic expressions produced by L2 learners, even when we try to find out their inner processes involved in producing their speech. However, at the same time, we also should answer the unsolved following questions: (1) what kind of linguistic expressions or syntactic styles should be given the priority when teaching TL to L2 learners, who have not enough linguistic realizations of TL to solve their communication breakdown; (2) when using L2 instead of L1, whether different linguistic realizations are the surface phenomena which are derived from the same internal and cognitive processes, or, different linguistic realizations themselves reflect what internal and cognitive processes are.

Our study is also in accord with the following Ellis' ideas. "Input can become implicit knowledge when the learner carries out the following operations: (1) Noticing (i.e. paying attention to specific linguistic features in the input); (2) Comparing (i.e. comparing the noticed features with the features the learner typically produces in output; (3) Integrating (i.e. constructing new hypotheses in order to incorporate the noticed features into the IL system)" (Ellis 1997: 119). Through these processes, "initially, learners need to focus their conscious attention on the choice

of linguistic form but as they progress, these controlled responses become automatized enabling learners to give more conscious attention to other aspects of message construction" (ibid.: 116).

Even though our study is limited, it has proposed one of the concrete models to reorganize the current English grammar teaching within a SLA framework. As mentioned in Introduction section, we hope that our study gives us a solution which kills two birds with one stone: enhancing students' ability to use TL, English, communicatively, and enhancing their English grammar, in particular, a core set of English syntactic patterns.

Notes

1. IL stands for interlanguage.
2. These majors were advertising ($N = 1$), aerospace engineering ($N = 1$), anthropology ($N = 1$), art ($N = 3$), computer and information sciences ($N = 1$), education ($N = 2$), ESL ($N = 5$), French ($N = 1$), genetics ($N = 1$), geophysics ($N = 1$), German ($N = 1$), Japanese ($N = 5$), linguistics ($N = 1$), nursing ($N = 1$), political science ($N = 1$), psychology ($N = 1$), public relations ($N = 1$), scientific and technical communication ($N = 1$), and sociology ($N = 1$).
3. Kendall's tau is a nonparametric statistic for determining the probability of a relationship between two sets of data, regardless of whether the observed data being compared are in the same or different orders for the two variables. Kendall's tau seems suitable in this case since the two variables are clearly of different orders.

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Appendix

Please read the directions and speak to the tape recorder in front of you.

(A) Directions

Please read each of the following situations and then respond to it as if you are in an actual conversation. We are not testing the uniqueness of your responses. All of the names used there are pseudonyms (Dick, Jim, Kana, Koji, Lincoln, and Sally). In each situation, please assume that:

(a)You are talking with your Japanese friend, Koji; (b) Because of his limited English vocabulary, he could not understand what you would say if you used the normal words; (c) You cannot use mime and body language because they are useless to him; (d) Therefore, you have no choice but to use alternative expressions.

(B) Recording from here

1. Koji asks you what your father does. You try to answer this by using the word "bursar", but Koji cannot understand the word. Please explain it to him.
2. You are working at a big company as a caretaker. Koji says to you, "By the way, Jim/Sally, what are you doing now?" You try to answer this by saying "caretaker", but Koji cannot understand the word. Please explain it to him.
3. You hear on the news that a rhinoceros has run away from the Minnesota Zoo. You try to tell Koji the

news. However, he does not know the word, "rhinoceros" in English. Please explain it to him.

4. Your friend, Dick, runs a ranch and is a highly amusing man. He keeps an ostrich there. You try to tell this to Koji. However, he does not know the word, "ostrich" in English. Please explain it to him.
5. You go swimming at the seashore in California with Koji. When you swim, you happen to step on a sea urchin. It hurts and you feel a sharp pain in the foot. You ask for Koji's help saying "sea urchin". It makes no sense. Please explain it.
6. Koji wants to send something nice to his wife. You recommend sending a potted plant, lavender. As usual, he does not know this in English. He says to you, "Food or something?" Please explain it.
7. You go to one of the Minnesota State Parks with Koji. There, you would like to take his picture; hence, you say to Koji, "Please stand up under an oak." In response, he says, "I don't know where. Near to the big pond?" Around the oak tree, there are many kinds of trees and flowers. Please explain it.
8. You go to the Mall of America in Minnesota with Koji. There are all kinds of different shops there. You go to a restaurant to eat pasta and drink punch. You say to Koji, "I would like pasta and punch there." Koji is totally confused and say to you, "Did you punch somebody in the past?" Please explain what pasta and punch are respectively to him. First, pasta and then punch, please.
9. You ask Koji to go to a grocery store to buy nectarines. At this store, there are many kinds of fruit and vegetable. Please explain to Koji what kind of thing a nectarine is.
10. You say to Koji, "I am going to buy coveralls at Tanger Outlet Center. As usual, it makes no sense to Koji. He says to you, "What are c...rals?" Please explain it.
11. At Koji's house, you help him to patch up the roof of his house and need a pair of pliers. You shout at Koji on the roof, "Please bring me a pair of pliers?" Koji replies to you from the ground, "You need a pair of pants?" Oh, dear. Please explain it.
12. At Koji's house, the furnace does not work well. After checking it, you find out that the thermostat in the living room is out of order. You have to explain these items to him. Koji comes from the warmest place in Japan. He has no ideas about them at all. Please explain these items. First, furnace and then thermostat, please.
13. Koji's car is out of order. You find out that its carburetor does not work. At the living room, you say to Koji, "You need to replace a carburetor." Koji is too poor at mechanics to understand it. He replies to you, "I have to have my car washed?" Please explain it.
14. Koji's daughter, Kana has been sick for four days. You think it is very serious; hence, you say to Koji, "Please call an ambulance." He is at a complete loss as to what he should do. He says, "Call the police?" Please explain him what an ambulance is.
15. You are working at a laboratory. You talk to him on the telephone. You say to Koji, "Let's meet at Lincoln laboratory." As usual, he does not know the word. He says to you, "Where? At a park?" Please explain him what a laboratory is.