Book review

Teaching grammar in second language classrooms: Integrating form-focused instruction in communicative context (ESL & Applied Linguistics Professional Series)

Hossein Nassaji and Sandra Fotos hardly need an introduction: Both are renowned scholars with a long track of publications in journals, edited collections and books on a wide range of topics within the domain of second language acquisition. Their latest publication, *Teaching Grammar in Second Language Classrooms: Integrating Form-Focused Instruction in Communicative Context*, tackles the subject of the effects of formal instruction on the acquisition of grammar. Not infrequent are objections voiced by specialists concerning practitioners' persistent traditionalism and reluctance to implement novel ideas in their classroom practices, and those of teachers who complain about the abstract nature of linguistic theories and their disparity with classroom reality. In the light of the above, the present book makes a rare attempt to bridge the gap between advances in SLA theory and the second/foreign language classroom.

The authors' objective is to bring the most recent developments in communicative focus on form to language teachers in an accessible way.

The nine chapters of the book have been divided into three parts: Part I focusing on input-based options in focus on grammar, Part II, where interaction- and output-based solutions are discussed, and, finally, Part III, where the role of context is considered. Most of the chapters follow an identical format: The presentation of the theoretical underpinnings of a particular option is followed by an account of empirical studies in its support and a selection of activities and techniques that integrate focus on grammar with opportunities for communication and could be readily applied in the classroom or serve as inspiration for developing one's own tasks. The opening chapter, "The Changing View of Grammar Instruction," briefly outlines traditional and more recent approaches to grammar teaching and offers an overview of current advances in communicative focus on form. Chapter 2, "Focus on Grammar through Processing Instruction" starts with a discussion of input processing, a theoretical model concentrating on ways in which learners derive richer intake from input. The presentation of empirical data in support of the claims of the theory is followed by guidelines for developing affective and referential structured input activities coupled with examples of such techniques. Textual enhancement, a technique that brings into focus important formal features that otherwise might not be attended to in the input, is the point of interest of Chapter 3, "Focus on Grammar through Textual Enhancement." Physical manipulation of the text, such as bolding, highlighting, underlining, and so forth – is aimed at increasing the perceptual salience of specific features, which, when consciously registered, become candidates for acquisition. Chapter 4, entitled "Focus on Grammar through Discourse," concentrates on the need to expose learners to target language discourse loaded with instances of a particular form, if that form is to be acquired. Discourse-based approaches to teaching grammar aided by corpus linguistics provide learners with the opportunity to explore the relationship between grammatical forms and their functions. Moreover, the grammar of spoken language has come to the fore allowing comparisons between corpora comprising data accumulated by both modalities. Sample activities reveal the potential of using discourse-level input and output for teaching grammar in the classroom.

Chapter 5, "Focus on Grammar through Interactional Feedback," is the first in the second part of the book where the premium is placed not on the reception of grammatical forms but their production. The interactional strategies and activities described here function as a means of drawing learners' attention to grammatical features that are to be acquired. The following chapter, "Focus on Grammar through Structured Grammar-focused Tasks," presenting

the background and rationale for task-based instruction, discusses a whole array of implicit and explicit grammar-focused tasks, including consciousness-raising, information exchange, problem-solving, and interpretation tasks. In Chapter 7, "Focus on Grammar through Collaborative Output Tasks," various techniques requiring collaborative production of language are presented. The recognition of the contribution of the output hypothesis as well as that of sociocultural theory to the understanding of the processes leading to the mastery of a foreign language provides grounds for developing group- or pair-work activities that require learners to produce a certain grammatical structure.

Chapter 8, "The Role of Context in Focus on Grammar," being, apart from the Conclusion, the only chapter in Part III, considers the importance of the pedagogical context in classroom teaching. The impact of such contextual factors as learners' age and proficiency level, having a native or a nonnative teacher, or living in the second or foreign language context on the outcomes of the learning process are examined to the conclusion that task developers need to account for the goals of each context to maximize the effects of instruction.

The conclusion chapter of the book explicates the authors' recognition for the dominant role of perceptions, beliefs and experience of teachers in every classroom context. Language teachers, being active participants in the process, will not apply novel ideas automatically. Instead, the authors have no doubt, the decisions teachers make are guided by teachers' personal views on teaching and learning confronted with particularities of the conditions in which they dwell. The authors emphasize the intricate relationship between theory, research and practice stating that the options offered by researchers and theorists are not ready-made solutions but rather proposals whose effectiveness will be tested by language teachers in their everyday practice. Nevertheless, a question rises whether language teachers will reach for the volume that is part of a well-recognized but more academia-oriented series tackling issues of theoretical nature and discussing research perspectives rather than practical solutions.

The audience of the book has been identified as language teachers and language students, who, even if lacking background in SLA, wish to explore the connection between theory and the classroom. By the same token, researchers and graduate students should find the book useful as it combines an account of the latest advances in SLA theory and research with a practical guide offering advice on their implementation in the classroom. Moreover, each of the chapters includes a *Questions for Reflection* section which provides an opportunity to reconsider the concepts tackled in the chapter, which could be done individually or in class with teacher trainees. Equally practical appear the *Useful Resources* parts at the end of each chapter containing a list of leading publications on the

ideas presented in a particular part of the book. All titles without exception are followed by a brief presentation of their contents and merits.

All this testifies to the exceptional usefulness of the book that can be recommended to a wide audience as a tool that may be used in training programmes or serve as an inspiration for developing new activities or techniques, or for exploring, further on, the concepts elaborated in the publication.

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