Effective Approach to Implicit and Explicit Grammar Instruction*

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Jeong, Sooyeong. 2008. Effective Approach to Implicit and Explicit Grammar Instruction. The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal, 10(3), 43-59. The question of how to teach English grammar in the school system has been a subject of study for English scholars. Several years ago there was the suggestion that to instruct English grammar in the Korean EFL situation was useless, but it is not possible to speak without English grammar. Fluency is very important in speaking English, yet fluency with correctness is better. In the traditional way, teachers have taught English grammar explicitly to make students learn grammar, but students do not apply grammar in discourse situations. Nowadays, instead of teaching English grammar explicitly, teaching English grammar unconsciously and implicitly or accidentally and intercommunicatively is focused on more in education mixed with English speaking education. This implicit and unconscious English grammar instruction is more effective in inmated students grammar teaching and lasts long in the memory. I will introduce traditional grammar teaching methods and teaching grammar implicitly in the present English curriculum and in English speaking education, and explain how to apply it in the school system.

Key Words: implicit, explicit, focus on form, focus on forms, obstrusive, deductive, metalinguistic, communicative, content-based

1. Introduction

Among the prominent issues in the foreign language classroom is the debated and controversial question of whether or how to teach grammar

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in second language instruction. To what extent or degree and which linguistic features should be taught to learners are other issues. The role of grammar in language lessons is salient enough. The theories and techniques of grammar teaching have changed for centuries and run to opposite ends of the continuum, necessary and unnecessary, for items such as the phonics approach and the whole language approach in language education. Grammar education in communicative content-based teaching has long been through memorization. Since grammar is required in producing output, grammar has long been internalized in the case of communicative lessons, rather than grammar lessons in isolation. When linguistic rules are focused on in grammar lessons incidentally, teacher and student negotiation occurs. Grammar is required in language teaching.

Long (1997) has proposed that instructional options can be of three types, a focus on meaning, a focus on forms, and an integration of both meaning and form. According to him, instruction with focus on meaning posits that exposure to rich input and meaningful use of the second language can lead to incidental acquisition of the L2 system. Instruction with focus on forms in isolation assumes that the target forms need to be taught one by one in a sequence externally preplanned. The final instruction type in Long’s categorization has learners focus on forms integrated in meaning and capitalizes on brief, reactive intervention. The learner’s attention is drawn to a linguistic feature which causes trouble in completing classroom tasks and is learnable within the learner’s internal development stages.

The term form-focused instruction was proposed by Spada (1997) characterize a wider range of instructional types, embracing the role of consciousness and attention in L2 learning, regardless of whether they are reactive or proactive, or obtrusive or unobtrusive. The purpose of such form-focused instruction interventions is to foster learner’s focal attention to particular forms within a meaningful context with a predetermined linguistic syllabus in mind, if needed.

Doughty and Williams (1998) suggested definitional criteria for focus on form instruction: engagement with meaning occur before attention to