Explicit Grammar Instruction: 
Its Role and Place in a Foreign Language Classroom

Alla Smyslova
Columbia University
October 23, 2009

Explicit grammar instruction (EGI)
- the use of strategies
- to draw learner’s attention
- to form and structure
Grammar – Translation

Audio-Lingual

Cognitive

Krashen’s SLA model

input (i + 1)
effective filter
monitor
storage
output

acquisition vs. instruction
acquired knowledge vs. gained knowledge
Grammar – Translation

Audio-Lingual

Cognitive

Communicative

Main points of research in SLA
(in the 1980s)

1) Does formal classroom instruction help acquisition process?
2) What effect does grammar instruction have on
   fluency and accuracy?
   the rate of acquisition?
   the order of acquisition?
   ultimate attainment in SLA?
First empirical evidence that investment in explicit grammar instruction in the early years of FLL may result in advances in speaking skills at the high-mid and advanced levels.

Brecht, et al. 1993

Explicit grammar instruction is an equal partner in producing expert language learners not only for accuracy but also in advancing speaking skills.

Brecht, et al. 1993
Focus on Form

- focus on forms
- focus on meaning
- focus on form

*Only noticed input can contribute to L2 development.*

Doughty, 1998

---

Meaning-form focus in communicative activities

- isolate the form
- ascertain the meaning
- establish association between the two

Doughty, 1998
A Unit of Activities

- listening to comprehend
- listening to notice
- checking (the students are given a text containing errors they have to identify)
- understanding the grammar point
- trying it in a short production

Ellis, 2002

What forms to focus on?

- different from L1
- infrequent in input
- not important for successful communication
- likely to be misinterpreted

Doughty, 1998
To sum up:

- Gained knowledge and acquired knowledge interact.

- The focus of EGI should be raising structural awareness as acquisition begins with awareness.

- Explicit grammar knowledge is an important component of self-monitoring and self-management in L2 production.  
  
  Ellis, 2002

- Effects of EGI are gradual and cumulative rather than instantaneous.

- EGI is an organizer that helps learners to understand input.

  Doughty, 1998
Communicative Approaches to Language Learning

pre-communicative  true-communicative
quasi-communicative

Numrich, 2009

Language Categories by Level of Difficulty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category I</th>
<th>French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>about 600 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category II</th>
<th>German, Indonesian, Swahili</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>700-900 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category III</th>
<th>Armenian, Bengali, Finnish, Greek, Hindi, Hebrew, Persian, Slavic, Vietnamese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1100-1400 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category IV</th>
<th>Arabic, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2200 – 2800 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also: Foreign Service Institute 1973
http://www.effectivelanguagelearning.com/language-guide/language-difficulty
Structural Differences between English and the Foreign Languages by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time of events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>names of things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forms of address</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>words for actions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leaver, et al. 1999

Language Proficiency Levels

http://www.toeic.or.jp/toeic_en/lpi/lpi_02_1.html