Principled grammar teaching

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Abstract

A key aspect of the acquisition of grammar for second language learners involves learning how to make appropriate connections between grammatical forms and the meanings which they typically signal. We argue that learning form/function mappings involves three interrelated principles. The first is the Given-to-New Principle, where existing world knowledge is exploited as a resource for connecting known or 'given' meaning with new form-meaning mappings. The second is the Awareness Principle, which states that discovering new mappings between form and meaning is a process which necessarily involves awareness. The third is the real-operating conditions principle, whereby the process of acquiring form-meaning mappings is not complete until learners are able to practice them in a communicative context and through a primary focus on meaning rather than on form. The challenge for grammar instruction is to create conditions for each of these three principles.
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1. Introduction

There are now a number of grammar teaching models available to teachers. Some of these derive from experienced language teaching methodologists. In addition to the generic PPP model (Present-Practice-Produce), current examples of such models include Scrivener's (1994) ARC model (Authentic Use-Restricted Use-Clarification) and Harmer's (1998) ESA model (Engage-Study-Activate). Other models are based on theories of second language (L2) acquisition. Van Patten (1996), for example, has proposed that grammar can be best taught and learned through Processing Instruction, where students are led to attend to problematic grammatical structures through structured input activities. All these models propose a specific sequence of <u>types</u> of activities that can comprise a grammar lesson.

The approach we will adopt in this article is somewhat different. We believe that rather than specifying a sequence of types of activities, an alternative is to identify a set of principles that can guide the selection of specific instructional procedures. Such an approach allows for a flexible but theoretically informed approach

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to teaching grammar that will provide teachers with a basis for evaluating their own teaching and the proposals that have emanated from language teaching methodologists and SLA researchers.

2. Three principles for effective grammar instruction

The three principles that we describe below are informed by one general principle:

Effective grammar instruction must complement the processes of L2 acquisition.

In discussing the three principles, we will draw on work by a number of researchers in second language acquisition (SLA), especially (but not exclusively) in work undertaken within a cognitive, information-processing framework.

2.1. The Given-to-New Principle

The notion that there is a principled relationship of one sort or another between given and new information is far from new. In discourse analysis, for example, it is argued that effective communication is enhanced when new information is preceded by relevant information which is already known to the hearer (Cook, 1989, pp. 64–67). Clark and Clark (1977, p. 92) discussed this as the 'Given-New Contract', pointing out that grammatical choices (such as whether to use active or passive voice) are frequently motivated by determining what the hearer can reasonably be expected to know. The Given-to-New contract focuses on language use. However, our concern is with the ways in which given and new information are aligned in the interests of language acquisition, which we refer to as the Given-to-New Principle. This principle refers to the idea that the process of making new form/function connections involves the exploitation of what the learners already know about the world – as part of their 'given' schematic knowledge. This knowledge is used as a resource in order to help them perceive something new: how a meaning they are already familiar with is expressed by a particular grammatical form. This may involve learning to see how a given meaning is signalled by a form with which they are unfamiliar, or how a form they have already used in relation to one meaning (such as the present progressive tense for actions 'as we speak') can also be used to signal other meanings (such as using the present progressive to talk about planned future events).[1] Batstone (2002a,b) has argued that the significance of the Given-to-New Principle is underrated in communicative approaches to language teaching.

Language teaching textbooks frequently introduce new grammatical items and their meanings through setting up a context of some sort, for example by using pictures and/or scripted dialogues, in order to establish the appropriate meaning. Superficially, at least, these contexts set the scene for subsequent explicit explanation and practice of the grammatical form. However, it is much less common for textbooks to provide clear principles for guiding learners from the former (the meaning) to the latter (the form).

By way of example of the kinds of problem that arise in some materials, we will consider a sample activity from a popular textbook, *Headway Intermediate* (Soars and Soars, 1986). The task presents the distinction in meaning between two future forms: the *going to* form to talk about planned future action, and the *will* form to signal a spontaneous decision. The learners are presented with a dialogue between Peter and Anne which reads as follows:

Peter: I'm just going to the shops. Do you want anything?
Anne: No, I don't think so. Oh hang on. We haven't got any sugar left.
Peter: It's all right. It's on the list. I'm going to buy some.
Anne: What about bread?
Peter: OK. I'll go to the baker and buy a loaf.
(Soars and Soars, 1986, p. 24).

This is followed by a section headed 'Grammar Question':

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[1] It should be noted, however, that pedagogic exploitation of the Given-to-New Principle depends upon the given meaning already being salient to the learner, and this may not always be the case.

– Why does Peter say:
I'm going to buy some (sugar); but
I'll go to the baker.
– What's the difference between 'will' and 'going to' to express a future intention?

Alongside the dialogue and the grammar question, the learners are also shown a picture of a handwritten piece of paper. It is headed 'shopping list', and it consists of the following list of items: 'sugar, tea, coffee, cheese, biscuits, cornflakes, tin of beans, yoghurt'.

In principle, at least, it is possible to see how the Given-to-New Principle might work here. If the learners already have a schema for shopping lists, they will have the related concept of planned future action as a 'given'. The dialogue seeks to make these concepts salient by providing certain textual cues. The notion of spontaneity (necessary for making sense of the 'will' form) is cued by its contrast with the plan to buy sugar: bread is not on the list, and so is not planned but a spur-of-the moment decision. The notion of planned future action is cued by Peter's comment that bread is 'on his list', suggesting that he had already thought about it.

But if we turn to consider how salient this procedure might be from the learners' perspective, it is not at all clear that the 'given' meanings here are sufficiently well established. The only indication in the dialogue that *will* is being used to make a spontaneous decision is a cue ('what about bread? OK I'll ….'). This is so implicit that it is hard to see how the learners could possibly interpret it appropriately (in discourse the phrase 'OK' is highly ambiguous and can mean a variety of different things). The cue for signalling planned action is certainly more explicit than this ("It's on the list. I'm going to buy some"), but even here the learners only get a single example from which to draw the requisite inference. It is very hard, in short, to see how the learners can easily pick out the appropriate given meanings here, and they could be forgiven for drawing entirely the wrong kind of conclusion (even a seemingly absurd hypothesis, along the lines that *will* is used to talk about bread but that *going to* is used to talk about sugar, is not beyond the realms of possibility!).[2]

How might this problem be remedied? What would be required, perhaps, is a text where the cues to prompt the given meanings are much more explicit. So for instance, we might cue the notion of spontaneity by amending the last part of the dialogue as follows:

Anne: What about bread?
Peter: Oh my goodness! I never thought about that. OK, yes, definitely, I'll go to the baker and I'll buy a loaf.

It might be objected that the kind of text which would result from this sort of additional cueing would be very inauthentic, peppered with cumbersome phrases with a decidedly uncommunicative quality. But processing language using the Given-to-New Principle frequently involves paying attention to linguistic cues which would be regarded as redundant from a communicative perspective, but which nonetheless provide an essential pathway towards making new discoveries about language. Contrivance, we would argue, is often essential to ensure the operation of the Given-to-New-Principle. See Cook (2001) for additional arguments in favour of contrived grammar teaching materials.

There are other ways in which learners can exploit the Given-to-New Principle. Van Patten (1996, 2004) and others propose an approach to grammar teaching known as Processing Instruction. Processing Instruction prompts learners to make new connections between form and meaning whilst preventing them from taking short cuts which by-pass the grammar. Because the sentences are constructed to avoid the use of lexical cues, it is argued that Processing Instruction effectively 'forces' learners to process the grammar more deeply than they otherwise would through input that has been especially structured to provide exemplars of the target feature.

Various types of processing instruction activities are examined in the literature, but the type we will examine here consists of sentence-level activities such as those that involve identifying the roles of noun phrases, i.e. who is the agent or instigator of an action and who is the patient or experiencer of an action (see the review in Van Patten, 1996, pp. 71–81). A typical procedure for this type of activity involves providing a series of sen-

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[2] A further problem with the dialogue from Soars and Soars (1986) is the confusion that might ensure from the fact 'go' is used as a main verb as well as a future-form.

tences targeting a specific syntactic structure known to be problematic for learners. The learners are invited to inspect the sentences in relation to various pictorial representations of the events they refer to, and then to make decisions about which sentence is best represented by which picture. Imagine, then, that the learners are given the sentence 'The dog was bitten by a snake'. They are asked to examine this sentence and to decide which of two accompanying pictures most accurately represents it. Picture one shows a dog with a snake in its mouth, whilst picture two shows a snake with its jaws round the neck of a dog (the correct option). The learners' first instinct might well be to assume that the first picture is the correct choice, particularly if they pay rather more attention to the lexis than to the grammar and assume that this is a prototypical subject–verb–object structure where the first noun (the dog) is both subject and the instigator of the action, and where the second noun (the snake) is both object and experiencer of the action (see Van Patten, 2004, pp. 14–18). They would then opt, incorrectly, for picture one, and would be told that this was the wrong choice, with no further explanation provided. This procedure may be repeated a number of times, until eventually they are prompted to look further into the grammar in order to discover how the passive form is undermining their expectations about who is likely to be doing what to whom.

Although Van Patten does not say so, we would argue that such an account of what this process involves needs to acknowledge the role of the Given-to-New Principle. By engaging with the picture prompts, the learner can achieve a necessary reconnection with context and with 'given' meaning. The pictures of the snake and the dog, for example, point to a situation of the most conceptually fundamental kind, involving transparent relations between protagonists and victims, agents and patients. It is hard to imagine a group of learners, whatever their cultural background, who would not find this kind of representation readily meaningful. In short, such pictures potentially serve a vital pedagogic function in establishing 'given' meaning. It is at this point that the feedback in processing instruction becomes so central. It is the process of providing repeated feedback about the correctness or incorrectness of each choice which ultimately motivates learners to use the pictures as a resource for making sense of the sentence, and which therefore sets in train a form of given-to-new processing. The Given-to-New Principle, then, makes an important contribution to the theoretical basis of Processing Instruction.

2.2. The Awareness Principle

The Awareness Principle is directed at making learners aware of how a particular meaning is encoded by a particular grammatical form. It is possible of course that learners are able to make the connection between meaning and form implicitly (i.e. without awareness) and, to some extent, this probably does take place but, as Schmidt (2001) has convincingly argued, 'people learn about the things they attend to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to' (p. 30).

Following Schmidt, we would like to distinguish different senses of 'awareness'. This is useful because it also enables us to identify different kinds of instructional activities to develop awareness at different levels. At one level, learners pay conscious attention to specific grammatical forms that arise in the input. However, even features that are highly frequent in the input (such as English definite and indefinite articles) may not be attended to if the learner's current interlanguage does not contain a representation of this feature and/or if the learner's L1 does not contain an equivalent feature. In other words, the 'given' obstructs attention to the 'new'. This suggests a clear role for instruction – to direct learners' conscious attention to grammatical features that normally they would fail to notice.

The starting point should be to establish a basis for the acquisition of a grammatical feature in meaning. Ellis and Gaies (1999) offer a sequence of activities, the first of which requires students to listen to a short text which contains exemplars of the target structure and answer a number of questions to establish a general understanding of the text. For example, in the unit focusing on the use of the English indefinite and definite articles to perform the functions of first and second mention, they ask students to listen to a text about 'a tamagochi' and answer questions like:

What is a tamagochi?
What does an owner of a tamagochi have to do?

The next activity is a listening cloze exercise that requires the students to listen to the same text again, this time focusing on the use of *a* and *the*. They are asked to complete the text as they listen:

___ tamagochi is a computerized toy invented in Japan. The name means a cute little egg. ___ tamagochi has become very popular all around the world. The gadget hatches ___ chick. ___ chick makes a chirping sound every few minutes. ___ owner has to push buttons to feed, play with, clean up and discipline ___ chick. If ___ owner stops caring for the chick, it dies.

Such exercises have two essential features. First, the specific grammatical feature the learners are to attend to is made explicit in the instructions. Second, completion of the text does not depend on learners' knowing which form to enter in each blank (although of course they may make recourse to this knowledge) but on their ability to detect the correct form in the input as they listen. Such an exercise requires 'intentional attention' to specific exemplars of the grammatical feature and, as Schmidt argues, this may be essential for the learning of some grammatical features (e.g. when the learner's L1 does not contain an equivalent feature). An important feature of the cloze listening activity is that it gives salience to grammatical features (such as articles) which often lack salience in more communicative contexts.

A second level of awareness is awareness at the level of 'understanding'. That is, learners need to recognize that the forms they have attended to encode particular grammatical meanings. The forms that learners notice are exemplars of higher-order and abstract categories, and learning grammar involves discovering the connection between the exemplars and these categories. Again, it is possible that this can be achieved without awareness, but there seems little doubt that learning will be enhanced if learners (especially adult learners) develop a conscious representation of the form-meaning mapping.

It follows, then, that instructional materials need to go beyond encouraging noticing of linguistic forms and guide learners to construct an explicit rule to account for the form-meaning mapping. Activities that have this purpose have been referred to as 'consciousness-raising tasks' (Sharwood Smith, 1981; Ellis, 1991). A consciousness-raising task is 'a pedagogic activity where the learners are provided with L2 data in some form and are required to perform some operation on or with it, the purpose of which is to arrive at an explicit understanding of some regularity in the data' (Ellis, 1991, p. 239). That is, consciousness-raising tasks constitute a form of discovery learning.

The example of a consciousness-raising task below builds on the noticing activity from Ellis and Gaies (1999). It constitutes the third activity in their instructional sequence. The students' answers to the noticing activity are first checked to make sure that they have filled in the blanks correctly with 'a' and 'the' to refer to first and subsequent mention. They are then asked to perform two operations on the data – (1) to complete a table and (2) to answer two questions about the use of 'a' and 'the'. The intention is to guide the students to discover that 'a' is for first mention of an object/person and 'the' for subsequent mentions. The students are then able to consult a pedagogical description of this rule to check if their understanding is correct. In this inductive approach to consciousness-raising, guided discovery of the rule precedes presentation of it on the grounds that such an approach involves greater depth of processing than is the case with traditional deductive pedagogy.

Read the complete story. Fill in the table.

a(n) + noun	the + noun
a tamagochi	the tamagochi

Answer the questions:

1. When is 'a' used? When is 'the' used?
2. Look through the story again. Study the other phrases with 'a' and 'the' (e.g. 'a computerized toy'; 'the gadget'). Can you see why 'a' is used in some noun phrases and 'the' in others?

Schmidt also identifies a third sense of awareness – awareness at the level of control. The controlled use of grammatical forms is most clearly evident in 'monitoring' – the process by which learners utilize their explicit

knowledge of the L2 grammar to edit their production for accuracy and appropriateness. We would like to suggest therefore that grammar teaching materials can usefully include activities that encourage learners to monitor their own output. These activities are likely to focus on contrived sentences that illustrate the target structure. The fourth step in 'Ellis and Gaies' sequence of activities consists of what they call 'checking'. This is achieved either by asking learners to judge whether sentences are grammatical or ungrammatical or by using their explicit understanding of the structure to decide which form is needed to complete a gapped sentence, as in the example below:

> Read the following descriptions of other toys. Fill in the blanks with *a(n)* or *the*. 1. Tuggles is ____ cuddly pet with a leash. When you pull on ____ leash, ____ pet walks by itself.

Another more contextualized approach to encouraging monitoring is Lynch's (2001) transcribing activity. Lynch suggests that students be invited to transcribe their performance of an oral communicative task and then to edit the transcription. The teacher then takes away their corrected transcripts and reformulates them. The next day the students compare their own edited transcript with the teacher's reformulated version. Lynch reports that the students he asked to complete such a transcribing activity co-operated in transcribing, made a number of changes, and engaged effectively in both self- and other-corrections.

2.3. The real-operating conditions principle

We can distinguish two broad types of grammar teaching activities – those that treat grammar as an object to be studied and analyzed and those that treat it as a tool for engaging in effective communication. The former type typically involves contrived examples and inauthentic operations, while the latter strives to achieve either situational or interactional authenticity (Bachman and Palmer 1996). Our position is that both types of activity are needed – and, indeed, that the former can serve to guide learner performance in the latter. The activities illustrating the Given-to-New Principle and the Awareness Principle in the previous sections have encouraged learners to view grammar as an object, and have been directed at noticing and developing explicit knowledge of form-meaning mappings. We will now consider the case for treating grammar as a communicative tool and suggest ways in which this can be accomplished.

Johnson (1988, 1996) noted that cognitive theories of language acquisition emphasize the need for practice in the context of 'real-operating conditions'. That is, learners need the opportunity to practise language in the same conditions that apply in real-life situations – in communication, where their primary focus is on message conveyance rather than on linguistic accuracy. Johnson emphasises the importance of feedback in the learning process, suggesting that the instructional sequence is best seen as one of 'learn → perform → learn' rather than the traditional sequence of 'learn → perform'. During the 'perform' stage learners must have the opportunity to receive feedback. Johnson emphasises that for feedback to be effective learners 'need to see for themselves what has gone wrong in the operating conditions under which they went wrong' (1988, p. 93). He suggests that this can probably be best achieved by means of extrinsic feedback (i.e. feedback from an outside source) that shows the learner what is wrong by modelling the correct form <u>while</u> they are attempting to communicate.

The key question in our view is how learners can be guided to attend to a specific form-meaning mapping in the context of communication that simulates real-operating conditions. Two general positions can be identified. The first (which we consider problematic) draws on Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis. According to this, learner's attention to form will arise naturally as a result of the communication problems they experience while performing a meaning-focused activity. The second rests on the assumption that learners need to develop an explicit (conscious) representation of the structure either prior to engaging in the communicative activity or during it. We will briefly consider these two positions.

According to the Interaction Hypothesis, learners become aware of form-meaning connections through engaging in meaning-focused interaction (either with the teacher or with another learner), and specifically at points where communication breakdown leads to corrective feedback, a process known as 'negotiation for meaning'. According to Long, learners will be able to find the mental resources to pay attention to the teacher's linguistic correction because 'the intended message is (already) clear to the learner ...' (1996, p. 452), thus reflecting the Given to-New Principle. That is, if the learners are already clear within themselves about the meaning they are struggling to express, then this meaning can be taken as a 'given', and the ensuing

correction should enable them to make the connection between this given meaning and the corrected version of the grammar offered by the teacher or another learner.

But negotiation for meaning is a form of communicative interaction which poses a number of problems for grammar learning. For one thing, as we have already noted, when learners are strongly focused on understanding and conveying meaning, they may fail to notice that the teacher is trying to draw their attention to grammar (as shown in Mackey et al., 2000). In other words, the stronger the communicative focus on meaning, the less salient or noticeable certain critical aspects of the grammar might be. As a result, learners may fail to connect meaning to form. This is more likely to be the case if the negotiation of meaning is conducted by means of recasts, as a number of researchers (e.g. Lyster, 1998; Ellis and Sheen, 2006) have rightly noted that recasts may not be perceived as corrective by students in a classroom context with the result that the grammatical forms lack saliency and are not noticed.

The alternative position is based on the claim that learners will need to develop an explicit understanding of the target structure. This can be achieved either prior to learners' attempt to process the structure in real-operating conditions or during it.

Skill-Acquisition Theory is premised on the assumption that students should first engage in activities directed at awareness raising of the target feature (i.e. they explore grammar as the explicit aim of the activity) and then participate in focused tasks designed to provide opportunities for them to use the target feature under real-operating conditions (i.e. in what DeKeyser (1998) calls 'communicative behaviour'). Vygotskian socio-cultural theory also lends support to the need for establishing an explicit understanding of a grammatical feature prior to use. Lantolf and Johnson (2007), for example, proposed an approach to grammar teaching called 'concept-based instruction', arguing that instruction needs to first ensure a conceptual understanding of a form-function mapping and, from there, afford opportunities for learners to experience use of the structure in what they call 'concrete practical activity'. Lantolf and Johnson's notion of 'conceptual understanding' corresponds to Dekeyser's 'declarative knowledge', with the proviso that Lantolf and Johnson emphasize the importance of linguistically sophisticated descriptions of grammatical phenomena – what they call 'scientific concepts' – rather than simple rules-of-thumb. Their 'concrete practical activity' corresponds closely to Johnson's idea of real-operating conditions and DeKeyser's 'communicative behaviour'.

Both Concept-Based Instruction and Skill-Acquisition Theory assume that it is desirable to develop learners' explicit knowledge of the target feature before they start trying to process it in communication. There are a number of problems with this approach. One is that it ignores the well-attested fact that the acquisition of grammatical structures is a gradual process involving transitional stages (see Ellis, 2008, chapter three). This makes it unlikely that learners can achieve automatization of a new form-meaning mapping in the relatively short period of time assumed by both DeKeyser and Lantolf and Johnson. A second problem is that if students are made aware that the purpose of an activity is to use a specific grammatical feature then it is difficult to see how the task designed to afford opportunities for practicing the target structure communicatively will result in real-operating conditions. Such conditions, we argue, can only be achieved if students' primary orientation is message-centred, directed at communicating meaning, not form-centred, directed at performing a pre-determined feature accurately.

An alternative way of developing students' explicit understanding is to make the target feature explicit to the students in the course of their performing a communicative task. Focused tasks can be devised that make it essential, useful or natural for the students to use the target feature (Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1993), although this is no guarantee that they will actually use it. The teacher can employ various focus on form strategies to encourage students to pay attention to the feature (see Ellis et al., 2002). These strategies involve time-outs from the business of communicating but need not seriously disrupt the flow of communication. They can be pre-emptive as, for example, when a teacher advises students about the use of a particular form or asks a question about a student's choice of form and/or they can be reactive, as when the teacher elects to negotiate form.

We have discussed a number of ways in which the real-operating conditions principle can be implemented. While we see obvious advantages to, not of integrating explicit attention to, not for a form-function mapping into a communicative activity, we do not wish to be prescriptive. We prefer to emphasize two points: (1) to ensure that students engage the processes needed to acquire a form-function mapping, they need opportunities to experience the mapping in real-operating conditions and (2) to achieve this it will frequently be necessary to

guide them towards the consolidation of a form-function mapping so they can apply it in real-operating conditions. Precisely how this guidance is to be achieved remains a matter of some controversy. We have argued that it must necessarily involve the Given-to-New and Awareness Principles. That is the guidance must seek to ensure that what is new is based on what is given and that students pay conscious attention (and possibly develop metalinguistic understanding) of the target feature as a basis for using the feature in real-operating conditions. We will now illustrate how these three principles can be implemented in a task-based grammar lesson.

3. An example of the principles in action

The example we have chosen is Samuda's (2001) account of a task-based lesson designed to teach students epistemic modality (i.e. the use of modal verbs such as 'might' and 'must' to express degrees of possibility and certainty). Pre-testing established that the students had very little prior knowledge of this form-meaning mapping. Samuda distinguishes 'knowledge-constructing' activities designed to assist learners to construct new form-meaning mappings and 'fluency stretching activities' designed to refine and stretch learners' existing interlanguage, and the lesson she describes belongs to the first category.

The lesson began with an activity in which learners were told the contents of a mystery person's pocket and were asked to work together in groups, speculating about the person's possible identity. As they did so, each group was asked to complete a chart by coming up with possible identities (e.g. the person is a smoker because there are matches in his pocket) and by noting these speculations in one of three possible columns. The first column had the heading 'less than 50% certain (it's possible)', the second column was headed '90% certain (it's probable)', whilst the third had the heading '100% certain (it's certain)' (ibid. 127). An analysis of the students' production in the group work stage showed that they mined the input of the task for useful lexis (e.g. 'possible', 'probable' and 'certain') and also mobilized their own somewhat limited interlanguage resources (e.g. they used expressions such as 'maybe' and 'I'm not sure'), but that they failed to use the target modal forms.

Once the group work was over, the teacher chaired a class discussion in which she adopted the role of co-communicator but at the same time attempted to shift the students' focus from meaning to form by interweaving the target forms into the interaction, as in this exchange:

S: Look (opens matchbox). Many matches so maybe he just keep for friend, not for him.
T: Mmmm I-I guess *it's possible* he might smoke. It's hard to tell just from this.

Samuda describes the teacher's approach as an implicit one, involving 'precasting' (i.e. the 'systematic mining of pre-established meaning') followed by 'conversational interweaves' (where the target forms are introduced) to create an interface between meaning and form, as in the example above. However, the students did not take up the interweaves, a failure that Samuda explains as the result of the intense focus on meaning during this stage of the lesson.

In the next stage, the teacher initiated a more explicit focus on the target forms In the first place, the teacher tried to focus the students' attention narrowly on the connection between meaning and form, often resorting to metalinguistic comments to do so, as in this example:

T: 100% 100%? Then you can say he IS a business man (writes on board).
When you when you're NOT 100% certain, you can use *must*. OK? Not he <u>is</u> a business man but he <u>must</u> be a businessman.

It is during this stage that the students began to use the target forms in their speech when prompted. The teacher also now employed corrective feedback when students failed to use the target forms or used them erroneously. Samuda notes that all but one of the teacher's corrective moves were taken up by the students. In the post-task phase of the lesson (where the students collaborated in preparing a poster presentation), the students began to incorporate the new forms in their own language on their own initiative, as in the following example (ibid. 135) where a number of learners contribute to the discussion:

L1: He likes
L2: Golf

L3: Tennis
L4: Art
L2: Mmm (looking at chart) art <u>just probable</u> and chess
L4: So probable?
L5: Probable
L2: (writing) *He must* like chess?
L3: and art

A post-test administered after the lesson yielded a mean score of 19.01 (out of 26), an increase of 15.28 points from the pre-test. However, Samuda is careful not to make any claims about learning as there was no control group in her study.[3]

The 'Things-in-Pocket' task provides a clear example of how adherence to the three principles we have discussed above enabled the students to construct new form-function mappings. The lesson dovetails very neatly with the Given-to-New Principle. Part of the rationale for the initial group activity was to help the learners to activate and engage the target meanings (degrees of possibility). In part this is achieved by Samuda's concept of 'mining'. Language which was 'mined' was language taken from the original chart and incorporated into subsequent talk (both by the learners and by the teacher). The use of lexical cues (like 'probable' and 'possible') to semantically set the scene for the grammar which is to come is similar in principle to the use of lexis in the revised *Headway* dialogue. In effect, its function is to establish relevant meanings as a 'given'.

But what is distinctive about this lesson is not so much the use of lexis supplied by the task materials but the use of interaction in the implementation of the task. It is not just the 'mined' lexical items which helped to establish the given meanings, but the whole nature of the discussion task with which the lesson began, and the incentive it created for learners to get into the right kind of 'semantic space'. We might think of this as a form of task-based priming designed to get the learners thoroughly and actively engaged with the given meaning. Equally significant is the way the teacher used interaction to build upon this given meaning. Facilitating the connection between 'meaning-as-given' and 'form-as-new' was achieved initially by interweaving followed by a more explicit explanation, and then reinforced through corrective feedback. These enabled the learners to go beyond their existing knowledge of the L2 to produce new forms and, potentially, to learn them. It is also interesting to note that this was achieved not by negotiating meaning (as there were few apparent breakdowns in communication) but by negotiating form with the students.

The lesson also illustrates the importance of the Awareness Principle. In the first stage of the lesson, when the students worked in groups to complete the chart, they were not made aware of the target structure (epistemic modals). Instead, a context was created that would make the use of this structure 'natural' and, perhaps, also 'useful', but certainly not 'essential'. Given that the students initially had only very limited knowledge of the target structure (as shown by the pre-test) it is not surprising that during this stage they failed to use any modal verbs, relying instead on the input provided by the task and their prior knowledge of formulaic expressions. In the second teacher-led stage of the lesson, the students were made aware of the target structure. It will be recalled that 'awareness' was discussed in terms of 'noticing', 'understanding' and 'monitoring'. What Samuda's lesson seems to show is the importance of developing students' metalinguistic understanding of the target structure (i.e. 'understanding'). Without this, 'noticing' and 'editing' do not appear to take place. The teacher in this lesson adopted a number of strategies to help the students develop a clear understanding of the meaning of the epistemic modals. She explicitly pointed out the <u>meanings</u> of the modals *might* and *must* by showing how they expressed the same meanings as the lexical items 'possible' and 'probable'. She also drew their attention to the <u>form</u> of the modal verbs ('You use the simple verb here because *mus*t is a modal verb – it doesn't change'). These metacomments were inserted into the ongoing flow of the class discussion, reflecting the 'focus on form' strategies that Ellis et al. (2001) noted occur frequently in task-based lessons. In addition, the teacher also used the blackboard to underscore key points. Importantly, it is only when the teacher adopted these explicit strategies for raising the students' awareness that they began to notice the forms in her input and, a little later, to begin using them themselves. Also, with the teacher's

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[3] Samuda did not intend her study to be experimental. She was more concerned with using the data she collected to explore how the teacher guided the students to make the form-meaning connections.

prompting, they were ultimately able to monitor their errors (e.g. one student self-corrected 'must has' to 'must have').

The third principle – the real-operating conditions principle – can also be seen at work in this lesson. There was clearly a primary focus on meaning. Indeed, in the first stage of the lesson when the students were completing the chart, the focus appears to have been entirely on meaning. In the discussion stage, the focus shifted backwards and forwards from meaning to form, but throughout the primary focus was on meaning (i.e. how to express the notions of possibility and probability). In the final stage, when the students collaborated on a poster preparation, the focus was on message but now there was also evidence of an explicit focus on the choice of epistemic modals. Thus, what we see in this lesson is an overall concern for achieving the task outcome but increasingly as the task progressed this was combined with explicit attention to form.

This lesson demonstrated the effectiveness of an approach to grammar teaching that integrated attention to form into a task-based lesson. Samuda and Bygate (2008), in their commentary on this lesson, noted the following:

Whereas teachers have generally focused on form before students need to use it (as in PPP approaches) or after the need has passed (in post-task feedback and practice materials), this approach specifically times the teacher's input so that it occurs at a mid-point during the task, before the task has been completed' (pp. 144–145).

Such an approach demonstrates how the three principles we have discussed can be successfully implemented in a grammar lesson.

4. Conclusion

Models of grammar teaching vary according to the theory of grammar teaching that informs them. It may be a fruitless exercise to try to demonstrate that one model has greater merit than another. What we have argued in this article is that it might be possible to develop an approach to grammar teaching based on a limited set of theoretical principles which underlie the specific theories that inform different models. To this end, we have identified three principles derived from a single general principle (i.e. 'Effective grammar teaching must complement the processes of L2 acquisition').

We have argued that the goal of grammar teaching should be to assist learners to acquire new form-meaning mappings and to integrate these into their existing form-meaning system. The three principles have been articulated with this goal in mind. The Given-to-New Principle is a principle designed to guide our thinking both about the learning and about the teaching of new form-meaning connections. In terms of learning it highlights two important processes: engaging with relevant meaning which the learner already knows, and using this meaning as a basis for making a new link into the grammar. In terms of teaching it facilitates these processes by suggesting ways to establish 'given' meaning and ways of guiding learners to make the connection from 'given' meaning to its 'new' encoding in the grammar. The Awareness Principle affirms the importance of consciousness in language learning and suggests ways in which consciousness at the levels of noticing, understanding and actual use (e.g. monitoring) can be operationalized in instructional activities. For many learners (perhaps all), making the connections between form and meaning explicit is an essential step in the learning process. The real-operating conditions principle points to the need to ensure that students have the opportunity to experience target features in the kind of language use that they will experience outside the classroom. This requires activities where there is a primary focus on meaning (and where meaning is the starting point) but it also allows for attention to form, including of the more explicit kind, to be incorporated into an activity as it is implemented.

There are, of course, a number of remaining questions. One is whether the three principles are best implemented in a task-based approach, as illustrated in Samuda's task, or in a sequence of relatively discrete activities as in PPP or in the set of activities from Ellis and Gaies (1999). The choice may come down to whether the instruction is directed at 'knowledge-construction' (as was the case with Samuda's task) or with 'fluency stretching'. In the case of the former, the aim of the instruction is to enable the learner to construct an initial form-function mapping, and we would argue that this can be best achieved within a communicative context created by a task and the teacher's incidental responses as the task unfolds. In the case of the latter, the aim of the instruction is to assist the learner to consolidate or modify a form-function mapping that is already estab-

lished. In this case, a task-based approach may again be helpful but so too might a carefully sequenced set of activities that embody the principles we have discussed. Samuda's distinction between 'knowledge construction' and 'fluency stretching' is an important one for grammar teaching, as it does not follow that what works best for one will also be best for the other. In both cases, however, we would argue that instruction needs to embody, in one way or another, the three principles we have discussed.

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