2014

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Sevda Budak

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, sbudak2@unl.edu

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Abstract

We know little about how teachers teach grammar in the public school context. This qualitative study explores public middle school teachers' grammar instruction in today's diverse classrooms. An instrumental case study design was employed to provide a broad description of two ELL middle school teachers' grammar teaching. Analysis of the multiple data sources revealed how ELL teachers orchestrated grammar teaching, which is explored in themes within each case. Based on the findings that emerged in cross-case analysis, similarities and differences between two cases are also discussed. The particularities of these two in-service teachers' grammar teaching provide insight to all language-teaching professionals regarding the factors that impact ELL teachers' thinking and practice. Such insight holds particular importance for teacher educators who need to better understand how in service teachers think about and teach grammar in order to guide and develop such thinking into their practice.

Key Words: grammar teaching, ELL teacher thinking, form-focused instruction, ELL teacher education, case study

Introduction

The proper teaching of a language's grammar has always received considerable attention throughout the history of language instruction (Celce-Murcia, 1991; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Numerous grammar-teaching approaches have emerged, each varying in their perspectives on the quantity and the quality of focus on the form of a language (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). While language-teaching researchers carried out studies to explore the effectiveness of different approaches regarding grammar,

teachers' roles in applying these approaches in their practice have also been acknowledged. In an attempt to explore the relationship between teachers' grammar teaching and their thinking, an abundance of studies have been carried out since the late 1990's. The majority of these studies have been carried out in the university and/or private institution settings with homogenous student population. The present study examines English language learner (ELL) teachers' grammar teaching in a public middle school setting with a heterogeneous (linguistically and culturally diverse) student population by exploring how teachers address target grammar features and their rationale for their choices of options related to the teaching of grammar.

Literature Review

In the past, it was believed that the best way to teach and learn a language was achieved through studying grammar, which was connected with the approaches and understanding of the teaching of classical languages (Rutherford, 1987). As a result of this conviction, grammar stayed at the center of language pedagogy for years. In line with researchers, the majority of language teachers also think that grammar is the foundation of a language and this foundation of language is considered of foremost importance in language learning and teaching (Budak, 2009). For that reason, the approaches language teachers use to teach grammar has been a continuous matter of concern for the language-teaching professionals.

Various approaches, which are also referred to as traditional methods, have emerged throughout the language teaching history such as the Grammar Translation, the Audio-Lingual, the Structural-Situational (also known as Structural Language Teaching), and the Silent Way (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Even though these methods differed in their ways of applying language study, their primary focus was on teaching grammar rules and structures to facilitate language learning (Batstone, 1994). For example, the Grammar Translation Method involved the study of grammatical rules through the means of practice and translation into or from the native language by heavily focusing on written language. The Audio-Lingual Method, on the other hand, prioritized the attainment of oral

language skills. A typical Audio-Lingual lesson involved a conversational dialogue, followed by memorization and practice of certain grammatical forms, phrases and key words. Based on the Structural-Situational framework, a typical lesson often followed Presentation-Practice- Production (PPP) sequence (Richards, 2006). The target grammatical structure(s) were introduced in the presentation stage, followed by the practice stage in which students were encouraged to practice the target grammatical items with the use of written or spoken exercises. In the production stage, students were expected to use the target form in different contexts.

Grammar-based approaches were claimed to be insufficient in increasing learner's communicative skills (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Recognizing the functional aspects of language, the Communicative Approach has emerged. The Communicative Approach opposed the study of language that focused on grammatical structures through context-free pattern drills, memorization and repetition (see Richards, 2006). It was argued that language was a medium of communication and more than grammar structures. Therefore, language teaching should also focus on "communicative competence" (Hymes, 1972), not only to know the form but also to be able to produce it in appropriate circumstances. For that reason, it was proposed that the language should be taught in a meaning-based context in which form was considered a second priority (Celce-Murcia, 1991).

With the advent of Communicative Language Teaching, the goal of teaching was shifted from building on knowledge and skills of grammatical competence to communicative competence. However, the Communicative Language Teaching was divided into two different categories based on the degree of attention to grammar: strong and weak. The main concern of the strong version was to develop learner's communicative and comprehension skills, which manifested in various language instruction models such as content based or task based. The weak version; however, implied the development of communicative competence without the exclusion of grammatical competence. Despite the distinction between strong and weak communicative language teaching, the emphasis was on facilitating communicative language skills, rather than the knowledge of language form.

The Communicative Language Teaching models helped in learner's communicative abilities, comprehension skills and, vocabulary knowledge; however, learner's still experienced difficulties in grammatical accuracy in their oral and written language use. Therefore, language-teaching professionals proposed that there should be a balance between attention to form and meaning. It was claimed that learner's benefited from explicit attention to form within a meaningful context in terms of acquisition and accuracy (Long, 1991). The approach that proposed a language instruction that purposefully drew learner's attention to language forms within a meaningful context was called Form-Focused Instruction (FFI).

Form-Focused Instruction involved "any pedagogical effort which is used to draw the learners' attention to form either implicitly or explicitly … within meaning-based approaches to L2 instruction [and] in which a focus on language is provided in either spontaneous or predetermined ways" (Spada, 2011, p. 226). The definition of FFI varied in literature, for example Long (1991) categorized FFI as focus-on-forms (fonfS) and focus-on-form (fonf). The former involved the teaching of language forms in isolation, whereas the latter indicated "attention to linguistic elements as they arise[d] incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus [was] on meaning or communication" (Ellis, 2001, p. 45-46). Spada and Lightbown (2008) categorized FFI as Integrated FFI and Isolated FFI. Integrated FFI, similar to focus-on-form, entailed the study of language forms within a meaningful, communicative context. Isolated FFI; however, was used to define the explicit teaching of a language form either before or after an activity to foster or complement student understanding. Despite the differences in the description of FFI, they all shared a common theme: attention to language form within a communicative, meaning-based context.

Recent schools of thought related to grammar teaching still differ in their views when it comes to their preference. Some prioritize teaching grammar within meaningful communicative contexts (focus-on-form) (Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen, 2002, 2006; Long, 1991) while others insist on the benefit of teaching grammar in discreet items in which the focus is on the language form (focus-on-forms) (Sheen, 2003, 2005). There have been many empirical studies regarding different considerations in teaching grammar; however, none of the studies are in consensus

with the benefit of a single approach (Ellis, 2006; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). In fact, the majority argued for the use of an approach that would best fit the surrounding circumstances (Ellis, 2006; Ellis et. al., 2006). Essentially, it was confirmed that teachers are the sole agents that could make the best decision among the proposed grammar teaching options based on their teaching environment and experience.

Investigators who have looked at the practices of language teachers brought forward the impact of teacher thinking, teacher knowledge base, and their classroom context on their choices of grammar teaching options (see Borg, 2006; Freeman, 2002; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000). It has been recognized that language teachers rely on several different factors such as student expectation, student proficiency levels, and/or curriculum requirements in their decision-making regarding grammar teaching (Budak, 2009). Within the research regarding teacher practices and teacher thinking, much insight has been provided related to university and private institution settings (Basturkmen, Loewen & Ellis, 2004; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Phipps & Borg, 2009) compared to primary or secondary school context (Andrews, 2006; Andrews & McNeil, 2005; Farrel & Particia, 2005; Ng & Farrel, 2003). Attention to public school ELL teacher thinking and practice regarding grammar teaching has been minimal. This present study was carried out in an attempt to fill this void. The purpose of this instrumental case study is to explore how grammar is taught by middle school teachers in ELL classrooms. In this stage of the research, the understanding of grammar involves the morphological (structure of the words) and the syntactical (the structure of the sentences) properties of the language (Crystal, 2004). Grammar teaching will be generally defined as:

> Any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it (Ellis, 2006, p. 84).

Therefore, the central question of the present paper is: How is grammar taught by two ELL teachers in a public middle school? The following sub-questions also guided this instrumental case study: How do the ELL

teachers understand grammar? What approaches do they prefer in teaching grammar? What is the rationale behind their choices? How do they understand what their students know about grammar?

Methodology

An instrumental case design is used in this study. Stakes (1995) uses the term "instrumental" when a case is used as a means to understand an issue. Using Stake's (1994) words, "The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else" (p. 237). Since the aim of this research is to explore how grammar is being taught through understanding "the particularities" of the two different secondary ELL teachers, this approach fits best for this particular inquiry. Additionally, the description of a case study involves a "bounded system" (Creswell, 2007). The two ELL teachers in Hill Middle School (pseudonym) in the Midwest U.S during the months of January to March, 2011 set the boundaries of this study.

The sampling strategy used in this study can be defined as purposeful as the intent was to find the persons and the places that would provide information to heighten the understanding of the research question(s) (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, two criteria define the site and the participant selection: access and a middle school in which ELL instruction was being offered.

Data Collection

Qualitative research stresses the place of scientific methods of inquiry in the data collection and the analysis process in a qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007). In consideration with this statement and consistent with a case study design, multiple sources of data were collected for this study (see Table 1 below).

Four observations per teacher (45 minutes per class) were conducted in each teacher's classroom setting during the months of January and March 2011. In addition, audio recording and note taking were employed for the interviews. The classroom observations were initially recorded in fieldnotes later to be typed into the computer no later than forty-eight

hours (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Interviews ranged between 35 to 45 minutes in length and were later transcribed.

Table 1. *Types of Information and Sources*

Information Source	Kerry and Erin (Pseudonyms)
Interviews	Two interviews with each teacher (ranged between 35 to 45 minutes)
Observations	Four visits per teacher (45 minutes per class)
Documents	Plans, district rubrics, worksheets, activities, curriculum
Audio-Visual Materials	Digital recordings of the interviews, photos related to the activities
Emails	Related to all kinds of information exchanges
Informal Chats	Before and after the observations

Data Analysis

MAXQDA 10 software was used to analyze the data. A case study template (Creswell, 2007) was adapted by assigning codes in the code system in MAXQDA 10. To be more specific, after uploading the data into the MAXQDA 10, recurring codes were identified for each case context and description. During the analysis, the recurring codes were aggregated under themes within each case, which was followed by a thematic analysis across the two cases, called cross-case analysis. In-vivo codes and themes (terms used by the participants) were written in italics throughout this paper. Pseudonyms were assigned to give anonymity to the participant teachers and the school.

Following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, permissions from the district office, the principal, and the teachers were obtained concurrently. As a need to validate accuracy and representation of the findings, member checking was used (Stake, 1995). Seeking for clarity in reporting the findings also served as an additional validity (Nunan,

1992). For further verification, the 20-point checklist prepared by Stake (1995) was used as a referral.

Findings

Context

In the school district of this study, the ELL program, which was under the umbrella of Federal Programs, was cross-graded and organized by levels (see Table 2 below). Students identified as ELL according to their measured English language proficiency scores received pull-out ELL classes. In every nine weeks, students that showed improvement in their language proficiency were advanced to the next proficiency level. Typically, students spent four quarters in each level, yet the frame was still variable. The district provided teachers rubric checklists with specific skills that were expected for each proficiency level for each language domain- speaking, listening, writing and reading. Grammar was embedded within these domains.

Table 2. *English Language Proficiency Levels*

Language Level	Description
Entry	Students with Interrupted Formal Education
1	Pre-functional
2	Beginning
3	Intermediate
4	Advanced
5	Full English Proficiency

(K-12 Guidelines for English Language Learners, 2011)

The participant teachers indicated that they used rubric checklists *as a guide* for the *specific language skills* they needed to focus on in their teachings and *as a source for planning* their units. The previous year, after extended committee meetings, the teachers formulized the curricu-

lum for level 1 in themes by focusing on vocabulary, reading, writing science and writing social studies. For the other levels, the teachers stated that the teachers took general education curriculum as a basis. Each year, by using series of books on different topics, the teachers divide the topics among themselves. Each teacher was free to choose the directions they wished to go; yet, still needed to focus on *teaching to the skills* that were *outlined in the curriculum*.

The use of *district expectation* or insinuations for the district expectation was frequent in teachers' utterances such as, "…what the district requires of us…; I need to meet those requirements that the district gives;…regardless of how they [students] are doing I will do a lesson on that because I know that it is part of the district expectation." While the pressure of district expectation was perceived as the primary driving force by the teachers in their teaching of grammar, several other factors also shaped the teachers' grammar teaching objectives and manner, which will be explored within the case profiles.

Case Profiles

Site: Hill Middle School

Hill Middle School was one of the two public middle schools in which ELL program was being offered in a midsized city in the Midwestern U.S. As of official 2010 Fall Membership Count provided by the city district, out of total 809 students enrolled at this school, 50% came from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. At the time of the study, 18 % of the student population represented ELL. The countries the students came from included Mexico, Guatemala, Bosnia, Sudan (Sudan includes South Sudan because the study was conducted prior to its independence), South Korea, Burma, Thailand, American Samoa, and Iran. The school operated on a total of seven periods: four periods in the morning, lunch, and three periods in the afternoon.

Table 3. *Demographics*

Names	Kerry	Erin
ELL Teaching Year	13	10
Initial Degree	English	Social Sciences
Levels being taught	1 , 2, 3	2, 3

Case One: Kerry

Kerry was a monolingual, native speaker. Kerry had the intention of becoming a high school English teacher at first, but after serving as a para-professional for a year in the ELL department at a high school, she got a job at a middle school while completing her ELL endorsement. She has been teaching for thirteen years. At that time it was possible to teach before the completion of the endorsement program, but it was not being accepted at present (see Reeves, 2010, for an overview of ELL certification programs). She was teaching proficiency levels 1, 2 and 3.

Grammar, she thought, was basically *using the language in its most proper form* and use of *correct grammar* was beneficial in every aspect of one's life such as job searching, school, and interactions with other people. Her approach to grammar teaching mostly revolved around explicitness based on *student factors* by which she meant student's proficiency level. She preferred addressing only the grammar features that the students were supposed to know according to the present and past lesson objectives. She was attuned to the student proficiency level expectations and reinforced this to her students at appropriate times.

Kerry was aware of the grammar errors that were specific to the ELLs and to the mainstream speakers. She would speak to that point when needed. She was also aware of the negative effects of first language (L1) influence on her students' English language use, which is further addressed within the themes below. Language learners use their knowledge of native language as an aid in their target language learning, which is also known as language transfer. Language transfer refers to "the [lan-

guage learner's] use of previous linguistic or prior skills to assist [their] comprehension or production" (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p.120). This suggests that language learners either consciously or unconsciously apply their knowledge of native language to the target language to facilitate their learning. In addition, the transfer can be positive or negative to the learning of target language. It was claimed that the high degree of similarity of the two languages enabled more positive transfer (Karim, 2003).

Kerry's main concern as an ELL teacher related to grammar was how to get those students, who had been making the same mistakes continuously, to use the correct form. She was struggling to find what she was missing when her students were not making the target form a *natural part of them*. "It drives me crazy", she said and wished for a switch she could have turned on in those occasions.

Case One: Themes

Theme One: *"What Dictates How I Teach"*

District rubric checklists and *the student level* of proficiency were the two essential factors that shaped Kerry's choice of topics and teaching strategy. Initially, all ELL teachers decided and chose the topics and resources they would prefer using at the group meeting. Then, they each planned their units by taking the district guidelines as a foundation. If the district required Kerry to teach certain grammar points, she would teach it without considering the students' background knowledge. For example, the district rubric checklist and the ELL guidelines for Level 2 students required ELL teachers to teach how to "use the present simple tense". Kerry, in an attempt to address this requirement, prepared a worksheet addressing the main points about the technical use of the present tense, even if the students might have the knowledge of use and function of the simple present tense.

Yet, Kerry pointed out the *student reality* as her core factor in choosing what to focus as a grammar point. *Student reality* was basically the level of student understanding. According to Kerry, student understanding is revealed better in their written works and writing prompts. By looking at the frequent common errors, Kerry would prepare work-

sheets composed of students' own sentences. Then, she would carry out mini-lessons in a suitable time during a lesson period. The example of the use of *have/has* below shows this point. After reading Level 1 student assignments, Kerry realized that the students were still confused as to when to use *have and has* in their sentences. She prepared a worksheet showing the differences between the two verbs:

Has ⟶ he, she, it, 1 person, place or thing
Have ⟶ I, you, we, they, 2 or more

She also prepared a small worksheet that included the students' own incorrect sentences from their homework to pull their attention to their mistakes such as:

1. Mrs. Benzer and Mrs. Tan (has)? two cats.
2. My friend (have)? two brothers.

Kerry believed in the importance of using students' own sentences to point out the differences in the usage of a grammar point. She thought that students would learn more effectively from their own mistakes.

Theme Two: *"Grammar in the Context of What We Have Been Doing"*

In addition to the elements above that have been shaping Kerry's use of methods in addressing the grammar items in her practice, the second theme that emerged was how Kerry combined the targeted grammar features in broader contexts. Kerry supported teaching grammar in combination with the content that they were studying at that moment rather than in meaningless structural chunks. For example, one of the topics of the unit "The Continents" was "Asia". The Level 1 district curriculum said:

> Students will learn about the world as a whole by studying the individual continents (land/climate, weather, people, animals/plants, natural resources.)

One of the language objectives the district curriculum asked the teachers to teach was, "Students will use comparative and superlative

expressions." Therefore, she combined this objective with the content she already planned.

Kerry used the continents –Africa, Asia and South America- and the animals that were indigenous to these continents such as tiger, hippo, and panda that they had studied as part of the content objectives. She also used the adjective *big* to cover the comparative and superlative forms of adjective as a grammar target because she thought " *big* [was] a simple adjective that all the students knew and understood in English". She brought stuffed animal toys that ranged in size, panda was the smallest animal and rhino was the biggest (see Figure 1). She also had the worksheet at hand with the pictures of those animals included. The students were asked to form their sentences using the comparative and superlative forms:

> The panda ......(is smaller than)....the tiger.
> The rhino ....(is the biggest)....toy animal.

With this additional worksheet, Kerry targeted to complement her students' comprehension of the form and function of comparative and superlative adjectives.

Figure 1. *Stuffed Toy Animals*

Kerry provided students an additional assignment with the adjective "tall" and the students themselves participated in the exercise. She asked the students to line up and mark their height at the board. Afterwards, the students were asked to form their sentences by comparing their heights. Her explanation for this activity was that the adjective was simple and the idea was very concrete when the students were able to line up and clearly see who was taller than whom and who was the tallest.

Kerry's mindset for the activities above shows that she was not only interested in addressing the formal requirements of the rubric, but also weaving them within her students' appropriate proficiency level as she perceived it. The district curriculum required Kerry to teach the comparative and superlative adjectives. Kerry believed that she should address these grammatical structures within a meaningful context to facilitate student understanding. On the other hand, her students' identified language proficiency level was Level 1, which indicated that their knowledge of English language was limited. Ultimately, all of the above factors- the curriculum requirement, the student proficiency level and Kerry's belief in context-embedded grammar teaching- shaped Kerry's mode of instruction.

Theme Three: *Use of Instructional Options during Grammar Teaching*

The third theme that emerged was the set of actions that Kerry carried out during her lessons. Two different instructional approaches dominated her method of teaching grammar. The majority of her strategies consisted of Initiation, Response and Evaluation (IRE) patterns and explicit instruction.

IRE pattern

In Kerry's room, the classroom talk usually consisted of teacher initiation (I), student response (R) and teacher evaluation (E) especially during mini grammar episodes. Below is a small segment of the kind of interaction during which they discussed the animals on the worksheet:

T: This is ?…Sts: Panda.	I, R
T: We call it baby Panda. While we were studying Africa, we talked about lion, but what animal is this?	E,I
St 1: Jaguar	R
T: Tiger. We haven't talked about it, but they live in Asia.	R,E
T: What is this animal?	I
St 1: Hippopotamus	R
St 2: Dinosaur	R
T: Rhinoceros. Raise your hand to tell me which animal is the biggest?	R,I
Hang ? Is it the panda or the tiger or the rhino?	I
St 3: Rhino is the biggest animal.	R
T: Here is the panda, here is the tiger. Which one is bigger?	I
St 3: Tiger.	R
T: Can you put it in a sentence?	I
St 3: Tiger is bigger than the baby panda.	R

As can be seen, the interaction between the students and the teacher was limited. However, Kerry tried to encourage her students to talk by constantly asking questions in an attempt to direct them toward her set goals. Her goals were helping her students go beyond one-word answers and using the targeted structure in full sentences. In addition, she tried to include as many students as possible by addressing more than one student within this model of interaction and pushing the students until they came up with an acceptable answer.

Explicit Instruction

Within this IRE sequence, the use of an explicit teaching approach was Kerry's primary preference. This approach consisted of explicit instruction by means of description, explanation, comparison and contrast. Providing feedback on errors was also among her options. For example, in one of the Level 1lessons the objective was the use of *have/has* within

the unit "The Continents". The small segment of this lesson below clearly depicts the elements of explicit approach:

> T: Do you remember yesterday when you wrote three sentences about Africa? And you   all wrote good examples with little problem.
> Sentence is: Africa <u>have</u> more than 50 countries.
> T: Almost perfect. Who knows what the problem is in this sentence?
> St: Have
> T: Can you tell me the difference? You have to decide when to use have/has.
> (She turned the projector on)
> T: Use have with "you, they, we" use has with "he, she, it.
> T: How many is 'they'? Use have when you have more than one person, place or thing. Eg. Africa and Asia <u>have</u> two deserts. Why have?
> Use has for one person, place or a thing. Eg; Asia has a very big desert. Why has?
> Practice it because many of you want to say have. First, you see, why and when do we say have/has? Practice.
> T: Why is it "Asia has"? Before you say, remember, Africa and Asia have. Now Africa is just one. Asia and Africa ...two...have.
> Use *have* when you are talking about more than one place. You see...why and when we use have and has.

This particular classroom interaction shows that Kerry preferred providing strategies to find and use the correct form by comparing the differences between the uses of *have* and *has*. She was frequently reminding students of the form and rationale to increase student understanding. However, Kerry was aware that the explicit strategies did not work at all times and that created concern for her. She was struggling to find what she was missing when her students were not making the target form a "natural part of them".

One example of this is the use of "ain't". As a result of one of the Level 2 student's constant use of "ain't" she asked the student to use "am not" instead. Immediately, she explained that even if native speakers

were using "ain't" it was not **S**tandard English. She also thought that many of the student mistakes were the result of the negative effects of first language influence on her students' English language use. Her only way to overcome this problem was to ask the students to practice often to achieve correct "muscle memory", such as in the misuse of the third person singular verb ending –s. She said that "as a rule any Asian speaker struggled with the –s" and that "there was something in their language that did not transfer" positively into English language. For that reason, constant practice might help in achieving the use of –s. In these situations, she was asking her students to practice the correct form in front of a mirror at least a hundred times until the correct form became a habit, " a natural part of them".

Case Two: Erin

Erin was also a monolingual, native speaker. Erin's initial degree was in social science. She described her present situation as "accidental**.**" During her training to be a social science teacher, she had the opportunity to complete her K-12 ELL endorsement courses through the university grant. She admitted that she was lured by the idea of no cost when she first took the classes, but she later found out that she loved teaching ELL and ever since then she has been teaching in the ELL department. This year was her tenth year**,** all at the same Hill Middle School. During the time this study was conducted she was teaching Levels 2 and 3.

Erin believed that grammar was important for oral and writing skills. Having not taken any courses related to grammar teaching, her pedagogical knowledge mostly grew from observing an ELL teacher during her formal teacher-training year. Contrary to her personal experience with grammar learning by means of out-of-context excessive drilling exercises, she preferred *a holistic view,* which she learned and liked during her teacher-learning observations.

Rather than as a whole lesson, she preferred addressing target grammar points as a *warm-up* in the first ten to fifteen minutes in each lesson period. The routine involved working as individuals first, followed by working as a whole class. The book she was following consisted of exercises such as finding mistakes, using the correct forms or editing. The

repetitive feature of this book reflected Erin's belief in repetitive practice that occurred with a lapse of time was effective in learning.

Erin's initial tension was to have to look up different sources for "little picky details in grammar". She described herself as having a basic foundation, yet she needed to learn grammar on her own, as she did not have a concrete background during her college and teacher learning years.

Case Two: Themes

Theme One: *Grammar as Warm-ups and Grammar as District Objectives*

The district objectives and a daily review book marked Erin's methods related to grammar teaching. Initially, she preferred using a review book heavily focused on different language skills on a daily basis at the beginning of each lesson. The target grammar feature depended on the book itself as Erin followed the book orderly. Second, if the unit and the story they were reading required her to teach certain grammar features, she would plan it as mini-lessons. Sometimes the review practice in the warm-up sessions would link to the story they were reading by chance. At these moments, she would heavily stress the connections between reading and the grammar practice. During an interview, she defined her approach as *holistic*, by which she meant addressing the target grammar points within a meaningful context. However, her use of a practice book did not necessarily reflect her statement as the book taught grammar that was not tied to genuine and meaningful contexts.

Theme Two: Instructional Approaches

Apart from the above factors that shaped Erin's grammar lesson objectives, as a second theme two primary approaches dominated Erin's practice related to grammar teaching, IRE (Initiation, Response, Evaluation) sequence and explicit instruction, which are detailed below.

IRE Pattern

IRE was the dominant class talk during warm-up exercises. The snippet of Erin's teaching episode below is an example of this pattern. In this particular lesson segment, the students were working on the sentence: his car breaked down on peek road so we call a toe truck. And the classroom talk went like:

> St: Capitalize the "h"
>
> R
>
> E: capitalize the "he"
>
> E
>
> St: car brokez
>
> R
>
> E: How would you spell it?
>
> I/?

As seen above, the interaction mostly went between the teacher and the student and the primary focus was on the structure of the language and making appropriate corrections. In addition, the coding shows that Erin used her initiations mostly in the form of questions and her last evaluation marked the closing of the interaction in the form of a detailed explanation. In fact, the use of question forms was dominant in Erin's strategy to attract student attention to the focus point. Erin preferred using "good" and "excellent" frequently as reinforcements as well.

Explicit Instruction

Within the theme instructional approaches, a second subtheme emerged as the use of explicitness. Specifically, during story related activities and the warm-ups Erin preferred talking about the language by analyzing and describing. *Whys* were frequent in her grammar related in-

quiries. Usually short, but detailed explanations followed the inquiry. The use of terminology often occurred in her instructions and questions. Consider the following example that was related to a sentence correction during a warm-up session.

Sentence: our class study the graph to find information about americas favorite pet.

Student: Capitalized "O", capitalized "A" -America's – and apostrophe.

> Erin: Why do you need the apostrophe?
> St & E: It belongs to the people in America
> St went on: –favorite pet –period-.
> E: So, we've got to make sure that our subject and our verb agrees. Ok. So, class is a singular subject, there is only one class. Even though there is many people in the class, it's just one class. Same with family. So, you have the make sure the verb and the subject in a sentence agrees in the present tense. And then we have a proper noun. America. It's also a possessive noun needing the apostrophe 's'.

As can be seen, the analysis of the language includes the use of terminology and metalinguistic information in Erin's instruction. Erin believed that the students needed to know the correct labels of the grammatical features that they were studying.

A similar format was evident within story reading episodes as well. Erin would remind the students of the previously studied grammar point(s) at every possible opportunity to help them make the connection between the form and the usage in the immediate text, such as during the story Johnny Appleseed. Following the reading assignment *Johnny Appleseed*, the students were asked to study the elements of the story: the characters, setting, time period, and the type. When they were talking about the time period, which took place during "the westward movement" (1750s-1980s), Erin felt the necessity of providing additional information regarding the simple past tense:

> E: …the story took place a couple of hundred years ago. What tense should you be using? You should be using past tense to write the events: "adding –ed or irregular verbs".

Another example that shows the characteristics of Erin's techniques is related to the study of the story about Mr. President and the cherry tree. In connection to this story, the students were assigned to respond to the question: If you were given the chance to be the president of the United States, what would you do? After writing the sentence on the board, Erin stressed that either "I would" or "I would not" should follow the sentence, "If I were given the chance to be the president of the United States". She continued as:

> A lot of sentences grammatically should say things like I would want the job because I would be best person in charge; I would make many changes; I would like to make some laws……OK….A lot of sentences should start with I would because of the way the question is asked to you. You need to be looking through your papers …if you got things in the correct grammar that says I would want to do these things. So look through your papers and see if you want to make any changes.
> How does it needed to be worded. I would.

Erin was describing the rule without using the metalinguistic terms here, and she was encouraging her students to apply the correct usage. She did not need to go into details about the conditional sentences, and/or its semantic meaning. Erin found it adequate to address the grammatical form at hand according to her perceived student level and understanding. In addition, the small classroom episodes discussed above show that Erin was true to her words when she said, "I use different approaches. Some benefit from segregated pulled out pieces, others from holistic". These words indicate Erin's deliberate consideration of differing student needs and how she orchestrated her instruction in an attempt to address her various student needs. As explored above, Erin addressed grammar in explicit ways as she considered many of her students would understand grammar if studied in isolation. In addition, she combined the previously studied grammar points within a target reading,

as she believed that many of her students would benefit from attention to grammar within a meaningful context.

Cross-Case Theme Analysis

Kerry and Erin both believed in the importance of grammar knowledge in students, yet they stated that they were against teaching grammar "as an end in itself" (Celce-Murcia, 1991, p. 467). Kerry favored addressing grammar features as a continuation or part of the immediate content. Her preference of teaching grammar as a part of the content under study showed itself in her teachings. Her grammar teaching approach mirrored her advocacy for teaching grammar within a meaningful context (Long, 1991; Spada & Lightbown, 2008).

Erin's approach in the *warm-up* practices did not really tie the target grammar features to the content or unit that was under study. In this sense, her approach reflected her belief of the effectiveness of grammar teaching in isolation, not connecting the target grammar item with a meaningful context. However, for story readings she either taught certain grammar points as a preparation for the coming unit or addressed the target grammar features during the study of a story. These techniques showed that she supported teaching form and function relationship in connection with a meaningful context.

Student proficiency levels played a huge role in both teachers' plans. For example, by looking at her students' writings, Kerry designed activities or handouts directly related to the common student errors in combination with the content as a mini-lesson. On the other hand, even if Erin said that she valued her students' understanding level in constructing her daily plans, it was not as evident in her daily teaching activities. These two teachers' preparation of a lesson plan related to a grammar feature based on the demand of the district curriculum was similar to their mini-lessons. They targeted teaching the form and function of a grammatical feature that was required in the district rubrics to enhance student uptake before the introduction of the essential content unit assigned in the curriculum.

Both teachers demonstrated different use of teaching options in their instructions during teaching such as explicit feedback on error (Long,

2007), description and explanation of the rules. They both tried to pull their students' attention to the errors they made and explained *how and why* the errors should be corrected according to the rules. However, providing feedback on errors occurred more frequently in Kerry's strategies than Erin's.

One of the major differences between the two teachers was the use of terminology. While addressing grammatical features, Erin was more inclined to use the linguistic terminology during instruction. This reflected her belief that the students needed to know the proper names of the grammar points that they were learning. Last of all, even if there were differences between the two teachers' ways of addressing grammar in their daily practice, both teachers seemed to have developed their own personal theory of grammar teaching and recognized the different options to use depending on the circumstances surrounding them.

Conclusion

The two cases presented here show teachers' understanding of grammar and the exterior factors that shaped their grammar-teaching options. The other conclusion that emerged here relates to the teachers' opinions about language teacher education and ELL endorsement programs.

Teachers' beliefs regarding the place of grammar in language teaching highly impact their teaching styles. This finding is consistent with the results of previous related studies conducted in various contexts (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Borg, 2003, 2005; Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001). It appears that when teachers in this case study planned on grammar related lessons and activities, they not only consider their students' level of proficiency as they perceived it, but also aim to cover the requirements of the district rubrics by aligning these requirements according to their students' level of proficiency. With these considerations in mind, these participant teachers prefer connecting the target grammar items either to the previous activity, and/or content or the future content to be studied.

Teachers in the current study prefer using an intensive and explicit grammar-teaching model as a mini-lesson with two conditions. These conditions involve either the district rubrics requirements or the gap in

student knowledge and/or proficiency level as perceived by the teachers. These teachers mostly detected their students' grammar gaps through their students' own writings. By looking at common student mistakes or errors, these teachers prepare extra worksheets that focus on the correct uses of the frequently made written mistakes in an attempt to increase their students' conscious awareness. Within these mini-lessons, teachers' explicit instructions consist of describing, explaining and comparing the structure(s) that they focus on or providing metalinguistic explanations (see Ellis, 2006). In addition, while addressing grammar, either in isolation or in combination with the target content, teachers in this study utilized techniques of feedback on errors, as they believe it is one of the effective ways of pulling students' attention to the target grammar items.

This study also shows the differences between both teachers' choice of options regarding grammar, depending on their teacher learning background and beliefs. Kerry's English language education background seems to afford her to weave the target grammar pieces with the content unit that is under study. One reason for this inclination may be related to her strong knowledge and experience of the English language. In addition, her belief in combining grammar within a meaningful context may also be the factor for her effort to teach it in a genuine way. On the other hand, as Erin confirmed, her educational profile influenced her manner in which the teaching of grammar was much more in isolation- even though she said she preferred to tie the target grammar to the immediate content under study. This finding actually shows the discrepancies between ELL teachers stated beliefs and their actual practice regarding grammar teaching, which is also supported by previous research (Farrel & Particia, 2005; Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001). Teachers may address grammar points in isolation even if they state that they prefer to focus on grammar within a meaningful context (Ellis, 2001). There may be several reasons for this divergence between the teacher beliefs and their practices such as the influence of teachers' educational background, and/or teacher-learning experiences. In this case study, even though Erin's teacher-learner experiences affected the way she would like to teach grammar, she did not necessarily reflect this belief in her practice, as much as she would like to. As she said rather hesitantly, her professional preparation programs did not enable her to develop pedagogically oriented grammar teaching. She added that most of her classes were

tuned to increase theoretical knowledge rather than hands-on activities, which would have developed her sense of pedagogy and practice.

Another key point to emerge here is that the findings of this study have a clear implication for teacher educators and ELL endorsement programs. Exploring these teacher practices and the reasons behind their choices of options regarding grammar teaching provided a window to teacher educators as to what to consider for constructing the language teacher education classes. Language teachers in this study explicitly stated their desire for a class that includes grammar teaching pedagogy, which also offers ways to connect grammar with the requirements of the rubrics or curriculum that they are asked to follow. Specifically, Erin conveyed that the language teacher programs fail to adequately prepare them with a thorough understanding of grammar and usage. In addition, this lack of understanding goes beyond leaving teachers without the skills to teach particular conventions. Learning English grammar should not be about "breaking bad habits" as Kerry said. A course in grammar and usage might help ELL teachers understand that language is an evolving social practice and that there is no one proper form of Standard English, but instead a myriad of forms, variations, and dialects. I am not suggesting that ELL teachers should not teach grammar as part of their instruction; however, it would be useful for teachers to help students understand that the variations of English are not "wrong" while standard English is "correct," but instead that Standard American English within the context of the United States is one of many useful variations – and one that will certainly grant them important kinds of access in their experiences in schooling and beyond.

As a final point, the teachers in this study represent a small sample of public middle school ELL teacher population and thus it would be wrong to encapsulate all of the middle school ELL teachers within the findings of this study. As Stake (1995) says, this instrumental case study is all about "particularization" rather than "generalization". Nonetheless, this multiple case study contributes to the existing literature as the particularities of these two ELL teachers provide insight to all language teaching professionals and teacher educators regarding the factors that impact in-service ELL teachers' thinking and practice in public school setting. Such insight holds particular importance for teacher educators who need to

better understand how in-service teachers think about and teach grammar in order to guide and develop such thinking into their practice.

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