



Teaching Grammar to EFL students: A combinatory *task-based* and *focus on form* approach

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Abstract

This TFG proposes a combinatory approach of *task-based* and *focus on form* methodologies for the teaching of grammar to EFL learners. Acknowledging the controversy around it in the field (mainly due to views on the definition of language), I provide an account of the different approaches and methodologies grammar instruction has, and still does, received. These will generally either emphasise attention to language form, to the communicative use of the language and/or a balance between both. Following current SLA (Second Language Acquisition) and TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) scholars' views on them and on the foreign language (FL) learning process, this TFG argues for their balance through a combination of *focus on form* and *task-based* methodologies. Therefore, explicit attention and instruction of grammatical structures in a meaningful communicative context is pursued. Finally, a lesson following this combined approach is proposed.

Keywords: *task-based*, *focus on form*, grammar teaching, EFL learners

1. Introduction

In this TFG I will explore the teaching of grammar in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. Traditionally, grammar has been taught in foreign language (FL) classes throughout the world. However, it has continuously been a controversial issue due to the contrasting views on language: either as a system of linguistic structures or as a tool for communication. This has inevitably shaped EFL teaching methodologies (Bascón and Calle, 2011; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2011; among others). Following current EFL reasoning, I consider language to integrate both perspectives (see Fotos, 2001, 2005; Pachler and Field, 2001; Savignon, 2005).

My aims in this TFG are, first of all, to explore the attitudes grammar has historically received and the ones it receives today in the EFL context. Secondly, to argue for a combinatory approach of *focus on form* (FonF) and *task-based language teaching* (TBLT) as a possible balance between communicative and focus on form needs when teaching FL grammar. Thirdly, propose a didactic unit following this proposal. Hence, in doing so, I will try to answer the following questions:

- a) Should we teach grammar to EFL learners? And, if so, how?
- b) Can grammar be integrated into a communicative approach to language teaching?

c) Can a combination of *task-based* and *focus on form* methodologies offer a balance between attention to form and attention to meaning? Is it suitable for EFL learners?

In order to answer these questions, I will first of all provide a literature review of the teaching of grammar to FL learners. Firstly, I am going to argue about different notions of language and of grammar, since they necessarily affect how they are taught. After that, I will outline a current perspective of the FL learning process together with related pedagogical concerns. Thirdly, I am going to present both historical and more recent approaches and methodologies for the teaching of grammar in the EFL context. Then, I will argue in favour of a communicative approach for the overt teaching of FL grammatical forms. For this, I suggest the combination of *task-based* and *focus on form* approaches. Finally, a lesson plan following this combined proposal will be outlined.

2. Literature review: teaching grammar

Since, as I have introduced, different perspectives on language (hence, of how grammar is regarded) are at the core of our topics' controversy, the first questions we may ask ourselves are precisely what is grammar? How is it understood in the EFL context? And, most importantly, should we teach it?

2.1. Different notions of grammar

The complexity inside the consideration of language has already been briefly introduced. As Larsen-Freeman (2011:156) asserts, our picture of what a language is necessarily affects the way we teach it. In this TFG, the notion of language I will follow is that of a set of linguistic rules and patterns that are, nevertheless, in continuous change due to speakers' use of language in communication. Hence, if it involves linguistic rules that are dynamic and dependent on its communicative function, how do we understand grammar?

The first distinction we may draw is that between internal and external grammars (see Cameron, 2001; Cook, 1991; Ellis, 2006). The latter, on the one hand, are the linguistic systems developed by linguists and language researches about the structures of a language. These include, then, theoretical and pedagogical grammars such as: generative, functional and structural ones. At the same time, they have traditionally been divided into prescriptive grammars (those that aim to establish a standard correct version of the language and reject the rest) and descriptive grammars (they try to

account for the real patterns in the language). Nowadays, there is a generalised disregard of prescriptive grammars (Lorenzo and Moore, 2005:409-411). Internal grammars, on the other hand, refer to learners' linguistic competence. In other words, what each learner actually learns/knows about the grammar of a language (also known as 'interlanguage' (IL) (Cameron, 2001:100)). Any language teacher, then, will aim to enhance their learners' internal grammar development. Nevertheless, how to do it and the usefulness of external grammars for such purpose have given rise to vast debate.

I have stated that teachers pursue the development of their learners' internal grammar. However, in doing so, two difficulties arise: first of all, the fact that language acquisition is neither a linear nor an instant process. Language students often seem to backslide –i.e. errors that were thought to have disappeared from their IL temporarily and/or regularly reappear– (Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Lorenzo and Moore, 2005; Pachler and Field, 2001). Secondly, the distinction between *explicit* (conscious, learnable, controlled, meta-linguistic and able to be verbalised) and *implicit* knowledge (procedural, controlled, rapidly accessible but not able to be verbalised) (Ellis, 2006:95). This is especially relevant to our topic, since it is at the core of the debate between the usefulness of *explicit* vs. *implicit* grammar instruction (see section 2.2).

As we know, language is both linguistic knowledge and communicative competence (i.e. how to appropriately use language in context (Cook, 1991:12)). Grammatical structures are not only form (morphology, phonetics and syntax), they also convey meaning (semantics) in use (pragmatics) (Larsen-Freeman, 2001:252). Ideally, external grammars would reflect all these aspects of the grammar of the language. These, ideally again, would be the description of the internal grammar of native speakers of such language. That is the final internal grammar that we aim our learners to achieve.

To conclude, and resuming the main topic, I will follow these definitions and Ellis's (2006:84) and consider grammar teaching as the use of "any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it meta-linguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it."

2.2. FL learning process and some pedagogic issues related to it

Research in Second and Foreign Language Acquisition is necessarily in close connection with EFL pedagogy. And, as we are going to see, it has been the source of

many methodological shifts in language classrooms. Now I am going to focus on current perspectives on the FL acquisition process. Firstly, I will briefly present some key conditions for language learning to take place. Secondly, I will outline the current view on the FL acquisition process. Thirdly, the value of instructed learning will be debated. Lastly, these will be related to views on *implicit* and *explicit* grammar teaching.

J. Willis (1996:59-60), supported by SLA research findings, presents four basic conditions for learning a language: (a) *Exposure* to rich but comprehensible input; (b) Opportunities for *language use*; (c) *Motivation*; and (d) *Focus on language* – “chances to reflect on language and to try to systemize what they [learners] know” (my parenthesis). These find their rationale (and are essential) in today’s perspective of the FL acquisition process. *Figure 1*, derived from recent scholars’ views (Losky and Bley-Vroman, 1993; Skehan, 2007 and Williams, 2005), sketches the FL grammar learning process:

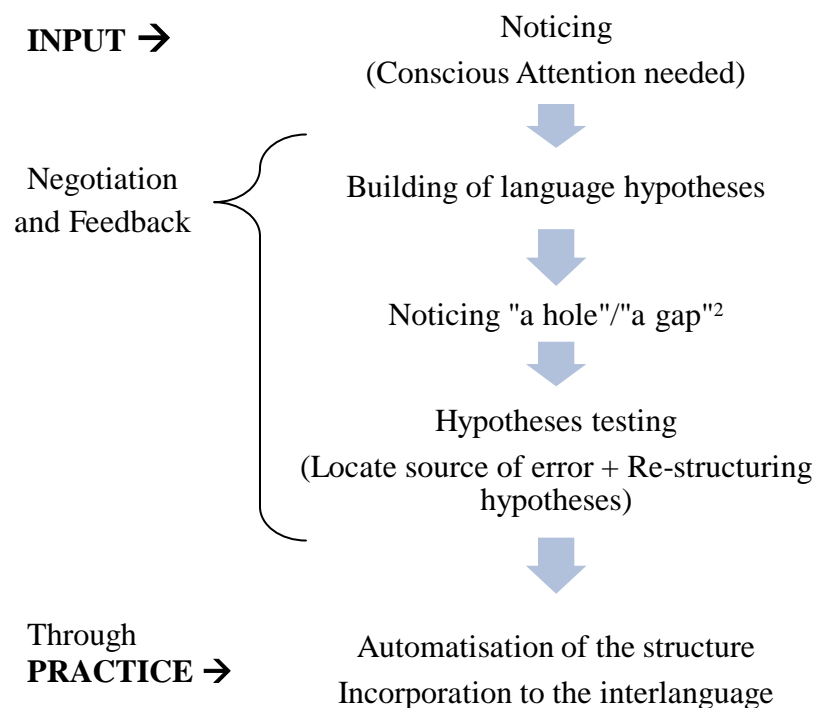


Figure 1: FL Acquisition process
(adapted from Losky and Bley-Vroman, 1993; Skehan, 2007 and Williams, 2005)

¹ Students notice gaps when they become aware that their interlanguage structure is different from the target (i.e. making a mistake). Noticing the hole is students’ lack of the means to express what they want to say (Williams, 2005:682).

We see, then, that Willis's conditions are indeed needed for our students' incorporation of a grammatical feature to their internal grammar. We should note that this learning process applies for the acquisition of a foreign language, which is being considered to take place in an instructional environment. In fact, supporters of a Naturalistic Approach to language learning (language acquisition in everyday communicative contexts where the language is used (Ellis, 2005:713)) would reject it. Some of the methodologies that will be presented in the next section will emphasise this view. Nevertheless, I consider instruction to be essential in TEFL following Ellis, 2006; Fotos, 2001, 2005; Hinkel and Fotos, 2002; Pachler and Field, 2001.

Finally, even when instruction is regarded as beneficial for the foreign language learner a debate between two perspectives remains. How to teach (in our case grammatical forms) *implicitly* or *explicitly*? The latter involves "deliberately draw[ing] students' attention to the target structure" (Bascón and Calle, 2011:141) and "to exploit pedagogical grammar in this regard" (Doughty and Williams, 1998:232). The former, on the contrary, would aim to attract the learner's attention to a structure without interruption of the communication of meaning (usually done through the use of a class activity, whose goals differ (at least on the surface) from the study of such a structure) (see Doughty and Williams, 1998:230 for a concise recompilation of their characteristics). Therefore, these pedagogical approaches are again a reflection of the FL acquisition dichotomy: *Implicit*, "natural", unconscious, focus on communicative language use vs. *explicit*, conscious, needing overt attention and effort, focus on grammatical form.

Both instructional options have advantages and disadvantages that the EFL teacher should observe (Bascón and Calle, 2011). One of the most important ones being learners' perspectives on grammar instruction, especially since many (typically adults) do expect and ask for explicit teaching of form (Cameron, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2001). Nevertheless, the important factor here is that they both share the currently accepted claim of grammar instruction being beneficial in the EFL classroom. In this TFG, I argue for the usefulness of explicit grammar instruction presented in relation to a meaningful communicative perspective (Cameron, 2001; Doughty and Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2005; Fotos, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Nassaji and Fotos, 2007; Nunan, 1989; Savignon, 2005; Skehan, 1996).

2.3. Multiplicity of approaches, methodologies and techniques to TEFL and its grammar

I have already stated that the teaching of linguistic rules as bound up with language use has not always been the general belief among EFL scholars. The perspectives on language and its acquisition, as presented above, direct teachers' and researchers' support for one or other TEFL approach. This has resulted in a "pendulum" movement going from one or the other end of the communicative continuum. Or, more recently, to a balance between both (Cameron, 2001; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Dörnyei, 2009; Ellis, 2005, 2006; Fotos, 2005; Harmer, 2007; Pachler and Field, 2001; Savignon, 2005). However, the reader might be foretold of the undeniable reality in TEFL that "there may be no single best approach [nor method or set of techniques] to grammar teaching that would apply in all situations to the diverse types of learners a teacher can encounter" (Hinkel and Fotos, 2002:1, my parenthesis).

The following sections will be an outline of the main historical and more recent approaches and methodologies in the TEFL field. My aim in presenting them is double: on the one hand, to inform the reader and make him/her aware of the different possibilities when teaching, in this case grammar, to foreign learners. And, on the other hand, although I may not explicitly indicate them, make him/her able to derive the source of FL classroom attitudes and decisions towards dichotomies such as: *accuracy vs. fluency*; *explicit vs. implicit* teaching; *focus on form vs. focus on form²*; etc. (see Bascón and Calle, 2011; Byrd, 2005; Cook, 1991; Dörnyei, 2009; Ellis, 2005, 2006; Harmer, 2007; Lorenzo and Moore, 2005, among others).

2.3.1. Historical account of approaches to L2/FL grammar teaching

If the field of L2 pedagogy is to be characterised in one word, it is fluctuation. In fact, there seems not to be a clear-cut distinction between approaches/methodological proposals many times. That is why I would like to clarify the reader with the terminology that I will follow first. From broadest to narrowest: An *approach* "reflects (...) a certain theory"; secondly, a *method* is "a set of procedures" that can be compatible with several approaches and a *technique* is "a classroom device or activity" (Celce-Murcia, 2001:5-6). Having this in mind, I present below, primarily following Celce-Murcia's (2001:3-11), Hinkel and Fotos' (2002:1-12) and Tejada et. al.'s (2005:159-

² Go to sections 2.3.2. and 3.1. for *focus on form vs. focus on formS* explanations.

209) overviews, the 9 main approaches that language learning and teaching has (and still does) received.³

- A) Grammar-Translation Method:** Traditional approach to FL teaching based on grammatical analysis and translation (from or into the target language) of, usually, written texts. Instruction is given in the students' mother tongue and language learning is considered to take place after memorisation of grammatical rules and vocabulary. Hence, there is little (if any) communicative use of the target language. This method dates back as far as the Greek and Roman periods, it has generally been followed until recently (18th-19th c.) and it is still used in some countries in EFL classrooms. However, many current scholars severely criticise its means and its lack of communicative effectiveness.
- B) The Direct Method:** A 19th-20th c. reaction to the Grammar Translation Method, which emphasised students' ability to use rather than analyse language. Its main features could be summarised as: Use of the target language only in the classroom; everyday conversational kind of language; use of inductive techniques to learn grammatical rules and the target culture; and native or native-like proficiency teachers. The Reform Movement and the development of the International Phonetic Association at the time emphasised this focus on oral skills and pronunciation teaching.
- C) The Reading Method:** It arose in late 1930s-40s U.S. due to lack of native speakers of the language. Centred on reading comprehension, basic grammar and controlled vocabulary within texts was taught. Hence, the teacher did not necessarily have native-like oral proficiency. Translation and use of L1 in the classroom was again accepted.
- D) Audiolingualism:** 1940s-60s U.S. reaction to lack of oral skill development in the Reading Method. It is based on both the Reform Movement and the Direct Method, but adds features of structural linguistics (Bloomfield) and behavioural psychology (Skinner). In this approach, skills are sequenced giving more importance to listening and speaking over reading and writing. This was done by means of drills supported by positive reinforcement. The main aim of this

³ This section is included in order to provide the reader with an idea of the pendulum or reactions movement that has affected the field of L2 teaching and learning (see *Figure 2* in p.11). However, it should be understood just as one possible proposal. Indeed, other approaches may be considered and/or rejected. In any case, may the reader be interested, more detailed accounts of TEFL approaches and methods can be found at A. P. R. Howatt (1984) and H. H. Stern (1983; especially Part Two).

procedure was that of learners' error-free habit formation (see Harmer, 2007:64 for a drill's example). Grammar was sequenced and inductively taught.

- E) Oral-Situational Method:** British counterpart of Audiolingualism, influenced by Halliday's linguistics, it encouraged the organisation of language structures around oral practical situations for learners. So, again oral skills presentation (although it was, in fact, usually choral repetition) preceded written ones. Since situation was important, most general and useful lexical items were taught; grammar was graded according to its complexity; and use of the target language only was encouraged.
- F) Cognitive Approach:** A reaction to the previous behaviourist approaches. It was influenced by Neisser's cognitive psychology and Chomskyan linguistics. The development of Universal Grammar theories re-emphasised the importance of explicit grammar instruction. Language learning was no longer the result of habit formation. On the contrary, it was seen as cognitive rule acquisition in which the four skills would be equally regarded. Also, learners' errors were considered natural and necessary in the L2 acquisition process.
- G) Affective-Humanistic Approach:** Built around the socio-affective psychological domain in human behaviour that started to gain more attention in the 1970s. It was mainly learner-centred and it pursued the creation of a classroom atmosphere where students could feel self-realised, at ease, respected and supported both by the teacher and their peers. Some teaching methods inside the approach are: Community Language Learning by C. Curran, The Silent Way by C. Gattegno and Suggestopedia by G. Lozanov (see Tejada et. al., 2005:180-185 for a summary of these methods).
- H) Comprehension-Based/Natural Approach:** Arising in the 1970s-1980s, time of L1 acquisition research boom, it was based on the assumption that L2/FL acquisition was similar to the L1 one. Therefore, authentic native input exposure and meaningful communication over L2 accuracy were prioritised.
- I) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):** Starting in the 1970s, it views language as an essentially communicative system. Thus, L2 teaching is aimed towards learners' development of their L2 communicative ability. Opportunities for communicative practice (e.g. pair/group work, role plays, tasks, etc.) are to be provided and learners L2 fluency and use of authentic material are encouraged. This last approach has greatly influenced current perspectives in the TEFL field.

Especially since it reacts to non-communicative traditional focus on linguistic form in foreign language classrooms.

All in all, the outline above may serve not only as a historical account, but first of all, as an instance of the continuous debate between focusing L2 teaching on its form or on its communicative function. Secondly, current EFL teachers can use the knowledge of these approaches, together with research findings about their success, when deciding their own attitudes towards L2 instruction and the methodologies they want to follow in class. Especially since not only teachers' beliefs about L2 acquisition nature are to be taken into account, but also their students' needs; their attitudes towards language and learning styles; time, class and materials constraints; governmental and institutional policies; etc. (see Harmer, 2007:76-79). Moreover, the approaches presented (particularly the last four) are not incompatible. In fact, an integrated approach that focuses both on language form and its communicative use, while paying attention to affective considerations and language acquisition research findings may actually be a more attractive and complete attitude towards TEFL (therefore, to L2/FL grammar teaching as well). This way, as Celce-Murcia (2001:10) suggests –quoting her colleague Clifford Prator–, the EFL teacher should ultimately “adapt; don't adopt”.

2.3.2. More recent TEFL approaches: current situation

As we foretold the reader, we can safely conclude from the previous section that there is not, and there will not be, a definite approach to L2 teaching. I will consider now the major trends in TEFL today. Current emphasis on the communicative aspect of language teaching is undeniable. Even though Traditional and Grammar Translation methods are still used, they all (or at least most) have evolved from a non-communicative nature to the inclusion of language use of some sort. Likewise for CLT which, in real EFL classroom adoption, tends to be combined with grammar instruction. Today, then, research in EFL and L2 classroom realities seem to advocate the combination and integration of both form-focused and meaning-focused perspectives (Byrd, 2005; Dörnyei, 2009; Fotos, 2001, 2005; Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Tejada et.al, 2005, among others).

This is precisely what *focus on form* (**FonF**) approaches are based upon. They argue for conscious direct attention being drawn to specific linguistic features, after being engaged first in meaningful communication. (It is often opportunistic and

incidental derivation from tasks). This approach, first coined by Long, was presented in opposition to *focus on formS* perspectives, based on a pre-planned de-contextualised – no attention given to meaning– study of linguistic items (Byrd, 2005; Harmer, 2007; Lorenzo and Moore, 2005 and, especially, Williams, 2005:671-691). Another recent approach to TEFL is the **task-based** one (**TBLT**), which is based on the assumption that students learn by doing, that is, by engaging in meaningful communication in tasks completion. Being the base of my proposal, both approaches will be readdressed in section 3.

Thirdly, built around the idea of language as lexical chunks⁴ is the **Lexical Approach**. It argues for a necessarily combined teaching of grammar and vocabulary, emphasising input, receptive skills development, learners’ awareness raising and language practice. All around the teaching of grammaticalised lexical chunks (Tejada et. al., 2005:192-193). Fourthly, **CLIL**, i.e., Content and Language Integrated Learning has been adopted lately by many educational institutions and in several countries, probably becoming one of the leading current TEFL approaches (Lasagabaster et. al., 2014; Ruiz de Zarobe et. al., 2011). It is based on the consideration that students will learn a language through the teaching of content (e.g. other subjects) in the L2/FL (see Snow, 2005 and Tejada et. al., 2005 for deeper explanations). Finally, further recent approaches have paid attention to learners’ attitudes and personal growth (**Neurolinguistic Programming**); awareness of different types of intelligence (**Multiple Intelligence Theory**) or the advantages of **Cooperative Learning** (Tejada et. al., 2005).

A summary of some of the approaches to TEFL seen, placed in the communication continuum may be found in *Figure 2* below:

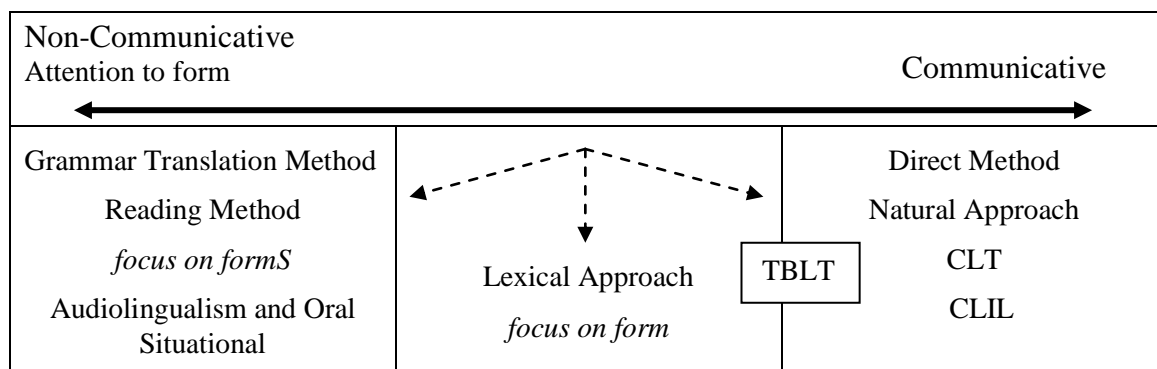


Figure 2: TEFL methods and approaches in the communicative continuum.

⁴ A lexical chunk is a group of words (up to 8) that often go together in a language. It has, thus, distinct meaning (Tejada et. al., 2005:192-193).

2.3.3. Some TEFL methodologies

Variation in approaches translates into multiplicity of teaching methodologies. After all, they are “theories translated into practical classroom applications” (Byrd, 2005:631). Following Lorenzo and Moore, 2005:422-427 and Harmer, 2007:62-75 (see both for practical examples), I present the following as some of the most popular ones:

- **PPP** (*Presentation, Practice, Production*): 3 stage methodology in which the teacher, first, introduces a context for a specific linguistic item to be taught. Then, students will practice it (usually by accurate controlled reproduction techniques, e.g. drills). Finally, they will use the item more freely (e.g. building their own sentences). This methodology has traditionally been used by Grammar-Translation methodologies.
- **ESA** (*Engage, Study, Activate*): Harmer (2007) argues for the need to motivate and engage students in language learning first. Then, there is a focus on the construction of a specific linguistic item. Finally, students are encouraged to use (some of or all) their language knowledge. The order of the stages in the model can be modified any time following “Boomerang” (*EAS* order) or “Patchwork” (no particular order between stages, returning to previous ones when wanted) sequences that broaden a PPP-like methodology to more communicative tasks.
- **TTT** (*Test, Teach, Test*): Harmer bases it on the cyclical nature of language learning. First of all, the teacher proposes a diagnostic activity without prior grammatical clarification, but which serves to contextualise the linguistic item the lesson will be dealing with (usually completed in pairs/groups). Secondly, the teacher circulates around the class and, only when needed, provides grammatical clarification. Finally, another activity to test students’ understanding of the item is developed.
- **OHE** (*Observe, Hypothesise, Experiment*) and **III** (*Illustrate, Interact, Induce*): Based on cognitive approaches and discovery techniques, it needs a certain level of students’ motivation and involvement. In both methodologies, an authentic instance of the target language is presented to students, who act as active researchers. In OHE, given the authentic text/audio, learners are expected to *Observe* the language, *Hypothesise* about how it works and *Experiment* with their hypothesis. In III, a text/audio

Illustrates language use and it enables students *Interaction*, which will *Induce* their understanding.

- **TBLT:** Although presented as an approach (a way of organising the syllabus), it can be considered as well a type of TEFL methodology. Students' fulfilment of a task using meaningful communication is its main aim. Following a top-down (rather than bottom-up)⁵ approach, grammar teaching would generally follow from the task's development.

2.3.4. Techniques for teaching grammar

Finally, narrowing our attention to classroom reality, I will only note the endless sources, references, materials, etc. about grammar teaching that are available today to teachers of English. From typical exercises (question-answer, matching, sentence completion, gap filling, etc.), activities (communicative ones –e.g. tasks– and discovery-type ones), to games they are all being used worldwide for teaching English grammar (see, for instance, Cameron, 2001:111-121; Lorenzo and Moore, 2005:428-438). As we have seen, some will be more frequent and characteristic of one approach/method and/or methodology than of others (e.g. tasks of TBLT, sentence translation exercises following the Grammar Translation Method, etc.). However, most of them can, and indeed are, adapted by EFL teachers according to their specific classroom reality.

2.4. Conclusion

Where does all this bring us to and how do we relate it to the teaching of grammar? I started the literature review by focusing on different notions of language and of grammar. I have argued the former to be both linguistic knowledge and communicative competence. It was claimed as well that our aim in learning a language is for its ultimate internalisation. Hence, no matter the approach or methodology, the goal of EFL classes will be towards helping learners' successful internalisation of the L2/FL and, in our case, of its grammar. Teachers and learners, nevertheless, should not forget that arriving at this implicit knowledge of the foreign language is a (non-linear, neither immediate) process. Therefore, a one hour lesson focused on a specific grammatical feature will not be enough for learners' internalisation of it (not even for the most receptive and

⁵ "Bottom-up approaches focus on the various components of the language and then fit these together in comprehending or producing language. Top-down approaches utilise knowledge of the larger picture, as it were, to assist in comprehending or using smaller elements" (Nunan, 1989:38).

successful students) (Ellis, 2002; Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1993; Skehan, 2007; Williams, 2005).

We have seen that the definition of language provided above has not always been held. In fact, different views on the continuum between language as linguistic rules (emphasis on language analysis/form, e.g. Grammar-Translation Method) or as communicative ability (emphasis on language use/meaning, e.g. Direct Approach) have governed the shifts from one approach to another in EFL classrooms. Today, there seems to be a generalised trend for the integration of both. Nevertheless, some approaches still emphasise one end of the communicative continuum over another. It could be said that, overall, recent decades have favoured the latter. Mainly due to CLT influence and its reaction to a generalised use of traditional approaches (*focus on formS*) in EFL classrooms.

Necessarily, all these will be reflected in EFL lessons realities, as “everything we do in the classroom is underpinned by beliefs about the nature of language and about language learning” (Nunan, 1989:12). Particularly relevant for grammar, is the decision of, first of all, whether to instruct it or not. And, secondly, if doing it in an implicit or explicit way. Nowadays, there is plenty of evidence that instruction of grammar to FL learners is effective (Bascón and Calle, 2011; Ellis, 2005; Fotos, 2002, 2005; Lorenzo and Moore, 2005; Skehan, 1996).

Nevertheless, not only the teachers’ views are to be taken into account, but the learners’ needs; their age; their preferred learning strategies; the cultural context; institutional decisions; class size; time and material constraints; etc. In fact, teachers of EFL are hardly ever completely free to decide on the methodology to follow. Therefore, pedagogical success recurrently lies upon teachers’ ability to adapt. An adaptation or, more accurately, an integration of two approaches is precisely what I present in the remaining part of the TFG. I will claim a *focus on form* approach through task implementation as a possible way of balancing focus on grammatical form and opportunities for meaningful communication when teaching grammar to EFL students.

3. Integrating *FonF* and *TBLT*: theoretical backgrounds

I have already stated my belief about the necessity of presenting a balance between form and meaningful communication of those forms in the EFL classroom when teaching grammar. Moreover, I consider that it is possible to do so while explicitly

teaching it. I believe that, on the one hand, this explicit instruction will help learners to notice both grammatical structures and gaps and holes in their inter-language more easily. On the other hand, introducing tasks will provide them with the necessary input and output for the final acquisition of structures (as we saw in section 2.2.), while presenting language in appropriate contexts (see e.g. Byrd, 2005:548; Larsen-Freeman, 2001:251-266; Savignon, 2005:640 for the importance of context). Finally, task completion might be a motivating technique for learners (especially for “concrete” and “communicative” ones, see Harmer, 2007:88)⁶. So, it seems that the four basic conditions J. Willis (1996:59-60) outlines for language learning to take place would be met (see again section 2.2) by the approach to teaching grammar I am proposing: Integration of *TBLT* and *FonF*.

3.1. Defining *focus on form* (*FonF*)

The basic notion of *focus on form* and its opposition with *focus on formS* was already introduced in section 2.3.2. It must be noted, however, that since M. Long’s introduction of these terms in the late 20th c. several interpretations, taxonomies and classifications of them have been proposed (see Williams, 2005:671-673 for a visual summary). All of them, nevertheless, maintain the ultimate feature of their distinction. That is, *focus on formS*, on the one hand, deals with linguistic features in isolation, dissociated from their context and from any communicative setting in which they naturally appear. On the other hand, *focus on form* draws attention to language structures generally as encountered in meaningful communicative situations (Doughty and Williams, 1998:3; Nassaji and Fotos, 2007:11-15). As *FonF* entails the importance of a communicative context for grammar instruction, it is the approach that I am going to consider.

Several decisions, however, may be made before implementing it. As, Doughty and Williams (1998:205-211) reflect, we may consider between taking a “proactive” or a “reactive” (Long’s) approach to *FonF*. In other words, whether to pre-plan tasks where the specific forms we are interested in dealing with will arise (proactive). Or to draw attention to linguistic forms only as a response to students’ errors or problems as they appear in communicative activities (reactive). Another related consideration already

⁶ Students’ age might influence their motivation to complete tasks as well. Being young learners generally more motivated to engage in them than adults. Nevertheless, I regard the individual learning preferred style of each learner, together with the task type being proposed, as more determinant in shaping his/her motivation (see Cameron, 2001:21-35 and Harmer, 2007:81-106).

introduced (see section 2.2.) is whether to focus on form implicitly or explicitly. Both are argued to be effective, although they are still a matter of large debate. The EFL teacher may, hence, consider Doughty's and Williams's claim of a non-completely dissociated view between them as an appealing stance (1998:228-243). These authors will suggest another flexible dichotomy in the *FonF* approach: "simultaneous versus sequential integration of form, meaning, and function" (Doughty and Williams, 1998:250). The main options in *focus on form* instruction (FFI) are summarised by Ellis (2005:717). Who regards FFI "as any instructional activity that is used to draw the learner's attention to language form" (Naasaji and Fotos, 2007:13-14). He will distinguish as well between *planned FoF*, *incidental FoF* and *preemptive FoF* (focus on a structure anticipated to be problematic but without actual error taking place, taking time out from the communicative activity) (Naasaji and Fotos, 2007:14).

3.2. Defining 'task' and *TBLT*

Scholars' understanding of tasks and the application of *TBLT* have been varied as well (see Fotos, 2002:140-141 and Van den Branden, 2006:1-16). For this reason, V. Samuda and M. Bygate (2008:192-229) warn us not to confuse task-based language learning and teaching (TBLT), task-supported learning and teaching and 'tasks' as pedagogic tools. Their basic distinction lying in the focus the task plays in instruction, from more to less central following the order above. *TBLT* is generally characterised for: using tasks to define and build the syllabus; focus on meaning (from which attention to form may be derived but not vice versa); assessment from task performance; and tasks as a simulation of real-world activities (aimed at learners' "real-world" needs fulfilment) (Samuda and Bygate, 2008:196). Since I am not interested in the benefits of the different types of syllabus here, I will focus on the benefits of tasks as implemented in the classroom. Moreover, I disagree of its appeal to foreign learners, whose "real-world" needs hardly ever meet L2 students' ones (from whom the approach may be more beneficial) (Fotos, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2001). Hence, even though the term *TBLT* might be used, I do not imply the building of EFL syllabus around tasks. Instead, by *task-based* approach I will refer to the use of tasks as language learning and teaching tools.

I understand 'task' as an activity in which learners use language to achieve a set goal (with a clear beginning and end, allowing, thus, a sense of task completion) (Fotos, 2002:140 and Willis, 1996:53). Generally, task completion will involve negotiation of

meaning (pair/group work often characterises tasks) and feedback (either from peers or the teacher) (Skehan, 2007). Many classifications have been proposed in the literature: on the basis of their communicative function, “real-world” and “pedagogical” tasks (unlikely to be encountered in a real-life context) are distinguished (Nunan, 1989:40-45); they can be “closed/discrete” or “open/indeterminate” (information needed for task successful completion is determinate and discrete or not) (Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1993:125); tasks might be classified as well according to their focus on “production” or “comprehension” (Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1993:140-143). According to Nunan (1989:11) tasks’ analysis and categorisation will depend on their “goals, input data, activities, settings and roles”. No matter the type of task being proposed, we must all be aware and acknowledge that the gap between “task as plan” and “task in action” (Breen, 1987 in Cameron, 2001:35) may be quite wide. Therefore, “until the task is turned into action, it cannot be fully evaluated for its usefulness or effectiveness” (Cameron, 2001:35).

3.3. How to combine them: proposal’s rationale

I have already introduced the underlying principle of my proposal as explicitly teaching grammatical forms in relation to their communicative context. Since this TFG aims at offering a planned framework for grammatical instruction for EFL learners, I argue in favour of proactive explicit focus on grammatical structures. Although FL teachers should not neglect reactive responses to *FonF*, especially when difficulties students encounter prevent them from successful task completion. This attention to form, nevertheless, is given a communicative context by the completion of a pedagogical task selected in accordance to our classroom reality (size, students’ age, language level, etc.). So, our students will be able to: draw attention to the grammatical form; receive input of the form in context; use it communicatively (i.e. opportunities for Ss (students) output) and receive negotiation and feedback (essential for the structure’s acquisition). Even though task success cannot be judged before its particular class implementation, I believe they offer a valid communicative context for grammatical forms. Therefore, they are an appealing method when trying to achieve the attention to form-language use balance in grammar instruction. Interestingly, this combination of *FonF* and *TBLT* has been recommended by many EFL scholars (Ellis, 2005, 2006; Fotos, 2001, 2002; Naasaji and Fotos, 2007). For an account of three different types of

grammar structure involvement in tasks, see Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993:132-143).

I consider the particular appeal of this combinatory approach for foreign learners to be manifold, some of its advantages being:

- It provides a context for grammar teaching.
- It gives the necessary conditions for language acquisition to take place:
 - o Input and output production, most generally limited to in class-time. (Larsen-Freeman, 2001:251; Pachler and Field, 2001:129)
 - o Opportunities for negotiation and feedback.
- It might be found motivating by both students who like to focus on analysing linguistic forms and those who prefer to use language communicatively (see Harmer, 2007 for learner types).
- Recent SLA research demonstrates the effectiveness of its theoretical grounds.
- It allows for the integration of skills. But it is flexible enough so as to focus on one if preferred (Willis, 1996:52-62).

Likewise, I am aware of the proposal's limitations. Some may argue that even a double limitation, since integrating both approaches means combining not only their advantages, but their dangers as well. Nevertheless, we must remember that there is no definite perfect approach to teaching English grammar to FL students (Ellis, 2005; Fotos, 2002). And so, EFL teachers will have to analyse their classroom characteristics before considering whether this approach may be effective for their learners.

4. Lesson proposal

In presenting my lesson proposal, I will first of all, provide its assumed context. Secondly, I will outline the session's plan. After that, I will discuss how possible criticism may be answered and how anticipated problems could be solved. Lastly, I acknowledge and encourage the vast amount of possible relevant variations that could be taken from my lesson plan, still supporting a *FonF* and *TBLT* combinatory approach for teaching grammar to EFL learners.

4.1. Context

The lesson I am proposing is directed towards adult learners of English (around 19-22 years old). More specifically, it is a one hour session for an intermediate level (B1-B2) group of 10 to 16 second year students of Journalism at any Spanish University.⁷ It is thought to be a mid-of term lesson in a compulsory module of their degree. In which they have already dealt with present, past and future tenses. Moreover, last sessions focused on the expression of opinions and how to support argumentations. This one is organised around the instruction of the passive voice.

4.2. Lesson plan (adaptation of Willis's (1996) framework)

Aims:

- Provide students (Ss) a balance between attention to linguistic form and opportunities to engage in meaningful communication.
- Opportunities for meaningful use of previously seen linguistic content (revision, Ss hypothesis testing).
- Present the linguistic structure (passive voice) in real context (noticing) + explicit attention to its form (reflecting/analysing language).
- Opportunities for practice of the “new” linguistic structure in a meaningful context.
- Take into consideration Ss' motivation and enable them to take agency of their learning.

Content and procedure:

1) *Task 1: Passive voice in newspapers*

Aim of the task: Ss revision/use of previously acquired language + provision of a meaningful authentic context of the passive voice.

Procedure:

a) Ss will be paired up and instructed about the task's requirements:

They are going to be given a newspaper per pair. Reading the headlines and sub-headlines only, Ss will have to choose a piece of news and try to guess its content. Pairs are expected to engage in communication in order to agree and reason on their article's choice and to theorise about its content. Ss are foretold that they will have to report their decision, reasons and guesses to the class.

⁷ The lesson takes into consideration CEFR's (Common European Framework of Reference) levels and “can do” statements (Council of Europe, 2001:24, 26-27).

The teacher (T), then, gives an example of the type of information Ss are expected to report (see appendix 1):

Teacher: ‘I have chosen “£35,000 for boy of six labelled a brat”, written by D. Jones in *The Sun* on the 23rd of May, page 31. I chose it because...It seems that a boy was said to be...’ (enriched input, my adaptation and my underlining; headline taken from Grundy, 1993:39).

- b) Ss can ask the T for word meaning doubts. Moreover, a webpage with an online dictionary is opened for Ss to consult if needed (task support).
- c) Newspapers are handed.
- d) T goes around the class monitoring Ss’ speech.

Time: 15’

- 2) Pairs report to class and T writes in the blackboard the headlines chosen. Then, they are given 2’ to skim through the articles and check if they guessed the content right.

Time: 5’-10’

- 3) Focus on language form: News’ headings and/or subheadings (at least some) are expected to contain the passive voice.⁸ Call Ss’ attention to the structures in them, ask them what differences and similarities they see (by this we expect Ss to recognise/imply passive vs. active voice distinction. If they do it, ask them for their use). After that, explicit grammar instruction of the passive voice in English is given (structure, examples and doubts are addressed. Use of the blackboard for visual support).

Time: 15’-20’

- 4) Practice: Ss are asked to go back to their chosen article and underline passive voice constructions. Ss will give underlined instances (either elicited by the T or by Ss’ own initiative).

Time: 5’

- 5) Task 2: Describing changes (adapted from Ur, 2009:192-195).

Aim of the task: Provide Ss with further meaningful contexts of the passive voice.

⁸ See section 4.3. for solutions if passives do not naturally arise.

Procedure:

A pair of pictures from well-known places in Spain (a contemporary one and another one taken 20 years ago, see appendix 2 for an example) is handed to each member of Ss' pairs. Each S will have to describe to the other one what *has been done* in that place since the 1st picture was taken, *what is being done* and/or imagine *what will/needs to/should be done* in the future. The other S will try to guess what place his/her colleague is referring to. Roles are then switched.

Time: 20'

6) For the next session: Allow Ss to choose homework:

- *60 seconds news*: short oral presentation (1') highlighting the headlines of the week (review of the passive). It can be done in groups in order to make presentations possible.
- *Writing report*: Making use of the pictures from *Task 2*, write a short report for a magazine describing how the place has changed. (It might be presented as a contest to enhance Ss' motivation and attention to accuracy, the prize being: publication in another international institution's blog).
- *Listening to English speaking radio/TV news online*: try to notice the passive voice being used. Note down 3 instances you encounter.

Time: 2'

4.3. Lesson's rationale

I have already discussed the theoretical grounds of my proposal in section 3. Therefore, I consider that it is clear from the previous section how I propose grammar (in this case the passive voice) to be explicitly instructed and how tasks could be used in the EFL classroom for a *FonF-TBLT* combined approach. Hence, now I will only briefly address some reasonable criticism, possible anticipated problems and how these could be successfully addressed. Finally, pedagogical possibilities for variation are acknowledged and encouraged.

First of all, some may consider the lesson in 4.2. not to follow a *task-based* approach in the sense that *Task 1: Passive voice in newspapers* and *Task 2: Describing changes* would not be regarded as tasks. Nevertheless, both have clear set goals and an outcome. These, would be achieved by students' meaningful use of language (meaning negotiation is involved) and both allow for peers' and teacher's feedback. So, they do follow the definition of 'task' presented in section 3.2. Moreover, the passive voice is

expected to naturally and authentically arise from them (proactive *FonF*). In other words, students are not foretold to focus on the linguistic form. In *Task 2*, for instance, they are not explicitly told neither obliged to use the italicised instances of the passive voice. However, being it a pedagogical tool, the teacher's presentation of the task would be purposely directed towards their emergence. Furthermore, Skehan's (1996) argument for tasks' need to balance accuracy, complexity and fluency has been respectively taken into consideration by: students' reports to the class; tasks' inherent complexity and provided support; and students' attention to meaning in pair communication.

Regarding *Task 1*, it could be the (unlikely) case that the passive voice is not encountered in the pieces of news chosen by the students. This could be easily solved by providing them with pre-selected articles where its use is assured (Grundy, 1993). I do not directly present this option because, firstly, I believe it is unlikely to happen. Secondly, it would decrease the task's authenticity. This, I consider especially motivating for our intended learners as students of Journalism.

In fact, I have tried to propose a highly motivating lesson for them. First of all, I purposely present the news as the session's theme so that our students find it relevant. As future journalists, they will be expected to master the passive voice. Not only that, they will inevitably encounter it throughout English-speaking pieces of news. Secondly, while monitoring students' speech, the teacher may provide them with feedback regarding previously seen grammatical structures. Students' accurate use and/or realisation about their language acquisition process will probably motivate them. Thirdly, students' level, age and differences in learning are taken into account (e.g. users vs. analysers of the language; those who prefer to hear instructions/explanations and those who need visual support –e.g. blackboard use–). Finally, students' choice of homework allows them to take agency of their own learning, generally considered to motivate EFL learners as well (see Dörnyei, 2001 on motivation).

All in all, I have tried to offer a valid, relevant and motivating lesson following the combined *task-based + focus on form* approach for the context in consideration. Nevertheless, I acknowledge it is just one among the vast possible EFL classroom implementations of it for the teaching of grammar. Certainly, EFL instructors could easily suggest many interesting variations and sessions following it. In fact, I would encourage them to do so, since I believe in its usefulness for EFL learners. Moreover, as

we have seen throughout the TFG, TEFL realities are precisely characterised by the constant need to adapt.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, may the reader be reminded about our initial three hypotheses questions: a) Should we teach grammar to EFL learners? And, if so, how?; b) Can grammar be integrated into a communicative approach to language teaching?; and c) Can a combination of *task-based* and *focus on form* methodologies offer a balance between attention to form and attention to meaning? Is it suitable for EFL learners?

I believe all three have been answered throughout the TFG. Following current SLA and TEFL scholars' views, I have argued for the usefulness of explicit instruction of grammar to EFL learners. Not only that, since I regard language learning to be a combination of linguistic knowledge and communicative competence, I have proposed to follow a combinatory *task-based* and *focus on form* approach. I believe this would offer EFL learners the opportunity to balance meaningful use of language in communication and attention to linguistic structures. A practical instance is given in the form of a lesson in section 4. By answering the aforementioned questions 'b' and 'c', I think it is not only possible to balance attention to grammatical form and to language meaning, but I would also encourage it. My proposal regards tasks as pedagogical classroom tools instead of as syllabus builders (more relevant for L2 learners), since I consider EFL learners' needs to be addressed more realistically this way. Nevertheless, I am aware that not every EFL context may benefit from the proposed approach. In fact, each EFL instructor should consider its appeal for their individual classroom reality. Finally, even if the combined *FonF+TBLT* approach appears to be theoretically beneficial for EFL grammar instruction, it is only after classroom implementation that we will be able to evaluate its usefulness.

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7. Appendix

- 1- Example in *Task 1: Passive voice in newspapers* (Grundy, 1993:39, my underlining)

£35,000 FOR BOY OF SIX LABELLED A BRAT

Handicap kid's libel triumph

A BOY of six branded the "worst brat in Britain" by a newspaper won £35,000 libel damages yesterday.

Handicapped Jonathan Hunt was said to have been a "terror tot" who wrecked his parent's home, cut off his own ear and killed the family cat.

But the claims were lies. Tragic Jonathan — the youngest person in Britain ever to sue for libel — had behavioural problems after developing meningitis at birth.

Yesterday Jonathan's 36-year-old mother Josephine, said the stress of the case had helped cause the break-up of her marriage.

And the mother of four revealed that despite the payout she still could not afford treatment her son needs in the US.

The claims were made in the Sun newspaper, which was ordered by the High Court to pay costs.

An article called Jonathan Britain's "naughtiest kid" and quoted Josephine, of Sawdson, Cambs, as saying: "He's a horror.

"My three others are perfectly normal. I keep asking myself, 'Why me?'"

Later, The Sun carried a letter from Josephine saying her son was handicapped, that he severed his ear in an accident and that the cat had died from sickness.

It was headlined "Monday moan."

Mrs Hunt, who shares the damages, wanted the award paid in a week. But The Sun asked for three weeks to pay because the cheque had to come from their Peterborough accounts HQ.

Mr Justice Otton ordered that the money should be paid as quickly as possible and said: "The Romans managed to get to Peterborough.

"I cannot accept that it will take this company 21 days to pay this cheque."

- 2- Possible pair of images for *Task 2: Describing changes* (adapted from Ur, 2009:192-195)



(Images from Calhoun, 2006 and Rosillo, 2014)