SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Final Project
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OVERVIEW

- **Form-based** instruction was replaced by **communicative** approaches.
- Krashen's Natural Approach dominated the end of the 20th century.
- Research now indicates **learners need both** form-based and communicative instruction.
- This lesson sequence proposes using a blending of form-based and communicative approaches.

SPECIFIC RESEARCH

○ Learners who acquire a second language using Krashen's Natural Approach tend to be unable to produce grammatically accurate communication despite being fluent in the target language.

  • (Hammerly, 1991; Kowal & Swain, 1997; Swain, 1995; as cited in Ellis, 2002)

○ Indeed, "natural language learning does **not** lead to high levels of grammatical and sociolinguistic competence."

  • (Ellis, 2002, p. 17)

WHEN SHOULD WE TEACH GRAMMAR?

○ Fotos (2002) recommends a three-part grammar lesson:

  1. explicit grammar instruction, preferably at the beginning of the lesson;

  2. communicative activities containing many usages of the instructed form; and

  3. summary activities to focus learners' attention on the grammar form they were instructed on and then encountered communicatively. (p. 138)

IMPORTANCE OF INTERACTION

- Pair work encourages students to talk more than teacher-led lessons.
  - (Fotos, 2002, p. 139)
- Interaction does not produce less grammatical speech.
  - (Pica, 1997; Pica & Doughty, 2985; Rulon & McCreary, 1986; as cited in Fotos, 2002)

RESEARCH SUMMARY

- A teaching approach that **combines** form-focused lessons with task-based opportunities for **interaction** has the potential to increase learners' long-term explicit and implicit knowledge of grammatical forms and will therefore help them become more accurate communicators.

WHY TEACH SVA?

○ One of the biggest problems English students face – either as native speakers or second/foreign language learners – is **subject-verb agreement.**

- (Baxter & Holland, 2007; Byrd, n.d.; C. Gibbs, personal communication, December 4, 2010; V. Parmenter, personal communication, October 14, 2010; Shibuya & Wakabayashi, 2008)

○ The basic rule is simple: English verbs must agree with their subject in person and number. Why, then, is the concept so difficult to teach and so difficult for learners to understand?

- (Byrd, n.d.)

TWO HYPOTHESES FOR SVA ERRORS

○ **The Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis** argues that L2 learners have no difficulty in acquiring syntactic features but they have problems with mapping the formal feature on the relevant surface forms.

○ **The Representational Deficit Hypothesis** maintains that L2 learners cannot acquire certain formal features when these features are not instantiated in their L1.

- (Shibuya & Wakabayashi, 2008)

SVA REMEDIATION

- Ongoing **remediation** would also address both hypotheses outlined by Shibuya & Wakabayashi (2008), since exposure to SVA along with tasks and interaction should move explicit grammar rules about SVA into implicit interlanguage knowledge (Noonan, 2004).

OBJECTIVES

- The target age group is high school students.
- The class length is a 90-minute block.
- The lesson sequence relates to North Carolina's Standard Course of Study's Language Proficiency standards for English language learners (ELLs) – Standard I and Standard II.
- High school English courses' competency goal six, specifically goal 6.02, highlights the instruction of SVA in high school English classes.

LESSON PLAN SEQUENCE

- The lesson plans presented herein are rough outlines that follow guidelines described by Farrell (2009).
- Each lesson consists of five parts:
  1. perspective,
  2. stimulation,
  3. instruction/ participation,
  4. closure, and
  5. follow-up.

PROCEDURES

- After explicit but very basic instruction about the form, the teacher should provide learners with examples of the correct usage of SVA in English.
- Next, students should be put into pairs to work on an identification task using an authentic text.
- Following the task, the teacher should question students about their findings.
- Based on this information, the teacher should adapt the second and third lessons in the sequence to target the forms that presented the most difficulty.

EFFECTIVENESS / INFORMAL ASSESSMENT

1. Did the class seem to learn the material well?
2. Were the learners engaging with the foreign language throughout?
3. Were the learners attentive all the time?
4. Did the learners enjoy the lesson and feel motivated?
5. Were the learners active all the time?
6. Did the lesson go according to plan?
7. Was the language used communicatively throughout?

CONCLUSION

- Communicative approaches cannot completely replace "old-fashioned" form-based instruction.
- Research has shown that communicative or task-based approaches alone do not provide learners with sufficient grammatical knowledge to be effective communicators in the target language.
  - (Hammerly, 1991; Kowal & Swain, 1997; Swain, 1995; all as cited in Ellis, 2002)
- However, form-focused instruction alone is not the answer either. A blended approach is needed.

Conclusion, con't

- One way to help learners understand the grammar of an L2 is by "consciousness raising," a gradual process that builds upon Krashen's language acquisition theory by including explicit grammar teaching.
    - (Ellis, 2002; Fotos, 2002)
- Lesson plans that include both a form-based and communicative approach will benefit learners' long-term knowledge and proficiency in an L2.
    - (Noonan, 2004)