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Developing the language awareness of second language teachers

Abstract

This paper reports on two different studies on the language awareness of experienced teachers. It raises issues of how knowledge of grammar, particularly at sentence level, can be developed and applied in the classroom. In the first study, teachers undertaking a postgraduate TESOL practicum generally showed a high level of competence in their use of English grammar but limited metalinguistic knowledge and ability to formulate grammar rules. This finding is in contrast to the teachers' expressed beliefs about the importance of this kind of content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge.

In the second study, experienced teachers of languages other than English (LOTE), who already used their own well-developed knowledge of sentence-level grammar in their teaching, reported on their experience of and their attitudes to the teaching of grammar. Together with the researcher, teachers then undertook a professional development activity which aimed not only to sharpen their own language awareness, but to develop strategies for focusing on grammar-‘noticing’ in an interactive way in secondary LOTE classrooms. In this paper, we argue that there is a need for second and foreign language teachers to develop language awareness, and offer an example of how teacher educators might do this.

Introduction

Language awareness

That teachers of second and foreign languages know about the language they teach has been taken for granted for centuries. This understanding has been made more or less explicit in the last forty years in the developing field of applied linguistics as well as in educational policy. In 1972, for example, the Bullock Report in the United Kingdom

made a number of recommendations about what teachers should learn about language. The first of these was that ‘Teachers should learn about the nature of language: as a system of rules; social effects; dialects’ (Hawkins 1984:28). Research on second language learning in the 1980s suggested the importance for learners of ‘Noticing the gap’ between language forms in the target language and their own interlanguage (Schmidt and Frota 1986). While second language teaching was influenced by ideas of natural language learning and meaning based language lessons (Krashen and Terrell 1983), the importance of Focus on Form within those lessons has been emphasized (Long 1998). In the 1990s some studies found it useful for learners when, within a communicative language teaching approach, teachers chose to focus on Form in second language lessons (Spada 1997, Doughty and Williams 1998). That is, lessons were primarily meaning-focussed, yet attention was given to formal or structural features of language. Cray (1999) summarised the arguments for teaching grammar by a number of researchers in the field of pedagogical grammar (e.g., Harmer, 1987; Ur, 1988; Odlin, 1994):

... if a component of formal instruction is integrated into the communicative classroom ... learners will learn more efficiently, they will attain higher levels of language proficiency without fossilization, they will succeed on standardized proficiency tests, and they will leave the language classroom with the ability to continue to learn through conscious analysis of language. (p. 84)

For teachers to make this choice, it follows that they themselves must have explicit knowledge of grammar. A recent study has posed the question which in our view needs to be asked, not only about teacher trainees, but even about experienced teachers of second language:

What level of explicit knowledge do (they) have and how well equipped are they to deliver the range of Focus on Form options available to them? (Elder, Erlam and Philp, 2007).

This study found that Malaysian teacher trainees varied considerably in their ability to articulate rules of English grammar and to use terminology about language.

Metalinguistic knowledge of second language teachers

Arguably the content knowledge of second language teachers in particular should include explicit knowledge about the grammar of the language that they are teaching, including knowledge of terms such as ‘subject’, ‘verb’, ‘object’, also called metalanguage, or

‘language about language’ (Berry 2005). Pedagogical content knowledge should include ways of explaining these grammatical features to students. Yet it is these kinds of knowledge that cannot be assumed in a generation (or two) of teachers who have, at least in Australia, not been schooled in traditional grammar. Indeed, in the experience of the authors, teachers vary considerably in their knowledge about language and in their degree of comfort in using metalanguage. It is this fundamental area of language awareness that is the focus of this paper.

This paper has arisen out of the experience of two language teacher educators involved in the professional development of second language teachers. In different research projects, we have explored the metalinguistic knowledge of teachers and set out with them to develop that knowledge, in the belief that in this will assist them to contribute more effectively to the language learning of their own students.

Part 1

The study of the metalinguistic knowledge of TESOL practicum students

Background

This study investigated the metalinguistic knowledge and the beliefs about the importance of this knowledge, in a group of teachers enrolled in a postgraduate TESOL practicum, which included 13 three-hour sessions at the university and the equivalent of 22 days placement in one or two ESL settings such as language schools and language centres for children or adults. Completion of the practicum for these teachers was part of a postgraduate diploma or masters program which would allow them to gain or maintain employment in the TESOL area.

Participants

The participants in the study were twelve experienced teachers, seven native speakers (NSs) of Australian English and five non-native speakers (NNSs). Two of the NSs of English had spoken a European language at home in Australia when they were children.

None of the NSs, had previously taught English as a second language. Along with one of the NNSs, these teachers were experienced generalist primary school teachers or teachers in curriculum areas other than second language in secondary school or in institutes of further education. In contrast to the NSs, four out of five of the NNSs had previously taught English language in their home countries India, Russia and Singapore, for varying lengths of time, and one of these teachers was employed as a teacher of ESOL at the time of the study. These four NNSs had all originally trained as teachers in their home countries and were either registered or eligible for registration with the Victorian Institute for Teaching. The fifth NNS had been educated at high school in Australia after arriving here from her home country in Asia. It can be seen from this description that the TESOL practicum students were a diverse group in terms of their language backgrounds, teacher training and teaching experience.

Collection of data

In the fourth week of a 13-week semester, participants completed a test of their metalinguistic knowledge and a brief questionnaire about their beliefs in the importance of this knowledge. At the end of the semester, they completed a second questionnaire on the same topic. As the lecturer for this unit, I administered the test with the informed consent of my students, after gaining approval from the university's ethics committee.

Research instruments

The test is a version of one used in the study by Elder et al., (2007) and consists of 15 short sentences with a single grammatical error in each one. Participants were asked to correct the sentences to make them grammatical, and to give a rule which would explain the error. An example sentence is No. 5 "Learning a language is more easier when you are young". The underlined section shows where the sentence is ungrammatical.

As a way of exploring teachers' attitudes to the importance of metalinguistic knowledge, I designed a brief questionnaire consisting of seven statements, about which participants expressed levels of agreement or disagreement by ticking the box which best expressed their view on a five point scale. For example, Number 7 states: "It matters whether

teachers accurately explain a particular grammatical item to students”. The second questionnaire, administered at the end of the semester, asked open-ended questions such as: “As a teacher, how important is it for you to be able to refer to the system of the English language when teaching your students?” These were based on the statements in the first questionnaire. It was hoped that participants would expand on their previous ticked responses.

Data analysis

Teachers’ answers for Part One of the grammatical knowledge test were initially given three points each, one point for correction of the error, one for a correct rule and one for use of appropriate metalanguage. For example, a correction of the sentence in Question 5 is “Learning a language is easier when you are young”, (one point). One participant additionally gave a correct rule *with* use of metalanguage, in this way: “‘easier’ is a comparative form and does not need qualifying with ‘more’,” (two additional points). A different participant gave a correct rule *without* use of metalanguage: “adding ‘er’ implies more’, (only one additional point). Correct rules and use of metalanguage for answers in Part One required interpretation. In an effort to ensure reliability of judgement, three raters, myself and two researchers involved in the Malaysian study made separate judgements, and agreement was then reached on acceptable answers for each item. Items in Part Two were unambiguously correct or not. Marking of these items, along with collation and analysis of answers to the questionnaire, was completed by the researcher.

Results

Test Part One

As Table 1 below shows, the participants were able in nearly every case to correct the grammatical error in each of the 15 sentences. Giving a rule for the grammar item proved much more difficult, however. A rule for 12 out of 15 grammar items was successfully articulated by only a small number of participants. In fact three questions proved particularly difficult for 11 out of 12 participants, Questions 2, 3, and 4 respectively: (Q2. Hiroshi wants visiting the United States this year; Q3. Keiko grew some tree in her garden; Q4. If Jane had asked me, I would give her money). The two questions for which

the largest group of participants could provide a rule were Questions 7 and 8: (Q7. Martin lost his friend book; Q8. Keum happen to meet an old friend yesterday). Broadly speaking, however, participants were more able to provide appropriate terminology or metalanguage than they were able to formulate a rule that applied to the error. For Question 3, for example, only one participant could articulate a comprehensive and correct rule, i.e. “‘Some’ refers to more than one tree so plural ‘trees’ is used”, yet nine participants used appropriate metalanguage (either *countable*, *plural* or *quantifier*) in attempting to provide a rule. Half or more than half of the group of participants did not attempt to articulate a rule for Questions 6 and 11 (Q6. His school grades were improved last year; Q11. Does Liao has a Chinese wife?)

Table 1: Grammar test questions 1-15 – Teachers’ corrections, rules, metalanguage

Question	Correction	Rule	Metalanguage	Did not attempt
1	12	3	5	4
2	12	1	2	4
3	12	1	9	2
4	12	1	5	2
5	12	5	4	3
6	11	3	4	6
7	11	8	6	2
8	12	8	7	2
9	12	3	6	2
10	12	3	1	2
11	11	2	2	7
12	12	2	3	5
13	9	4	3	4
14	11	5	2	4
15	12	6	2	5

First questionnaire

Participants generally expressed agreement with statements about the importance for second language learners of teachers’ explanations of the rules or system of the language, as can be seen in Table X below. Three out of twelve participants expressed a lack of confidence in their own knowledge of system of English and in their own ability to explain the rules of English to their student, while a further three participants responded neutrally that “It depends”.

Table 2: Teachers’ beliefs about the importance of metalinguistic knowledge

Questionnaire statements	Strongly agree	Mostly agree	It depends	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. As a second language learner, I believe that it is important for me to learn the rules of grammar of the language I am learning	6	2	4		
2. As a learner, I benefited from my teachers' explanations of the rules or system of the second language	4	7	1		
3. As a teacher, it is important for me to refer to the system of the English language	7	3	2		
4. As a teacher, I am confident about my knowledge of the system of English		6	3	2	1
5. As a teacher, I am confident in my ability to explain the rules of English to my students	3	3	3	2	1
6. It matters whether teachers attempt to explain a particular grammatical item to students	4	6	2		
7. It matters whether teachers accurately explain a particular grammatical item to students	7	5			

Second questionnaire

Five participants responded to seven open-ended questions based on the statements in Table 2. These answers offered more detailed information than in the first questionnaire. For example, Question 1 asked about the importance of learning the rules of grammar in any language which the participant had learned. A typical answer was:

“Very important. The rules of grammar have helped me to formulate sentences to aid my communication with other speakers of the language”.

In response to Question 2: “To what extent did you benefit from your language teacher’s explanation of the rules or system of the language?” one participant said:

Yes, it helped when I was learning French at high school. But when the explanations became complex I wished I had been taught the rules of my own language. I could have then transferred knowledge.

Asked how confident she felt about her grammar knowledge, one participant answered:

Not very confident at all. I feel I really need to learn English grammar and would like to become more proficient in this.

Question 7 asked participants about their coping strategies when they cannot explain a particular grammatical item in English. Answers included these:

At the moment, I know I shall be teaching a particular grammar item, I research the item to find out a) about the item and b) how to teach it,

and:

At this stage I just flounder. However I have every intension (*sic*) of studying how the English grammar system works. (I've just bought 2 of Scott Thornbury's book) *How to teach Grammar* and *About Language*.

Concluding remarks

The small scale study of teachers' knowledge about English grammar and metalanguage reveals a need for explicit activities to raise teachers' language awareness in TESOL education programs. There is also some evidence of need for professional development in language awareness for practising language teachers. It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the work undertaken in the TESOL practicum class to address the issues raised by the study. In brief, a range of language awareness activities were undertaken during the semester in which the participants were enrolled in the practicum. These included activities based on sentence level and discourse level grammar, activities based on English pronunciation (sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation), and so on. Teachers developed materials and taught mini-lessons to peers on individual points. A language awareness activity of particular interest in language teacher education, the Dictogloss procedure, is suggested below in Part 2 of this paper.

Part 2

The study with the LOTE teachers

Background

In contrast to TESOL practicum students reported on in the first study of this paper, the LOTE teachers demonstrated a much greater metalinguistic knowledge of grammar, both from having learned their own second languages from a largely grammar-translation approach and also teaching grammar explicitly in their classes.

The study with the LOTE teachers was the major focus of a larger, three-phase piece of research within a framework of Reflective Practice (RP). The principal question for the research related to how experienced language teachers might learn new ways of teaching and learning. The study examined the way in which the cultural, pedagogical and personal beliefs of experienced teachers influenced the way they teach. It also explored how prior experience influenced the professional practice of the teachers, and whether they might rethink some of their practices by using collaborative tasks with their students. The theoretical ideas that informed this qualitative study are drawn from the area of educational ethnography (Spindler (1982). Constructivist grounded theory, (Vygotsky, 1934/1987, 1978; Kaufman, 2004; Smith, 2003; Strunk, 2004; Woods, 1987) was also an important concept employed in the research.

The LOTE teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar

In a survey of recent studies of teacher cognition in grammar teaching, Borg (2003) reported on some of the approaches used by researchers to answer their questions regarding teachers' beliefs about grammar. Schulz (1996; 2001) sought the opinions of foreign language (FL) students and teachers when she researched attitudes to grammar and error correction in the US and Colombia. Interestingly, in both studies it was the students who were more in favour of formal grammar teaching and error correction than were their teachers.

In a number of the studies reported by Borg (2003), it seemed to be also the case that foreign language (FL) teachers were less influenced by research that shows the relative ineffectiveness of explicit grammar teaching than their ESL counterparts. The FL teachers believed in using more formal grammar teaching, as did the LOTE teachers in my research.

The choice of a research focus

Instead of studying teaching from the outside, and choosing topics for the teachers, as had been done in many previous studies on foreign language teaching, I wanted to get the insiders' perspective by looking at how teachers make sense of their practice (Nunan,

1996). As a consequence of this, in professional development sessions with LOTE teachers, I asked the teachers themselves what kinds of pedagogical questions both interested them and would be helpful in their own work. In discussions with the teachers and in their written evaluations and reflections, the issues that interested them most were:

1. the debate about focus on content in the communicative approach versus focus on grammar, and how to achieve some sort of balance between the two; and,
2. the role of pair work and group work in collaborative learning.

As it combined the two concerns listed by the LOTE teachers, the dictogloss (DG) procedure was chosen (Wajnryb, 1990). This collaborative activity, which incorporates a grammar focus within a CLT framework, is popular with ESL teachers, and one that I had used successfully in teaching EFL. Following the research of Swain (1999), who was using DG as one of the collaborative tasks in investigations of the language acquisition of French immersion students in Canadian schools, I was interested to know how DG would work with non-immersion LOTE teachers and students.

The LOTE teachers in my study were particularly interested in activities where they could try out collaboration, with students working in pairs or small groups, thus introducing a more student-centred approach to learning than they had previously used. Thus, teachers willing to participate in the research on a longer-term basis would hopefully be able to sharpen their language awareness, as well as to gain some helpful new perspectives on their teaching and their students' learning. This would, in turn, help me to understand more about their role as language teachers, and myself as a teacher educator and researcher.

Dictogloss

For an understanding of the collaborative activity the LOTE teachers would introduce to their students, the following explanation should be noted.

Aims

Three aims of DG were stated by Wajnryb (1990):

- 1) to provide an opportunity for learners to use their productive grammar in the task of text creation.
- 2) to encourage learners to find out what they do and do not know about English.

- 3) to upgrade and refine the learners' use of the language through a comprehensive analysis of language options in the corrections of the learners' approximate texts. (pp. 6-7)

Although originally devised by Wajnryb for use with learners of English, DG has been adapted by some teachers and researchers for use in teaching languages other than English, as in the present study. Swain (1999) stated that insights from her research with DG "... have relevance for both foreign language teaching per se, as well as content-based language teaching" (p127).

Procedure

To guide teachers in carrying out this collaborative task, Wajnryb (1990) gave an explicit description of the DG procedure:

- a. A short, dense text is read (twice) to the learners at normal speed.
- b. As it is being read, the learners jot down familiar words and phrases.
- c. Working in small groups, the learners pool their battered texts and strive to reconstruct a version of the text from their shared resources.
- d. Each group of students produces its own reconstructed version, aiming at grammatical accuracy and textual cohesion but not at replicating the original text.
- e. The various versions are analysed and compared and the students refine their own texts in the light of the shared scrutiny and discussion.

(pp. 5-6)

Research on Dictogloss

Various studies have investigated how Dictogloss (DG) tasks, collaborative output tasks, might help the learning of L2 grammar in a cooperative learning mode (e.g., Holliday, 1994; Murray, 1994; Read, n.d.; Swain, 1998, 2001; Swain, & Lapkin, 2000, 2001; Lim & Jacobs, 2001; Jacobs & Small, 2003; Leeser, 2004). Murray (1994) found that DG might develop crucial second language writing subskills in learners, such as "metalinguistic decision making, which may incidentally help them in writing" (p. 69). Swain (2001) reported that results of studies using DG as a task which requires written output have shown the output to be particularly useful for language learning in a number of ways: 1) it may promote 'noticing'; 2) it may trigger hypothesis formation and testing; 3) it may encourage 'metatalk' or the use of language to reflect on language use.

The teacher participants in the longitudinal research

There were seven practising LOTE teachers from two secondary schools and one adult setting as the final participants in the longitudinal research. The participants were all teachers of Languages other than English (LOTE). From a group of 20 teachers who initially took part in the Professional Development programs, the final seven teachers were chosen on the basis of their willingness to participate in a longitudinal study. The current 'teaching languages' of the final seven LOTE teacher participants included three European (French and German at secondary level; Dutch in adult settings) and two Asian (Indonesian and Japanese at secondary level). A summary of the teacher profiles, based on information from the Teacher Questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1. The teachers and their educational settings were all given pseudonyms.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from the LOTE teachers, by means of written teacher questionnaires, interviews (individual and focus group), classroom observation and the teachers' reflective diaries in order to view the teaching and learning situations from multiple perspectives. (For a more detailed account of the data collection, see Appendix 2).

In analysing and interpreting the data, categories were established, and then grouped together into broader themes. The aim in reporting the research was to give voice to the participants as far as possible.

Results

Grammar and CLT Approaches in LOTE teaching

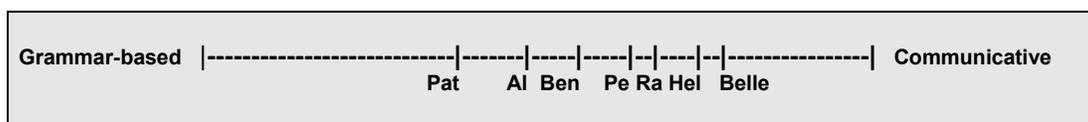
These results deal specifically with the LOTE teachers' beliefs about matters of grammar and communicative language teaching, two aspects of LOTE teaching which are combined in the dictogloss tasks. The first part focuses on questions relating to the teaching approach that the LOTE teachers preferred and/or used in their practice. The

second part is a discussion of the teachers' responses to a questionnaire, The Place of Grammar in Teaching and Learning Languages. See Appendix 3.

Preferred approach to LOTE teaching

On the written Teacher Questionnaire, teachers were asked to mark their approximate placing along a continuum from a grammar-based approach to a communicative approach (CLT) with respect to their preferred approach to language teaching. The results for the seven participating teachers are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Preferred approach to LOTE teaching



In addition to looking at how their backgrounds and beliefs/philosophy about LOTE teaching and learning might influence their practice, the discussion of the specific topic of the approach to teaching grammar is relevant in relation to the use of the DG tasks to develop language skills in a collaborative setting.

The results shown in the Figure above are compared with the comments made by the teachers in the first individual interview about the participants' preferred method of teaching and their views on grammar-based and CLT approaches. However, comparing the placings along the continuum with the remarks about teaching method in relation to LOTE teaching, it became obvious that the LOTE teachers did not necessarily share a common understanding of the terms.

Grammar-based vs. communicative approach to LOTE teaching (interviews)

Not surprisingly, these teachers all believed that LOTE should be taught with a thoughtful mixture of a communicative approach and some form of grammar teaching. Peter thought it was virtually impossible to teach communicatively in a classroom setting. Pat commented that she was influenced by both her own teachers (grammar-based

approach) and her pre-service study of LOTE teaching methods (communicative approach), and favoured a combination of the two. Ben's term of a 'guided communicative' approach was a useful way of capturing his thoughts on how he had been taught as a young man and how he now tried to teach.

Helen had marked her preferred approach quite near the communicative end of the continuum, but in the interview stated that her students didn't do much speaking in French during class, although she strongly believed in oral communication. This seemed to be a perplexing mixture of responses, perhaps influenced by Helen's statement that she needed to improve her own skill in speaking, which she expressed in discussing her challenges in teaching French.

Belle reported that since she had begun to teach adults three years previously, she considered that she had been able to change her teaching approach due to the new freedom she had gained by not having to follow a set curriculum. Rachel mentioned how much she had enjoyed studying grammar as an adult student, but in her teaching she thought it was important to integrate grammar with communicative activities. Alice recalled that she had marked the continuum in the middle, but in talking through her teaching methods in the first interview, she realised that she actually leaned more towards a communicative approach.

The place of grammar in teaching and learning languages

In the present study, the purpose of the written grammar questionnaire, *The Place of Grammar in Teaching and Learning Languages*, was to get a sense of the participants' beliefs about and knowledge of grammar, since the collaborative DG tasks the teachers were going to use involved focusing on grammar in a communicative framework.

Results of the questionnaire

Of the eleven questions in the questionnaire, four are discussed below. (For a complete discussion of the responses, see Harrington, 2005.)

Q2: What is your definition of grammar?

Rachel	Pat	Helen	Alice	Belle
The structure of language and word order.	How a language works the formal rules which underpin language and successful communication the patterns which lie beneath the surface of language.	Language has some recognisable patterns that can be used as shortcuts to using a language.	Rules/construction of language The 'skeleton' holding together the 'flesh' of words and phrases.	A network of rules which are inherent to language.

The word *rule* recurred here, used by Pat, Alice and Belle. This word is also common in connection with the word grammar in the field of Applied Linguistics (e.g., Ur, 1996; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Ur (1996) gave as a possible definition of grammar, "Grammar is a set of rules that define how words (or parts of words) are combined or changed to form acceptable units of meaning within a language" (p. 87).

Of the LOTE teachers, only Pat linked the rules of language with successful communication, an intriguing statement, considering that among all seven teachers she had placed herself at the lowest end of the communicative scale on the Teacher Questionnaire Continuum (Figure 1). However, Helen saw grammatical patterns as shortcuts to using a language, which might also be interpreted as communication. Alice used a biological metaphor, referring to "the 'skeleton' holding together the 'flesh' of words and phrases."

Q5: Briefly recall a really positive experience you've had in teaching grammar.

Rachel	Pat	Helen	Alice	Belle
Teaching personal pronouns and the students enthusiastically ask relevant questions and use the pronouns correctly	-er verbs with Year 8	A student puts a word into the plural following a learned pattern, even though they get the word wrong (it is irregular) they show they understand the pattern.	I have been pleased about the initial reaction of classes in their first exposure to French concepts of gender: they were very accepting of the fact, and of my explanation. No moans about it being stupid compared with English.	The reaction of native speakers: Is that how it works! Now I understand!

This question elicited two kinds of answers: the first group (Rachel, Pat and Helen) wrote of instances when a specific grammar point was clearly understood; the second group (Alice and Belle) described positive reactions from their students after a grammar explanation.

Q6: What is the hardest aspect of grammar to teach in your LOTE?

Rachel	Pat	Helen	Alice	Belle
Affixes attached to verbs.	Sentence structure - word order, use of complex tenses and registers.	If taught out of context, you know the girls are bored.	French: probably the concept of gender, as it is so alien to English. Japanese: particles in general, "wa" and "ga" ("topic" and "subject") in particular. Also the different groups of verbs.	Time - word order

In reply to this question, all the teachers named precise examples of grammar usage in their LOTE, except Helen, who gave no specific example, but instead spoke of the tedium for students if a point of grammar were taught out of context.

Q7: Do you always feel confident about teaching grammar?

Only Rachel answered this question with an unqualified yes. The others mentioned needing to do revision for themselves at times (Helen and Belle), and restating a confusing explanation in a different way (Alice). Pat contrasted teacher confidence with

learner confidence in stating, “I usually feel confident teaching, but not all my students feel confident in learning it.”

Teacher benefits from doing the DG tasks

From the results presented above, it seems clear that the LOTE teachers all had a good metalinguistic knowledge of grammar and already used this knowledge extensively in their teaching. What was attractive for them in this research, however, was the opportunity to use their considerable awareness of grammar in a new way by incorporating it into communicative activities to be carried out by their students in pairs.

In the focus groups held at the conclusion of the research, the teachers reported that they benefited from learning how to construct and administer the DG tasks, as well observing their students doing the task, listening to student feedback, and discussing some of the strategies presented in the student reflections on the tasks. They were also pleased that the tasks engaged the learners in using all the language skills, although the listening and writing skills were particularly well exercised. Agreeing to participate in this research seemed to give the teachers permission to reflect more deeply on the activities they were undertaking. Even though teachers often think about their teaching, they are usually too busy to record or write reflections on teaching and learning episodes. They reported that the participation in the present research gave them an opportunity and a reason to consider a specific activity, the DG procedure, to pay close attention to how the students collaborated on the task. They particularly welcomed the chance to discuss the activities with both the researcher and with other participants.

Teacher collaborative learning

In a review of teacher cognition in language teaching, Borg (2003) called for further studies in a wider range of teaching contexts “where [teacher] cognitions are explored with direct reference to what teachers do in classrooms and to teachers’ commentaries on their work ...” (p. 102). This research has begun to address this call in the contexts of secondary and adult language education, but clearly much investigation remains to be done.

The idea of collaboration applies equally for teachers as for learners. There is now a good deal of evidence of research by teacher educators engaged in mutual support for self-study, the same is not generally well developed among teachers outside university settings. Although there are a few examples of this sort of teacher collaboration (such as PEEL; Baird & Mitchell, 1986; Baird & Northfield, 1992), most teachers in school settings work in isolation from their peers.

In the area of language teaching and learning, Allwright (2003), a longstanding proponent of teacher research in language classrooms, proposed the idea of ‘exploratory practice’, which uses ‘puzzles and puzzling’ to connect with Vygotsky’s “zones of proximal development” as a way to rethink practitioner research. This would require a sharper focus on understanding classroom environments, rather than merely an attempt at improvement by efficiently solving technical teaching problems without consideration of the social interactions that influence classroom learning.

Concluding remarks

The present study has demonstrated that change can be introduced to a small group of interested teachers, firstly by directly asking what aspects of their practice they are interested in changing and then by working with them over a period of months on a feature of their language teaching that they perceive to have direct relevance for the L2 learning of their students. However, there needs to be ongoing commitment to this sort of teacher collaborative activity. Teachers must be given the time to work and reflect together. This time requires substantial funding, so studies that demonstrate the value of such work need to be highlighted and more widely disseminated.

Conclusion

The two studies reported on in this paper deal with different aspects of teacher learning in second language teaching contexts. The first study shows that twelve teachers undertaking a postgraduate TESOL practicum generally demonstrated the ability to correct ungrammatical English sentences but showed more limited ability to formulate relevant grammar rules and to use metalanguage. This finding is in contrast to the

teachers' expressed beliefs about the importance of this kind of knowledge relating to the content of their teaching.

The second study shows how seven experienced teachers of languages other than English (LOTE), who already had a well-developed knowledge of sentence-level grammar in their teaching, were able to incorporate that knowledge into a new kind of teaching activity introduced during professional development sessions by the researcher. A positive outcome of this professional development was that teachers who worked together in the sessions subsequently used more collaborative learning tasks with their own students..

In this paper, we have argued that there is a need for second and foreign language teachers to develop language awareness, and have offered an example of how teacher educators might do this.

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Appendix 1: Profiles of the LOTE teachers

Name/ Insti- tution	Sex	Age grp	Country of birth	Native language	Other langs known	Teaching langs	LOTEs now teaching	LOTE levels now t'ing	Total years of t'ing exp	Yrs of LOTE t'ing exp
Peter/G reen- bank Coll.	M	50+	U.K.	English	German French Norwegian Latin Russian Spanish Modern Greek Gaelic Esperanto	French German Russian	German French	7-12 7-10	32	32
Ben/ Green- bank Coll.	M	50+	Australia	English	German	German	German	7-8	34	32
Rachel Green- Bank Coll.	F	50+	Australia	German	English French Indonesian	Indonesian	Indonesi- an	8	22	1
Pat/ High- grove Coll	F	40-4 9	Australia	English	French Hebrew Yiddish	French Hebrew	French	8,10, 11 12	19	19
Helen/ High- Grove Coll.	F	40-4 9	Australia	English	French	French	French	7, 9	24	18
Alice/ High- Grove Coll.	F	30-3 9	Australia	English	Japanese French Indonesian	Japanese French	Japanese French	9,10 P-6	2.5	2.5
Belle/ Lyons TAFE	F	50+	The Nether- lands	Dutch	English French Spanish Italian	French Dutch	Dutch	Adult	25	25

Appendix 2: Steps in data collection with the LOTE teachers

1. Work with teachers on PD activities on a variety of topics over a number of months in after-school/lunchtime workshops and

seminars as well as spare periods of individual teachers

2. Identify which topics most interest teachers for their own teaching – Communicative vs Grammar-based and Collaborative

Learning tasks

3. Develop topic/s into ideas for working with individual teachers and their students

4. Identify individual teachers who are willing to participate in the research

5. Teachers fill in background questionnaires

6. Teachers fill in questionnaires on Grammar (20 Ts)

7. Develop semi-structured interview schedule

8. Trial interview questionnaires and refine questionnaires

9. Conduct semi-structured, extended (about 1+ hr) individual interviews with 10 teachers

10. Identify teachers who are willing to continue in the longitudinal research and to try out DG tasks with their Ss (7 Ts)

11. Meet with teachers individually to discuss suitable tasks for their specific LOTE

12. Teachers try out DG task/s with one or more classes

13. Teachers collect students' written pairwork on DG task and oral/written comments on working in pairs

14. Teachers write reflections on trying first DG task with students

15. Interview teachers about written reflections on first task(s)

16 Visit LOTE classes in order to:

observe class doing a DG task

make observation notes

audio-tape teacher and 3 pairs of students (4 separate tapes) engaged in the DG task.(Student pairs for recording chosen by teacher (from volunteers) as one from roughly high, medium and low levels of ability.)

conduct a reflective discussion with students for about 10 minutes after the DG task is completed (audio-taped)

collect a copy of the teacher's DG task

collect a copy of each student pair's written DG summary

17. Teacher writes reflections on observed DG task

18. Interview T for reflections on the process of doing the DG task, with focus on suitability of the task and emphasis on collaborative learning

19. Focus group discussion questions sent to teachers. Ts asked to write brief preparatory notes about questions and hand to researcher after focus group discussions.

20. Focus group discussion (semi-structured) with participating teachers in two groups of three; Discussion audio taped. The seventh teacher, who could not attend a focus group, sent written answers to the questions.

Appendix 3: Written questionnaire - The place of grammar in teaching and learning languages

Q1: What is the first thing that comes into your head when you hear the word "grammar"?

Q2: What is your definition of grammar?

Q3: How were you taught grammar at school?

Q4: Do you like grammar?

Q5: Briefly recall a really positive experience you've had in teaching grammar.

Q6: What is the hardest aspect of grammar to teach in your LOTE?

Q7: Do you always feel confident about teaching grammar?

Q8 (a): Do you ever get frustrated because you know that you have taught certain aspect of grammar, but a student hasn't learned it?

Q8 (b): Why do you think this happens?

Q9: In your experience, what kind of student likes grammar?

Q10: Can all students learn grammar?

Q11: Will the students learn the grammar of a LOTE naturally if they don't have formal instruction?