

Aspects of implicit learning and explicit learning of spanish language

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Abstract

In teaching foreign languages, different theoretical concepts on presentation and language teaching methods have emerged from different traditions. In this work are examined theories of continuity between implicit and explicit learning, taking into account also how these theories are reviewed by many linguists. The benefits of explicit and implicit grammar knowledge in the process of learning a foreign language have increasingly been put at the center of language debates. The debate arises from the fact that speaking a language is an automatic action; therefore, it assumes an unconscious or implicit way of acquisition form, an act done instinctively. But teaching of grammar implies an act done consciously. In our case the main question is what the role between these two acquisition forms is. The central idea of this proposal was the development of the concept of grammar awareness - grammar consciousness raising.

Keywords: *learning of spanish, grammar activities, grammar rule, Grammar -Translation and Audio Linguistic Methods*

1.Introduction

In this work are examined theories of continuity between implicit and explicit learning, taking into account also how these theories are reviewed by many linguists. To speak a language is considered as an automatic action, it assumes a recognition in the form of unconscious or in other words, an act realized instinctively.

But teaching of grammar implies an act done in the form of voluntary. In our case the main question is what is the role between these two knowledge, and this will be examine in this paper. Another issue to be addressed is the diference between explicit and implicit knowledge in order to establish a psycholinguistic model during the learning process of grammar.

Once the student has acquired knowledge of grammar, it arrives to practice through exercises that can be implicit and the explicit nature. Precisely this is what we will speak about at the last part of the paper.

2. Theories of continuity between explicit and implicit learning

In teaching foreign languages, different theoretical concepts on presentation and language teaching methods have emerged from different traditions. The traditional Method of Grammar and Translation (MGT) and the Cognitive Method (Zanón, 2007) of '60 -'70 of the 20th-century, tried to take advantage of operational skills of adolescents and adults of how they managed to analyze and reflect on a grammatical model based on rules. Both methods show that this ability enables learning through explicit rules of grammar, as it is considered that the perception and awareness of second language learning rules are inevitable to learn before being used in grammar activities.

In contrast to other methods, Audio-Linguistic Method or the Method of Communicative Approaches (MCA), this argued that foreign languages teaching to children as well as to adults happen implicitly, the same as the native language. The circumstances that lead to these situations are various, but we are going to highlight only some of them, following Jenaro Ortega, a professor at the University of Barcelona (1988), who presents the above mentioned in the article "Some considerations on the importance of grammar in learning Spanish as a second language." (Ortega, 1998). On one hand there were Grammar -Translation and Audio Linguistic Methods in contrast to those methods that put the emphasis on the importance of grammar content and its processes which were later left behind.

In the first case was presented explicit grammar, with a long set of rules including unfamiliar cases in the current language, a text was used to be translated and at the same time different grammatical patterns were practised through that text.

In the second case, relying on descriptive skills of structural linguistics and assumptions of applied linguistics in language learning, grammar was reduced to a strict order of structures that were implicitly presented with brief dialogues continuously repeated with minor lexical and morphosyntactic changes. In both cases, the errors were perseveringly corrected. One offered examples of written language, that fit the students' language level; in the other, the dialogues served as a mean to introduce linguistic structures that were needed to be taught, but in the end they resulted boring for the student. In short, none of these methods used to motivate or encourage communication, none of them includes objectives or students' linguistic needs. Both methods ended in routine practice and stayed away from linguistic and vital interests of the students.

3. The benefits of explicit and implicit grammatical knowledge acquisition.

The benefits of explicit and implicit grammar knowledge in the process of learning a foreign language have increasingly been put at the center of language debates. (Dekeyser, 2003; Doughty,

2004; N. Ellis, 2008; Nassaji y Fotos, 2011; Van Patten y BENATI 2010.) The debate arises from the fact that speaking a language is an automatic action, therefore, it assumes an unconscious or implicit way of acquisition form, an act done instinctively. But teaching of grammar implies an act done consciously. In our case the main question is what the role between these two acquisition forms is.

In his edition of 1993 (Ellis), professor Rod Ellis offers a discovery of the psycho-linguistics processes included in grammar language teaching. Let us look as follows:

Initially we start from the difference between explicit and implicit knowledge in order to establish a psycho-linguistics model to grammar learning process.

❖ Grammatical knowledge of explicit form deals with the rules and structures of a foreign language. They are organized as a separate system consciously by the student. The characteristics of this knowledge form are:

- They are composed of rules or abstract presentations of grammatical function (eg morphological endings system of first conjugation verbs ending in *-ar-*, as *Habla-ar cant-ar llama- ar*, etc.)
- These grammar rules are analyzed before as they can be described or classified.
- Knowledge is explicative in the moment grammatical rules are in the function of linguistic communication.
- The student can talk about these rules without hesitation from the moment he acquires the grammar of the language.

❖ Implicit grammatical knowledge are of instinctive or reflexive nature and are not formulated as a body of regulation. The characteristics of this knowledge form are:

- They consist of units without analyzing two types: phrase-formula and rules instinctive.
- Phrases- formula are linguistics structures without being previously analyzed, learned naturally, for example: ¿Que tal? - How are you? / What's going on?; ¿Puedes pasarme...? - Can you give me...?
- Grammar rules of instinctive nature are created by the student when he speaks or writes spontaneously.
- This is shown through grammar analyses of various linguistic forms, when learners come to realize how to make use of the language system.
- Implicit knowledge is not consciously developed. For example, most speakers of the Spanish as a first language are not able to explain the grammatical functions of language forms used by them.

Both implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge, are used in function of communication, but there are some linguistic borders, and in this case the student must use explicit knowledge in verbal as well as in written communication. The main function of explicit knowledge during the process of communication is that of monitoring, that is, when reviewing and correcting the formal qualities of linguistics structures that are used by the learner.

According to Krashen (1982), monitoring can take place only when three conditions apply. The learner should:

1. Recognize the existence of an error in language production.
2. Recognize the correct forms that enable them to carry out the correction.
3. Have enough time to analyze the points 1 and 2 above mentioned (Krashen)

These factors make that explicit knowledge to have a secondary role in the use of language in natural form. Consequently, implicit knowledge or internal grammar, are those prevailing in the use of linguistic communication.

But according to Robert Dekeyser (http://www.academia.edu/907788/Robert_DeKeyser), given the dichotomy between implicit and explicit knowledge, it seemed appropriate to focus attention only on explicit knowledge or implicit knowledge only. Therefore, teaching grammar in two different directions was proposed:

- a) Towards the acknowledgement of explicit nature, which facilitates the process of implicit learning of grammar. This means that it allows the analysis of monitoring and restructuring of grammar.
- b) The use of grammar that is focused on communication activities. This means that more focus should be emphasized on the use of grammatical function of different linguistic forms.

4. The influence of explicit and implicit knowledge on grammar activities

Various authors as Fotos and Ellis in 1991 (Fotos), Gomez del Estal and Zanon 1999 (Gòmez del Estal), established a set of criteria for the development of grammar activities, in order to facilitate detection of linguistic rules by the students themselves. This was done through observations of grammatical forms in semantic contexts. The central idea of this proposal was the development of the concept of grammar awareness - grammar consciousness raising (Sharwood-Smith).

According to Shawood, the main characteristics of teaching grammar in this case are:

1. Grammar consciousness activities enable pupils to think of certain grammatical about phenomena.
2. These activities are developed to urge the analysis and understanding of the forms and functions of these phenomena.
3. Grammar conscious activities enable the learner to identify grammar rules.
4. The correct use of these grammar structures must be essential in solving these activities.
5. Linguistic forms of communicative nature should be included in these activities.
6. The process should include a stage of feedback to the learner that has to do with the use of grammatical structures.

These grammar activities are found in the language manual such as *Equipo Prisma* 2006 (Ibidem).

Once the learner has acquired grammar knowledge, he manages to practice through exercises that can be of implicit or explicit nature. Exercises of implicit form may be used in different grammar structures. For example, when focusing on the prepositions of place, an activity can be used as follows: the learner draws a landscape without showing it to his friend, he begins to describe using prepositions of place so that the friend listens and reproduces the same description. Prepositions of place are taught implicitly through this exercise. Another activity of grammar implicit nature may be on the adjective comparative forms, making a description of two famous cities by comparing them.

As regards grammar activities of explicit form, they have semantic content as a key component to their solutions, but the content of this communication is a grammatical phenomenon. For example, grammar activities of explicit form may also be considered the exercises of the use of past tenses. Analyzing first the functions of these tenses, we ask the learner to do the exercises. We know that in Spanish:

- Al pretérito indefinido (Past Simple Tense) – it expresses a completed action in the past which is archived, "Ayer fui al cumpleaños de Maria" - "I was to Maria's birthday party yesterday."; it is also used to refer an action that interrupts another action in the past: "Cuando estaba paseando, de pronto, vi or Juan" - "I was walking, when immediately, I saw Juan."; also used to evaluate an experience in the past, " Fueron unas vacaciones estupendas " - "They were great holidays."
- Al pretérito imperfecto (Present perfect Tense) – Present perfect tense is used to express repeated actions in the past "De pequeña jugaba con las muñecas" - "I used to play with dolls when I was a child.", used to compare the past to the present: "Antes jugaba mucho al tennis, pero ahora ya no "; it is used to describe people, places, objects or different situations in the past, "Los Mayas vivian en Centroamérica" - "The Maya used to live in Central America."; it is used to ask for something in a polite manner: " Querria informacion sobre el apartamento en alquiler." - "I would like some information about the flat on rent"; it is used to do change from direct to indirect speech: "El hotel es estupendo - dijo que el hotel era estupendo." - "The hotel is wonderful - She said that the hotel was wonderful."
- pretérito perfecto – present perfect tense, it is used to express past experience that connects the speaker to the present: "Este verano ha estado en España". - "I have been to Spain this summer". In this case the action of the past, so summer is associated with the same year that we are because we have emphasized this summer of the year that we currently are.
- El pretérito pluscuamperfecto – past perfect tense. It is used to describe an action which happened before another action in the past, : "Cuando Ana llegó a la estacion, el tren habia salido" - "When Anna arrived at the station, the train had departed." (Maximiano Cortés, Mercedes Fonseca).

So based on the meaning of the sentences in the past tense, students will be able to work out the exercises, from the moment they are directed by grammatical explanation of past tenses, that was given by the teacher. These types of exercises are not intended to provide an immediate solution of given grammatical phenomenon; they are intended, primarily, to focus the learner's attention on the grammar characteristics and making them conscious on their solution (Elis). Consequently, we are dealing with activities through which the learner manages to think on a concrete grammatical

phenomenon. These activities may present a deductive approach, in order to change or improve a grammar rule which was presented. These activities may also have a heuristic approach, through which the learner manages to identify the rule himself from the analysis of grammar data the learner faces. Thanks to this process, the explicit nature of grammar activities, manages to enhance the learners' attention towards aspects of grammar and in this way they will be promoted to the ability to make adjustments in the linguistic structures that are produce by them.

The theoretical point of view that I support in this analysis is that co-operation between these two theories; implicit and the explicit theory. To show communicative grammar contexts where the cooperation learner-learner is emphasized and this is achieved thanks to the teaching through grammar tasks and activities that that focuses widely on teaching grammar explicitly through various techniques of linguistic phenomena. The combination of both explicit and implicit knowledge enables the learner to be provided with a good deal of knowledge and methods on different language phenomena of the Spanish language.

5. Conclusions

Finally, we can say that a definite grammar teaching method has not yet been specifically established, therefore we are not able to define which the right way is: implicit or explicit form. The knowledge obtained consciously are the product of explicit teaching and those obtained consciously or through personal insight that are the product of implicit teaching, based on the monitor model of Krashen.

According to Krashen (1982), learning a foreign language, like learning the mother tongue, comes in natural form as a result of implicit processes that occur while the learner is studying the rules of a foreign language. Krashen argues that implicit and explicit knowledge are totally independent and they are present in different mental processes and information gathering. This indicates that explicit recognition does not interact with them implicitly and consequently the teaching of grammar consciously is unnecessary in situations of linguistic communication.

On the other hand, linguistic interaction, the discovery and establishment of grammatical rules is related to the process of acquisition and that of speaking a foreign language. What characterizes speaking spontaneously and the natural acquisition process is the use of discourse and this compensates and complements the lack of grammar competence from the learner. Nevertheless, I must emphasize that in most cases happens the opposite: the teacher asks learners to use long sentences, taking into account the Spanish language as the mother tongue, not as a foreign language.

Teachers often tend more to correct linguistic mistakes rather than to collaborate and serve them as supporting points. In this way they forget that communication plays an important role in the

acquisition of syntactic structures of a foreign language. A practical suggestion in this case would be that grammar knowledge of explicit form can be used to plan various communicative situations. For example: when making up a dialogue in the classroom, telephone calls, text analysis with short answers, and other similar situations, the student can predict who should be grammatical elements that use, which will enable him to use phrases consciously.

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