Practical implications for fostering foreign language learners' strategy use in grammar learning

Tanja Angelovska (University of Salzburg)
Angela Hahn (University of Munich)
Why are you here?  
What are your expectations?

- Teaching grammar
- Approaches: functional and pedagogical
- Grammar learning strategies
- „I really want to know where my students are“
- „I want to take some practical tools“
- „It is difficult to teach grammar“
- „I want advice and shared experiences“
Your grammar learning strategies? (as learners and as teachers)

- "I started with PPP. I didn't have the choice. Whatever you do is dependent on the teacher."
- Explicit vs. Implicit
- "I learned German very analytically. I had the metalanguage to talk about."
- "Children coming from non-English L1 background did better at the grammar finals."
- "Grammar is related to speaking"
- "bringing it through phonology and all sorts of variables in there"
- "adult learners care about grammar in contrast to children"
- "focusing on the rules"
Outline

1. Intro: why focus on learners' strategy use in grammar learning?
2. "Reasoning" within Processing Instruction? Expanding the grammar learning strategy repertoire
3. L3 learners employ more grammar learning strategies? Exploiting "transfer" as a strategy
4. Hands-on
5. Discussion and conclusion
Why focus on learners’ strategy use in grammar learning?

"...strategies employed to learn and gain control over target language subsystems rather than more general investigations of strategic learning. The focus would be on areas that have thus far been somewhat neglected in research, namely grammar, pronunciation, and pragmatics..."
Grammar Learning strategies

‘deliberate thoughts and actions students consciously employ for learning and getting better control over the use of grammar structures.’ (Cohen et al 2011:147)

- Ignored in the research literature for a long time (Oxford and Lee 2007)
- How the students used strategies involving mental images in order to remember the correct use of grammatical forms (Morales & Smith, 2008)
- A questionnaire-based study of reported strategy use (Pawlak, 2009)
- Construction of a website with strategies for learning and performing Spanish grammar (Cohen, Pinilla-Herrera, Thompson & Witzig 2011)
The CARLA Spanish Grammar Project

Cohen, Pinilla-Herrera, Thompson & Witzig (2011)

To remember that in Spanish, the student memorizes an English sentence using the Spanish order: *You it I am bringing.* By translating this odd sentence back into Spanish, she makes sure she puts the pronouns in the right order.

"I just try to memorize that order."

The strategy self-regulation model & cognitive strategies

Based on many examples of a given structure that I encounter, I figure out the grammar rule in Hungarian. It’s not as interesting when someone else tells me the rules (Oxford 2011:39).
Processing Instruction (the underpinning theory)

Pedagogical intervention informed by the Input Processing Theory (VanPatten, 2004)
- Developing system is dependent on input for its growth
  - Internal strategies might work against the perception and processing of grammatical form in the input
  - Learners have limited capacities for processing information

What psycholinguistics strategies do L2 learners use in processing input?
Strategy 1. The Primacy of Meaning (Learners process input for meaning before they process it for form)
  - Last night we walked along the beach -
Strategy 2. The First Noun (Learners tend to process the first noun or pronoun they encounter in a sentence as the subject or agent)
  - Paul was kissed by Angela -
Processing instruction (the pedagogical intervention)

- Structured input tasks give learners practice-processing the target form, not producing it. They tackle a processing problem!
- Promotes form-meaning connections!
- Two types of structured input tasks:
  - Referential activities are those for which there is a right or wrong answer and for which the learner must rely on the targeted grammatical form to get meaning
  - Affective structured input activities are those in which learners express an opinion, belief, or some other affective response and are engaged in processing information about the real world
PI Classroom Study

Classroom study that empirically address the role that age might play in the results generated by *Processing Instruction*

- The specific aims of the study are threefold:
  - To measure the effects of PI in altering the *Lexical Preference Principle*
  - To test the effects of PI on the acquisition English *simple past tense* by L1 German native speakers
  - To measure any durable effects for PI

*(Angelovska & Benati 2013; Benati & Angelovska 2015)*
Research Questions

- (Q1): Will PI equally affect children and adults native speakers of German in their ability to process the past simple regular tense -ed as measured by two interpretation sentence-level tasks (with different cognitive demands)?

- (Q2): Will the positive effects of instruction be retained over time by both age groups?

(Angelovska & Benati 2013; Benati & Angelovska 2015)
Results

- Both age groups made similar gains and the effects were retained over time.
- Both age groups gained in their ability to interpret English past tense forms.
- The post hoc analysis for pre-test to post-test also revealed that the adults group performed better than the children’s group ($p = .000$).
- Similarly the post-hoc comparisons on the raw scores from post-test 1 to post-test 2 revealed that the adults group performed better than the children’s group ($p = .000$).
Interpretation

Processing instruction is effective:

- for helping young and adult L2 learners to make accurate form-meaning connections
- for both age groups, if the interpretation tasks are cognitively less demanding
- more for adults, if the interpretation task is cognitively more demanding

Difference in gains might be due to the following:

- adults, as more mature individuals with high cognitive abilities, handled better the cognitive-demanding modified interpretation task, AND
- adults, as more experienced learners, might have developed better cognitive strategies through the PI.

What about experienced learners who use more than one foreign language on a daily basis? Do they use more and better grammar learning strategies?

(Angelovska & Benati 2013; Benati & Angelovska 2015)
A study with third language (L3) learners

(Angelovska & Hahn 2014)
Research methodology

- **Aim:** to understand how L3 learner reflect on their L3 grammar strategy use.

- **Research questions:**
  - What grammar learning strategies do English L3 learners at different proficiency levels employ when reflecting on their written productions?
  - What can teachers do to raise language awareness about L3 grammar?

- **Instruments:**
  - Written text productions (average word number per text: 306), topic-free choice
  - Individual 30 min „language reflection session“, i.e. „Stimulated Recall“ accessing learners' reflections on mental processes (MacKey & Gass 2005).
Participants

- Consecutively acquired:
  \[ \text{L1 X} \rightarrow \text{L2 German} \rightarrow \text{L3 English} \]
- 13 learners
- L2 German: C1/C2, certificate
- L3 English: results from Oxford Quick Placement Test
RQ1: What grammar learning strategies English L3 learners at different proficiency levels employ when reflecting on their written productions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Selected L3 learners’ statements from the stimulated recall (translated from German in English):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ2: What can teachers do to raise language awareness about L3 grammar?

- Challenging questions (aim: guessing and detecting)
- Teacher-initiated requests for cross-linguistic comparisons
- Paralinguistic signs
- Focusing and giving explicit information

(Angelovska & Hahn 2014)
Hands-on 1

- Work in groups of 3-4 and make suggestions for a "(cognitive) grammar learning strategy inventory for L3 learners".
Your ideas

- Looking for generic strategies when dealing with different Ls
- Getting learners to identify rules, raising awareness
- Steven: learning lexical chunks as prototypes, realizes and uses his model
- Reflecting consciously, seeking explicit feedback
- Rehearsing, rule-based practice and drills (after deeper processing)
- -s and the snake (visual mental image)
- Dative in German (boy and girl story)
- Input and structured-input as a pre-step to conscious awareness raising and output-practice
- „to make myself participant in situations where I need to use it“
- Multisensory approach


