

Slavica Čepon

## Grammar – an obligatory ‘optional extra’?

### Abstract

This paper first focuses on general English (GE) attrition and its possible consequences for business English (BE) students at Ljubljana's Faculty of Economics (FELU). It then discusses the role of grammar within the areas of foreign language (FL) and BE teaching/learning as well as various opinions regarding the advantages of explicit FL/grammar instruction over implicit FL/grammar instruction. The author concludes that BE learners as economics students at the FELU must be given an opportunity to continue learning FL uninterruptedly. The author's suggestion is the introduction of grammar instruction in BE contexts in the first year at the faculty. By the latter the author refers to a combination of meaningful uses of a FL and form-focused instruction (FFI) in BE contexts. The author emphasizes that FL teaching/learning policies of certain academic institutions in Slovenia that do not offer FL instruction at all, or, not at periods crucial for FL learning of non-native speakers, are essentially flawed.

**Ključne besede:** business English, language attrition, explicit/implicit grammar instruction, FonF/FoF approach, form-focused instruction/FFI.

*"The grammarian has no more  
right to decree how people  
should speak than the physicist  
has to decree how electrons  
should move".*

(Cook, 2001: 20)

### 1. Summary

This paper first focuses on general English (GE) attrition and its possible consequences for students studying business English (BE) at Ljubljana's Faculty of Economics (FELU) - that is, future economists. Namely, students of BE require mastery of GE as a necessary prerequisite for further BE instruction. Since the FELU has no organized foreign language (FL) instruction for first-year students, BE students-to-be spend a year or two not using GE before BE lectures start in second

year<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the processes of GE attrition during this special transition period, when secondary-school students become university students and several years of studying GE transmute into studying BE, are deemed to be particularly detrimental to economics students at the FELU.

Based on the findings of a large-scale study of the language needs of economics students, which presented evidence of the processes of GE attrition slowly setting in during this lengthy period of FL disuse (Čepon 2006), the article makes a case for providing FL instruction and in our case grammar in BE contexts, in the first year at the faculty.

This paper discusses the role of grammar within the areas of FL and BE teaching/learning as well as various opinions regarding the advantages of explicit FL/grammar instruction over implicit FL/grammar instruction. Some of the likely benefits of introducing grammar instruction in BE contexts are combating language attrition of first-year economics students, easing the transition from GE to BE teaching/learning and above all, enabling continuity in FL study. One of the disadvantages for BE teachers is teaching pre-experience learners, thus also having to act as an expert in the area of students' carrier content and not just being an expert in the area of real content - foreign language.

Students' goals are to communicate in FL/L2. Grammar contributes to that goal, therefore, according to experts, it must be regarded as an obligatory "optional extra" (Cook, 2001: 39).

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 The importance of grammar

During the past 30 years or so we have seen grammar move from a central position in language teaching to positions of lesser importance<sup>2</sup>, and back, although it has never again reached previous importance. In addition, over the years its concept has also changed from prescribing how a language should be used to grammar focusing on actual language use (Nunan, 1999).

Grammar has held and still holds a central position in language teaching due to the fact that "there is ample evidence to demonstrate that teaching grammar works" (Ellis, 2006: 102). Grammar has been described as interwoven with meaning, social function and discourse (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Grammatical competence, along with sociolinguistic and strategic competences, is seen as crucial for mastering

---

<sup>1</sup> Rižnar (2010) states that a hefty percentage of tertiary institutions in Slovenia (14.5 %) do not offer FL at all or provide only English instruction.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that the zero grammar approach was popular it never really took hold (Ellis, 2006).

communicative competence. In this new view, grammar, lexis and phonology are resources for creating meaning in social communication that need to be learned due to the fact that those systems in FL/L2 do not develop on their own (Canale and Swain, 1980; Tarone and Yule, 1989; Frodesen, 2001). Experts have come to realize that both vocabulary and grammar are essential for communication, so neither area should be neglected at the expense of the other one (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Regardless of the fact how much importance has been ascribed to various aspects of FL/L2 study by linguists, they all seem to be curiously interconnected to each other via grammar - "the invisible central spine that holds everything else together" (Cook, 2001: 24).

A new broader, non-traditional approach sees grammar as interesting and helpful for effective language learning in itself and an opposite to traditional grammar rule-teaching. Rather than the learning of prescriptive rules, grammar has become a means of developing learners' ability to communicate meaningfully, appropriately and effectively, i.e., "an integral part of language use" (Frodesen, 2001: 234) and "a voyage of discovery into the patterns of language" (Hawkins, 1984: 150). By many experts "Language learning is essentially grammar learning and it is a mistake to think otherwise" (Widdowson, 1988, as cited in Frodesen, 2001: 234) and "knowledge of a language means knowing its grammar" (Ur, 1996: 76). Essentially, contemporary FL/L2 teaching/learning experts agree that "The essence of language lies in grammar" (Nunan, 1999: 96) since "Grammar exists to enable us to mean" (Nunan, 1991: 153).

However, despite all this evidence, the role of grammar in contemporary ESL/EFL is still undefined since nobody is certain in what way, how much and when to teach grammar. Its place still remains rather controversial since the experts in the field of teaching grammar have expressed a variety of views on this issue - many of them just pointing to the essential complexity of the issue. Consequently, Dörnyei (2009), for instance, claims that "in this latest development in SLA theory the term 'grammar' has been carefully avoided" (ibid: 281).

The most comprehensive model of grammar has been created by Larsen-Freeman (2001) who integrated three traditionally separate aspects of linguistics, i.e. syntax (form), semantics (meaning) and pragmatics (use) into grammar as a higher concept within linguistics.

### 3. Problem definition

The impetus for the paper developed through the author's experience teaching BE at the FELU. Therefore, the paper deals with the issue of grammar instruction primarily within BE study, which is extremely important for the future professional life of students at the FELU. In the Slovenian environment, students will undoubtedly use BE for the needs of their profession, job and work place (Čepon 2006).

Due to no organized FL instruction for first-year economics students, they are forced to stop learning a FL uninterruptedly. Even worse, they do not just discontinue studying a FL but stop using GE almost completely before the lectures in BE start in the second year at the FELU<sup>3</sup>. This one-/two-year hiatus<sup>4</sup> is deemed to be the greatest obstacle on their road to successful BE learning since it causes not only the attrition of GE grammar, as the basis for teaching/learning GE<sup>5</sup>, but also the attrition of GE itself, as the basis for teaching/learning BE<sup>6</sup> (e.g. Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

Admittedly, enabling continuity in FL study is especially important for economics students at the FELU for at least two reasons: firstly, they are non-native speakers of English, and secondly, they are in the period of completing GE study and beginning BE study on GE foundations<sup>7</sup>. For such students, a mere retention of the previously acquired GE during a one-/two-year hiatus in FL teaching/learning at the FELU would be quite difficult, let alone studying BE after the processes of GE attrition have started. Consequently, even advanced students with high grades after finishing the English matura exam find BE instruction in the second year quite challenging (Čepon 2006).

From this perspective, one could easily claim that the onset of GE attrition due to no FL study in a first-year tertiary environment clearly impedes economics students' further study of BE at the FELU and in a way, their future professional and career development<sup>8</sup>.

Although attaining FL/L2 linguistic accuracy via grammar instruction and thus producing genuine bilinguals does not seem like an achievable goal of FL/L2 instruction, lately several experts in the area of FL/L2 teaching/learning (e.g. Dörnyei, 2009) have started arguing in favour of explicit FL/L2 and explicit grammar instruction, or rather, knowing how to combine the two. For the purposes of this article we have devoted our attention to explicit grammar instruction in BE contexts.

<sup>3</sup> During this period, the students make insufficient use of additional opportunities to retain their FL knowledge, so this period results in almost complete non-use of English (Čepon 2006). According to Čepon (*ibid*), first-year economics students speak English less than one minute daily on average.

<sup>4</sup> The period of FL disuse may even extend to almost two years due to failed classes.

<sup>5</sup> Klapper (2006) remarks that "advanced learners entering university often experience quite a culture shock where grammar is concerned" (*ibid*: 397).

<sup>6</sup> Expert literature consistently emphasizes the extreme importance of gaining new knowledge on the basis of already internalized, existing prior knowledge (e.g.. Ausubel, 1963, as cited in Marentič – Požarnik, 2000: 44).

<sup>7</sup> Formally, faculty management does not demand evaluation of prior GE knowledge before the start of BE lectures in the second year and BE instructors therefore do not perform such tests.

<sup>8</sup> Apparently, little FL/L2 knowledge is a dangerous thing. According to a study of 2000 small and medium-sized enterprises and 30 multinationals from 29 European countries (CILT, ELAN 2006) it is possible to assess the devastating impact of a lack of FL/L2 knowledge on the effectiveness and the profitability of modern businesses. Pearson (1989) warns that it is a mistake to imagine that export selling is the only function in a multinational company that requires the knowledge of FL/L2 – other operations in such companies may require even broader FL/L2 proficiency from their employees.

The author concludes that possible first-year BE instruction - that is, at the beginning of studies at the FELU, when the students are still receptive as well as motivated enough for everything new due to adjusting to their study program - would internally motivate students to learn a FL and primarily stall the FL attrition processes. Greater contact and as early contact as possible for BE students would improve their FL knowledge.

#### 4. Grammatical instruction

Several books have been published on the place of grammar in the curriculum, most of them discussing different views on what it means to teach grammar. The problem with grammatical instruction may not lie in the teaching methodology itself but in the oversimplified understanding of a connection between L2 learner's conscious awareness of a rule and the ability to use it. Grammatical instruction as such seems neither important nor adequate for learning FL/L2<sup>9</sup> since teaching grammar does not enable learners to communicate effectively in real-life (Ur, 1996). The main goal of FL/L2 teaching/learning is to foster the internal processes for building up FL/L2 knowledge subconsciously. It is achieved when students can confidently and competently use FL/L2 in an unconscious sense. The function of grammar is to assist that within the context of FL/L2 teaching/learning methodology. To make things more complicated, Nunan (1999) offers evidence that even learners at the same level of language proficiency differ regarding their conceptualizations of grammatical rules, so he concludes that FL/L2 learners "grow their own grammars" (ibid: 113).

Knowing the grammar of a FL/L2 is important since it is a means of achieving linguistic accuracy - the more accurately a message is conveyed in FL/L2, the lesser the opportunities for misunderstanding in communication. Grammar is also possible to define from the point of view of the lack of FL/L2 grammatical competence - if/when the communicators do not participate willingly and fully in the conversational exchange, the communicative burden is not being shared equally and communication breaks down. Therefore, linguistic accuracy achieved via FL/L2 grammar accuracy contributes to the speaker's ability to successfully produce his/her own meaning in FL/L2.

As expected, there are opponents (e.g., Krashen, 1985) as well as proponents of grammar instruction (e.g., White, 1987; Dörnyei, 2009). Lightbown and Spada (2006) are for instance confident that exposure to meaning in comprehensible input and mere reliance on communication do not lead to FL/L2 acquisition automatically. In a similar vein, Cunningsworth (1984: 18) claims that "any teaching programme

---

<sup>9</sup> Studies by Dulay *et al* (1973, as cited in Nunan, 1988: 32) and Bailey *et al* (1974, as cited in Nunan, 1988: 32) showed that formal instruction had no effect on the order of learning of certain grammatical items. Research by Pienemann *et al* (1987, as cited in Nunan, 1988: 33) has led them to conclude that the acquisition of grammatical structures will be determined by how difficult the specific grammatical items are psycholinguistically, rather than how difficult or simple they are grammatically.

which omits grammar is not really teaching language in the full sense of the word". To him, it is the effective teaching of grammar that distinguishes a true language course from a phrasebook (Cunningsworth, 1995).

The long-term effects of instruction, as Nunan (1991) sees them, are that learners might not be not capable of reproducing a particular item being taught but "systematic exposure over a period of time will speed up acquisition in the long run" (ibid: 148). Similarly, Long (1983, as cited in Nunan, 1991: 148) emphasizes the advantages of formal instruction over acquiring FL/L2 informally, in a natural way<sup>10</sup>.

To sum up, there is no simple answer to a continuing controversy whether grammar should be taught. In the words of Dörnyei (2009: 270), implicit learning that "does do such a great job in generating native-speaking L1 proficiency in infants, does not seem to work efficiently when we want to master an L2 at a later stage in our lives".

#### 4.1 Explicit versus implicit grammatical instruction

Trying to clarify the role of grammar in FL/L2 study, many experts (e.g. Ellis, 1997) have pointed out that FL/L2 learners cannot be realistically expected to master the grammar system of the FL unassisted, on their own, mainly due to radical differences in the way L1 and non-mother tongues are acquired. All the available evidence seems to point to the conclusion that learning FL/L2 naturalistically accompanied by communicative practice does not help FL learners to become proficient in FL/L2 (e.g. Skehan, 1998, as cited in Lyster, 2004: 337; Swain, 1985, as cited in Nunan, 1991: 153).

Although some experts still deny the role of explicit instruction in teaching/learning (e.g., Krashen, 1991, as cited in Lyster, 2004: 321; Long, 1996, as cited in Lyster, 2004: 321), there are other FL/L2 theorists who are clearly convinced that implicit, incidental L2 learning<sup>11</sup> could not be more effective when it comes to improving learners' inter-language (Spada, 1997, as cited in Lyster, 2004: 321; Norris and Ortega, 2000; Lyster, 2004; Lyster, 2004a).

Consequently, as Dörnyei concludes (2009: 272), "we need explicit learning procedures - such as focus on form or controlled practice - to push learners beyond

<sup>10</sup> Systematic exposure to grammatical instruction with a view to enhancing subsequent noticing of the discrepancies between native speakers' input and learners' interlanguage (Schmid and Frota, 1986, as cited in Nunan, 1991: 150; Peckham, 2000, as cited in DeKeyser, 2003: 331) has been referred to as consciousness-raising (CR) (Rutherford and Sharwood-Smith, 1988, as cited in Nunan, 1991: 150).

<sup>11</sup> It is not likely that the terms 'incidental' and 'intentional' will soon receive a strong theoretical meaning in SLA theory. So far, 'incidental learning' has been used as a non-theoretical term to refer to unintentional acquisition of language during communication - i.e., picking up a language while the focus is on meaning and function and not on form. Hulstijn's (2001) attempt to offer some theoretical definition to these two terms is the following: incidental learning is learning with the intention to use the information for the successful completion of a listening, reading, speaking or writing activity, and not to memorize the information or commit it to memory. Intentional learning is learning with the intention to commit the information to memory so that it is not forgotten and not with the intention to use the information for the successful completion of a listening, reading, speaking or writing activity.

communicatively effective language toward target-like second language ability". Therefore, the overall consensus in the area of FL teaching/learning is that the lack of success of implicit teaching forces teachers to rely on explicit teaching.

Apparently, the advantage of explicit over implicit instruction is the most clearly documented method effect in empirical literature on types of instruction (Schumann, 1978, as cited in Fotos and Ellis, 1991: 607; Ellis, 1984, as cited in Fotos and Ellis, 1991: 607; Kadia, 1988, as cited in Fotos and Ellis, 1991: 607; Pienemann, 1984, as cited in Fotos and Ellis, 1991: 607; Ellis, 1990, as cited in Fotos and Ellis, 1991: 607). Dörnyei (2009), for instance, emphasizes that there are two strong sources of evidence available to support explicit teaching, namely reviews of empirical studies that specifically compare implicit and explicit instruction<sup>12</sup>, and secondly, educational experiences from immersion programmes that provide optimal conditions for implicit learning. Explicit grammar instruction, instead of an implicit one, slowly introduced via a deductive approach, is expected to help FL/L2 learners at higher levels to internalize the grammatical rules and learn a FL/L2 in a more natural, subconscious way (Norris and Ortega, 2000).

In conclusion, research has shown that children are better than adults at implicit language acquisition processes<sup>13</sup> and adults, due to their greater cognitive maturity, are better at explicit learning processes (DeKeyser, 2000). Thus, it can be concluded that certain Slovenian tertiary institutions' FL teaching/learning policies that deprive analytically capable adults of the opportunities to implement such abilities should be considered as essentially flawed.

## 4.2 The meaning/form continuum

Various studies of FL/L2 instructional effectiveness have proposed different instructional options; however, they are all to do with the major issue of the field of FL/L2 teaching/learning - the relative value of meaning, i.e., the role of communication and a focus on form (FonF/FoF instruction) - whether lexical or grammatical<sup>14</sup>.

To illustrate the meaning/form continuum, Long and Robinson (1998, as cited in Norris and Ortega, 2000: 420) have suggested a tripartite distinction among focus on meaning, focus on forms and focus on form. Namely, the reference is to three types of FL/L2 instruction - the type focusing on meaning, on forms (FormS/FonFS)<sup>15</sup> and

<sup>12</sup> Reviews of empirical studies that specifically compared implicit and explicit instruction mentioned in the article are Norris and Ortega (2000) and DeKeyser and Juffs (2005).

<sup>13</sup> DeKeyser and Juffs (2005) summarize the issue about implicit language acquisition processes by saying that "nobody doubts that implicitly acquired procedural knowledge would be useful; the main question is to what extent it exists" (*ibid*: 441).

<sup>14</sup> The term Focus on Form (FonF/FoF) was first coined by Long (1988, 1991, as cited in Williams, 2005: 671).

<sup>15</sup> Caution is necessary because of a potential source of confusion due to quite a number of rather similar terms and varied interpretations. According to Doughty (2001), FonF/FoF encompasses FormS/FonFS, but the reverse is not true.

on an integration of both meaning and forms (FonF/FoF). Instruction based on meaning assumes that appropriate FL/L2 input in meaningful situations leads to incidental acquisition of FL/L2. The second type, FormS/FonFS type of instruction refers to a deliberate teacher-fronted discussion of grammatical forms in isolation in the classroom (Norris and Ortega, 2000). The third type, FonF/FoF, is actually a combination of focus on meaning and focus on forms, and refers to a brief, incidental instructional attention to linguistic features within a communicatively meaningful context (Doughty, 2003).

FonF/FoF is an approach to redirecting learner attention during input processing since learners need to notice varying aspects of the FL/L2 input.<sup>16</sup> However, a guiding principle is to engage perception and noticing processes in FL/L2 input during implicit learning, rather than accumulate meta-linguistic knowledge. The overall emphasis is always on the communicative context within which the teacher should wait for a real-time problem-oriented trigger, also just perceived one, to appear incidentally. Doughty (2001) claims that what distinguishes FonF/FoF from other pedagogical approaches, is the necessity for learners' simultaneous processing of form, meaning and language use during one cognitive event.

FonF/FoF activities have been defined by Williams (2005) in terms of three features, the first being an essential feature and the other two being less obligatory. These are namely, problematicity,<sup>17</sup> targetness/planning, and obtrusiveness.<sup>18</sup> According to Williams (*ibid*), a major role for FonF/FoF appears to be in the following three areas: initially, in the area of noticing a form for the first time in the input, secondly, in recognizing that a learner's inter-language form is different from a correct target language form, and finally, an inclusion of the new target language form into a learner developing inter-language.

Similarly, Nassaji (2000) has also proposed an integrative approach to FonF/FoF - an integration of focus on form and meaningful communication. He claims that if the goal of FL/L2 teaching/learning is to achieve fluency, accuracy and complexity, and if accuracy cannot be achieved without paying attention to form, then the most reasonable approach seems to be to FonF/FoF during communication.

The overall feeling that one may get is that the principal question of the FonF/FoF argument is neither whether or not to teach grammar nor whether to teach it

<sup>16</sup> Why do L2 learners need to notice aspects of L2 input? According to Doughty (2003), research has shown that adults stop relying upon signals in the FL/L2 input. Instead, due to a process called developmental sharpening, i.e., a prerequisite to L1 listening ability, they normally start using their existing L1-processing strategies - most notably the ability to predict what is going to be said next based just on a few cues in rapid articulation. However, because of that they cannot stay tuned to the cues and details of the FL/L2 input. Since they do not have the ability to predict FL/L2 utterances during comprehension, they have to be guided through FL/L2 instruction back to perceiving and noticing the signals in the L2 input.

<sup>17</sup> Problematicity refers to a fact that FonF/FoF should arise out of a real-life/perceived problem in communication during a lesson to which only an incidental treatment is required from a teacher.

<sup>18</sup> Obtrusiveness refers to the degree to which an activity/technique interrupts the flow of communication.



explicitly or implicitly, but how to draw the students' attention to form/grammar without giving explicit grammatical explanations.

#### 4.2.1 Form-focused instruction/FFI

Form-focused instruction, often abbreviated as FFI, is the instructional approach frequently mentioned in SLA theory over the past decade and associated with Long's FonF/FoF type of instruction (1988, 1991, as cited in Williams, 2005: 671)<sup>19</sup>. FFI is the umbrella term for all approaches and techniques that focus on formal aspects of language<sup>20</sup>. It combines focus on formS and focus on form and could be labelled as "a (new) type of grammar instruction embedded within a communicative approach" (Dörnyei, 2009: 282). According to Lyster (2004), FFI is a way to drive immersion students' inter-language development forward. Ellis (2002) defines it as any planned or not planned instruction due to which FL/L2 learners pay attention to linguistic form. He is adamant that FFI contributes to the acquisition of implicit knowledge<sup>21</sup>.

Today, there are still no consistent answers to key questions about FL/L2 instructional effectiveness. Surprisingly, Garrett (1991) claims that the proponents and the opponents of the relative value of focus on form in SLA are really on the same side - they both assume that the grammatical rules are learned as a basis for language comprehension/production and that the acquisition of competence comes first and performance follows. The only issue they disagree about is whether FL/L2 competence can be internalized without explicit formal instruction or not.

Therefore, we should not separate communicative competence from grammatical competence, i.e., meaning from form/grammar, since it is not possible to speak a language meaningfully without grammar. The fact that students do not learn to communicate on the basis of learning grammar cannot be the reason for rejecting formal classroom instruction of the concepts of grammaticality, i.e., the interconnectedness of meaning and form: "We cannot assume that when grammar is not mentioned in class learners will automatically, successfully, induce the foreign language's grammatical concepts from the input" (ibid: 83).

### 4.3 Grammar within BE teaching/learning contexts

Let us now turn our attention to the key question - if FL instruction was to be introduced as first-year BE instruction at the FELU, what kind of BE instruction should it be?

With the emergence of BE in the late seventies of the previous century the issue of teaching grammar was even further complicated. Although BE seems to be

<sup>19</sup> FFI and FonF/FoF mean different things to different people and, in addition, their apparent similarity is potentially confusing.

<sup>20</sup> FFI was proposed by Spada (1997, as cited in Norris and Ortega, 2000: 420).

<sup>21</sup> FFI contributes to the acquisition of implicit knowledge only if two factors are given: the choice of the target structure and its extent. Namely, extensive instruction directed at simple structures was more effective than limited instruction directed at difficult structures.

approaching the problem of teaching grammar from an entirely opposing point of view, the dilemma and the complexity of the issue stay the same. With regard to the question about the existence of grammar in BE, experts (e.g. Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998) claim there are no new categories created by or specific to BE. BE can utilize all the language forms which exist in GE and it needs to cover all the core grammatical areas of GE<sup>22</sup>. In the words of Brieger (1997), "Business English, as a wide-ranging area encompassing all communication activities used in business interactions has no limits as far as grammar is concerned" (ibid: 37).

Essentially, the experts claim that in GE there should be more emphasis on the selection of a right methodological approach to grammar teaching (i.e., a pedagogical sequence of grammatical structures) (Larsen-Freeman, 1979; McIntosh, 1979) whereas in BE the emphasis should be more on finding a right measure of grammar for the purposes of the target group of BE learners.

Despite all this, the author concludes there are compelling reasons to treat grammar in BE classes at the FELU from a different approach. Firstly, due to a lack of first-year FL instruction BE students at the FELU have experienced a prolonged period of FL non-use, sometimes even up to two years' long. Undoubtedly, the presentation of grammar to BE learners who are making a new start at studying BE cannot be carried out in the same way as it was during their FL study in primary and secondary school. Obviously, in their case the reference is to learn BE, a 'different' kind of language, and after a considerable gap of time.

Secondly, just before the start of BE instruction in second year, BE students at the FELU already feel the consequences of GE attrition. According to the analysis of the FELU's BE students' language learning needs (Čepon 2006), the great majority of the participants felt they were forgetting English during their first-year studies. The results showed that both they and BE teachers at the faculty believed that GE attrition processes were impeding BE teaching/learning. The consequences of GE attrition can especially be perceived in students' subjective feelings of losing spoken and written language skills, secondly, in forgetting English grammar, thirdly, in their reports about having problems recalling "more demanding" English words and "more difficult grammar", and finally in their admission of consequently consciously retreating to their "elementary-school" levels of language knowledge. In the author's opinion, and based on the results of the above-mentioned analysis (ibid), these must have resulted from a longish period of FL disuse, as well as from the unstimulating language environment in the first year at the FELU and a lack of economics students' motivation to find opportunities to use English actively.

The effects of GE attrition, directly and indirectly triggered by a slowly dwindling logical structure of GE, are known to cause a lack of real internal and external motivation for further FL learning. A lack of motivation for FL learning is in language attrition literature even reported as a direct indicator of the underlying and ongoing

---

<sup>22</sup> Certain grammatical forms can be more or less prevalent in certain types of BE discourse and genre.

language attrition processes (Weltens, 1989; Gardner et al, 1987, as cited in Hansen and Retz-Kurashige, 1999: 8; Edwards, 1976, as cited in Weltens, 1989).

Thirdly, BE students at the FELU do not simply continue learning GE from before but start learning BE in the second year. In the author's opinion, the disappearance of the main factor for successful BE learning - that is, a logical structure of prior GE knowledge and its grammar, renders the would-be BE students' acquisition of new BE knowledge more difficult.

The next possible reason for the introduction of first-year grammar instruction at the FELU may as well be directly linked with the FELU's present policy of internationalizing its students. The author is referring to the fact that due to EQUIS and AACSB accreditation requirements for the FELU<sup>23</sup> there has been an increasing number of foreign-exchange students in BE classes at the FELU recently. They are not all speakers of a homogenous native language and not all learners have gone through an integrated course of FL study identical to the one that Slovenian students have been through. BE teachers at the FELU are therefore quite likely to encounter BE classes quite heterogeneous with regard to students' grammar background.

More advanced FL learners, a category that by definition should include most BE learners, require less grammar because the assumption is they have already internalized it. Consequently, experts in the field of BE advocate very little treatment of grammar in BE classes and certainly no overt explanation of grammar. Most experienced BE teachers have realized that the students will not be able to automatically transform explicit grammar input into productive communicative output, so they resort to explicit grammar explanations only as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

#### **4.3.1 New instructional approach to BE grammar teaching/learning**

First-year grammar instruction at the FELU that the author is proposing should basically be placed in the BE teaching/learning context. It should be communicative in orientation but still contain opportunities for reviewing, revising and practicing grammar. Such FL instruction is superior to both traditional GE classrooms that may emphasize grammar heavily and to immersion programs that avoid grammar entirely (Spada 1990, as cited in Nunan 1999: 47). Essentially, BE instructors at the FELU should concentrate on creating conditions for meaningful uses of a FL and form-focused instruction/FFI. Since FFI relates the form to the meaning arising from the language in a FL classroom, FFI in BE classes would therefore refer to any incidental and undeliberate discussion of grammar, i.e., counting on BE learners assimilating grammar incidentally as a function of communicative activity.

---

<sup>23</sup> In 2006 the most important European association of business schools, the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), awarded the FELU its global EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System) quality accreditation status - the leading international system of quality assessment, improvement, and accreditation of higher education institutions in management and business administration. In 2010 the FELU earned another renowned international accreditation - The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business/AACSB international accreditation, which only 579 business schools in the world have been awarded so far.

Such an instructional approach is undoubtedly more suited to proverbially quite proficient FL learners with an internalized knowledge of grammar than the deliberate discussion of grammatical forms. An incidental discussion of grammar arising from classroom communication appears especially appropriate for BE instructional contexts since FFI is the approach with a strong communicative quality but a lesser interest in structural and formal properties of language. Put shortly, it implies that the learner's engagement in situational meaning is primary and their attention to linguistic form secondary.

The principles that the author proposes for first-year BE grammar instruction at the FELU should ideally be based on the key principles of instructed language learning proposed by Dörnyei (2009). Namely, besides being personally engaging and motivating for proverbially quite advanced BE students, BE grammar instruction should contain the optimal balance between meaning-focused and form-focused instruction with a lot of/enough controlled practice, mainly due to the fact that such an instructional approach is apparently as effective as teacher-fronted instruction that involves pure focus on forms (Norris and Ortega, 2000). Fotos (2005), for instance, claims that the time has come to realize that a combination of grammar instruction and communicative activities is optimum for effective FL learning. Long et al (1993, as cited in Norris and Ortega, 2000: 421) assume that such instruction is likely to be more effective because "it is consonant with what L2 researchers know about how second languages are acquired".

In practice, FFI involves a number of approaches and techniques under its umbrella since there are several other ways of bringing the students' attention to grammar without giving explicit explanation<sup>24</sup>, all of which is sound classroom practice and not new to seasoned teachers<sup>25</sup>. According to Doughty (2001), the most beneficial kind of pedagogical intervention is an immediate contingent recast<sup>26</sup> which fits into a learner's working memory along with the original utterance with which it is compared<sup>27</sup>.

Put simply, attention-oriented instruction is effective; however, the key point is that metalinguistic awareness and noticing are two separate mental processes - the latter is a mental process that enables the learners to segment the input for themselves.

<sup>24</sup> To mention but a few; printing the grammatical items in question in italic or bold-letter forms, paraphrasing the students' sentence to highlight the mistake, recasting, highlighting features of the input, subtly slipping grammatical discussion in as support for other activities.

<sup>25</sup> However, convincing as these claims may be and given that grammatical form is there to serve meaning, Cook (2001) even questions if those other ways of bringing the students' attention to grammar without giving explicit explanation have anything to do with form. He goes on to suggest that they may in fact be a way of focusing on meaning. In his opinion, meaning and form should not be separated.

<sup>26</sup> Recasting is the use of implicit unobtrusive exchanges between students and teacher instead of a direct correction. According to Doughty (2003), studies of visual input enhancements such as font manipulations or colour coding, have not proven important or visible enough for the students to notice, whereas auditory recasts, one of the more implicit of FonF pedagogical procedures, have been found to be quite effective in raising students' attention. For example: Student: I buyed it. Teacher: Aha, you bought it. Student: Yes, I bought it (*ibid*).

<sup>27</sup> Psycholinguistic studies have suggested that the size of the cognitive window of opportunity for pedagogical intervention is well under one minute (Doughty, 2001).

The more a learner pays attention to morphological, orthographic, prosodic, semantic and pragmatic features of a language, the more likely it is that the new information will be retained and it does not matter whether they do so intentionally or incidentally.

The purpose of FFI practice should be clearly explained to BE learners. There should be enough declarative input, i.e., explicit initial grammatical input components, offered in several creative ways<sup>28</sup>, as well as a guiding principle to avoid accumulation of metalinguistic knowledge.

Eventually, in order to stir implicit learning there should be plenty of opportunities to partake in genuine FL/L2 interaction. Such a combination of FFI and meaning-based instruction appears particularly suitable for older, more mature and more proficient BE learners. The learning resulting from the FFI should enable such BE learners to develop abstract rule-based knowledge of grammar and not just knowledge based on examples, mainly due to their predisposition, i.e., their greater cognitive maturity to induce rules (Lyster, 2004a). The fact that such BE learners are supposed to already have access to a much larger range of stored vocabulary is also important, although the question is whether it is passive or active vocabulary.

Another, not so desirable consequence of BE adult learners' greater cognitive maturity is that BE teachers must take into account their inability to pay attention to cues in FL/L2 input due to their reliance on the already existing L1-processing strategies - most notably, the ability to predict L1 utterances during fast, real-life language comprehension and production (*ibid*). Unfortunately, a FL/L2 knowledge cannot be acquired via reliance on trying to predict what is going to be said.

One of the major deficiencies of the change proposed is that it is impossible to expect pre-experience learners to bring any business experience or carrier content knowledge of their area of work/ field of study into the BE study process. Since they are in the midst of obtaining professional and theoretical knowledge their business knowledge is impractical and impersonal, only theoretical, incomplete, and obtained merely from books. Due to that, in the case of introducing first-year BE classes, the faculty's BE instructors would thus have to bear not only all of the burden of explaining carrier content but also the burden of teaching BE learners among whom it is already possible to perceive the beginnings of the attrition of real content, which is a FL itself.

In reality; however, any FL instruction would be much more beneficial to the students of economics at the FELU than no instruction at all. In addition, the instructors of other specialized subjects and the faculty management at the FELU should also contribute their share to facilitating the transition from GE to BE learning after the hiatus of one or more years - the former with demands for regular reading of English professional literature, and a wider and more binding selection of

---

<sup>28</sup> To achieve subsequent automatization and internalization of declarative knowledge, BE teachers must not underestimate the value of rote-learning and intensive recycling.

obligatory English study literature and the latter by introducing formal evaluation of students' prior GE knowledge. However, they should be aware that a vital continuity in FL learning would only be provided by organizing first-year FL instruction.

## 5 Conclusion

All the above mentioned evidence has led many experts (e.g. de Bot et al, 2005) to accept the value of explicit teaching without any doubt and only focus on the search for the most effective type of explicit teaching. It appears that the real challenge in fact is knowing how to combine implicit and explicit teaching/learning.

In the light of BE instruction at the FELU, it can be concluded that in the first year at the FELU when students are left to their own self-initiated language study, they are not capable of creative English learning. Majority of students do not consider changing their non-existent or inactive method of retaining, revising or studying GE, its grammar or BE and even if they do, this only involves minor changes (Čepon 2006). Generally speaking, they find their superficial approach to maintaining their FL knowledge quite sufficient. To most of the economics students, their already acquired GE seems good enough and adequate for the needs of their study, i.e., merely passing their FL exams and browsing the Internet. In addition, being laymen, even those who claim their FL knowledge is quite good, only take receptive language skills into account, i.e., reading and listening and not true FL language knowledge and all of the language skills (*ibid*).

To gather some of the threads about FL teaching/learning in the tertiary context at the FELU, we conclude that BE learners as economics students at the FELU must be given an opportunity to continue learning a FL uninterruptedly. Instead of a year-/two-year gap in FL instruction before they start with BE classes in the second year, the author's suggestion is to introduce them to grammar instruction in BE contexts in first year at the faculty instead<sup>29</sup>. By the latter the author refers to a combination of meaningful uses of a FL and FFI in BE contexts.

Grammar may be labelled 'an optional extra' (Cook, 2001: 39) in BE contexts where there is an uninterrupted continuation of FL learning and a natural conversion from GE to BE instruction. However, in the specific BE teaching/learning contexts at the FELU, we should perhaps label its function as an obligatory 'optional extra'.

All of the preceding entails that current FL teaching/learning policies of the academic institutions in Slovenia that do not offer FL instruction at all or not at periods crucial for FL learning of non-native speakers are essentially dubious. By doing so, they deny FL learners at academic institutions the ability to use an analytical approach to

---

<sup>29</sup> According to Čok *et al* (1999), it is useful and necessary for older and more proficient FL/L2 students to study/learn FL grammar.

FL learning, i.e., they are denying high-analytic-ability learners the only mechanism at their disposal to learn a FL. Namely, SLA research has suggested that "explicit learning processes are a necessary condition for achieving a high level of competence in a non-native language after childhood" (DeKeyser, 2000: 520).

## References

- Brieger, N. (1997). *The York Associates Teaching Business English Handbook*. York: York Associates.
- Canale, M. and M. Swain. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1: 1–47.
- Celce-Murcia, M. (1991). Grammar Pedagogy in Second and Foreign Language Teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(3): 459–480.
- Celce-Murcia, M. (ed.) (2001) [3rd edition]. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign language*. Boston, Mass.: Heinle & Heinle.
- CILT: The National Centre for Languages. (2006). ELAN: Effects on the European Union Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise. Available online: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/Focus/docs/elan-sum\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/Focus/docs/elan-sum_en.pdf), accessed 10 March 2010.
- Cook, V. (2001). [3rd edition]. *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*. London, New York: OUP.
- Cunningsworth, A. (1984). *Evaluating and Selecting EFL Teaching Materials*. Oxford: Heinemann International.
- Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing your own Coursebook*. Oxford: Heinemann Publishers.
- Čepon, S. (2006). *Analiza jezikovnih potreb študentov poslovne angleščine na Ekonomski fakulteti v Ljubljani*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta. Oddelek za anglistiko in amerikanistiko.
- Čok, L., J. Skela, B. Kogoj and C. Razdevšek-Pučko. (1999). *Učenje in poučevanje tujega jezika: smernice za učitelje v drugem triletju osnovne šole*. Ljubljana: Pedagoška fakulteta.
- de Bot, K., W. Lowie and Werspoor, M. (2005). *Second Language Acquisition: An Advanced Resource Book*. London: Routledge.
- DeKeyser, R. (2000). The Robustness of Critical Period Effects in Second Language Acquisition. *SSLA*, 22: 499–533.
- DeKeyser, R. (2003). Implicit and Explicit learning. In C. J. Doughty and M. H. Long (eds), *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 313–348). Oxford: Blackwell.
- DeKeyser, R. and Juffs, A. (2005). Cognitive Considerations in L2 Learning. In E. Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 437–454). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Doughty, C. (2001). *Cognitive underpinings of focus on form*. In P. Robinson, *Cognition and Second Language Instruction* (pp. 206–258). Cambridge: CUP.

- Doughty, C. J. (2003). Instructed SLA: Constraints, Compensation, and Enhancement. In C. J. Doughty and M. H. Long (eds), *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 256-310). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). *The Psychology of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: OUP.
- Dudley - Evans, T. and M. J. St John. (1998). *Developments in ESP. A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: OUP.
- Ellis, R. (2002). Does Form-focused Instruction affect the acquisition of implicit knowledge? *SSLA*, 24: 223-236.
- Ellis, R. (2006). Current Issues in the Teaching of Grammar: An SLA Perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1): 83-107.
- Fotos, S. and Ellis, R. (1991). Communicating About Grammar: A Task-Based Approach. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(4): 605-628.
- Fotos, S. (2005). Traditional and Grammar Translation methods for Second language teaching. In E. Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* ( pp. 653-670). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Frodesen, J. (2001). Grammar in Writing. In M. Celce-Murcia (ed.), [3rd edition], *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign language* (pp. 233-249). Boston, Mass.: Heinle & Heinle.
- Garrett, N. (1991). Theoretical and Pedagogical Problems of Separating "Grammar" from "Communication". In B. F. Freed (ed.), *Foreign Language Acquisition Research and the Classroom* (pp. 74-87). Lexington, Massachusetts, Toronto: D.C. Heath and Company.
- Hansen, L. and Reetz – Kurashige, A. (1999). Investigating Second Language Attrition: An Introduction. In L. Hansen (ed.), *Second Language Attrition in Japanese Contexts* (pp. 3-18). New York: OUP.
- Hawkins, E. (1984). *Awareness of Language: An Introduction*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Hulstijn, J. H. (2001). Intentional and incidental second language vocabulary learning: a reappraisal of elaboration, rehearsal and automaticity. In P. Robinson, *Cognition and Second Language Instruction* (pp. 258-287). Cambridge: CUP.
- Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: a learning-centred approach*. Cambridge : CUP.
- Klapper, J. (2006). *Understanding and developing good practice: Language teaching in higher education*. London: CILT.
- Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis*. London: Longman.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (1979). Issues in the Teaching of Grammar. In M. Celce-Murcia and McIntosh, L. (eds), *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign language* (pp. 217-257). Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2001). Teaching Grammar. In M. Celce-Murcia (ed.), [3rd edition], *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign language* (pp. 251-266). Boston, Mass.: Heinle & Heinle.
- Lightbown, P. M. and Spada, N. (2006). [3rd edition]. *How Languages Are Learnt*. Oxford: OUP.
- Lyster, R. (2004). Research on form-focused instruction in immersion classrooms: Implications for theory and practice. *French Language Studies*, 14: 321-341.



- Lyster, R. (2004a). Differential effects of prompts and recasts in form-focused instruction. *SSLA*, 26: 399-432.
- Marentič - Požarnik, B. (2000). *Psihologija učenja in pouka*. Ljubljana: DZS.
- McIntosh, L. (1979). A Grammar Sequence for Teaching ESL to Beginners. In Celce-Murcia, M. and McIntosh, L. (eds), *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign language* (pp. 229-240). Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.
- Nassaji, H. (2000). Towards Integrating Form-Focused Instruction and Communicative Interaction in the Second Language Classroom: Some Pedagogical Possibilities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 84(ii): 241-250.
- Norris, J.M. and Ortega, L. (2000). Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A Research Sythesis and Quantitative Meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 50(3): 417-528.
- Nunan, D. (1988). *Syllabus Design*. Oxford: OUP.
- Nunan, D. (1991). *Language Teaching methodology. A Textbook for teachers*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall International.
- Nunan, D. (1999). *Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Boston, Mass.: Heinle & Heinle.
- Pearson, M. (1989). Languages in a multi-national company. *The Linguist*, 28(5): 146-147.
- Rižnar, I. (2010). Hrabri novi svet: konferenca Izzivi jezika stroke v 21. stoletju. *Management*, 5(1): 89-92.
- Tarone, E. and G. Yule. (1991). *Focus on the Language Learner*. Oxford: OUP.
- Ur, P. (1996). *A Course in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Weltens, B. (1989). *The attrition of French as a foreign language*. Dodrecht: Foris.
- White, L. (1987). Against comprehensible input: The input hypothesis and the development of second language competence. *Applied Linguistics*, 8: 95-110.
- Williams, J. (2005). Form-Focused Instruction. In E. Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 671-691). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.