GRAMMAR, GRAMMAR TEACHING, AND GRAMMAR AND TEACHERS' COGNITIONS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Grammar teaching is regarded as one of the most polemical issues in foreign language teaching[2] (Thornbury, 1999). Such controversy may have risen mainly for two reasons. Firstly, because there is a large debate among researchers whether to teach grammar is or is not appropriate for language development. Whereas researchers such as Krashen (1982) claim that teaching should not focus on grammar when acquisition, or communication and fluency, are aimed, others, such as Doughty and Williams (1998), counterargue this assumption by suggesting a focus on form. The second reason for such controversy is the fact that the concept and the scope of grammar is still an object of study leading to diverse multi-dimensional definitions (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2001; TONKYN, 1994; BATSTONE, 1994a). Tonkyn (1994), for example, points out that the first distinction of diverse types of grammar is between descriptive or theoretical, and pedagogical grammars. The author also reminds us that beyond these types of grammar lie various other types of and attitudes towards grammar.

In view of this, this paper presents a review of literature on grammar, grammar teaching and teachers' beliefs. The paper is divided into six sections. Section two presents the definitions of grammar and four types of grammar. Section three comments on the different positions regarding the role of grammar in the FL classroom. Section four presents a brief review of some studies addressing teachers' cognitions about grammar and grammar teaching. Lastly, in section five, the final remarks are presented.

2. WHAT IS GRAMMAR?

Throughout history, the term 'grammar' has received different definitions in the area of Linguistics. The most common definition is the one in which grammar is seen as the *combination of morphology and syntax* (PALMER, 1971; BATSTONE, 1994b; LARSEN-FREEMAN, 1999). However, such agreement regarding the definition of the term is not common. Larsen-Freeman (2001, p. 34), for example, reminds us that 'grammar':

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[2] Following Richars et al (1992), the terms *second language* and *foreign language* are used interchangeably along this review.

> ... is used to refer both to language users' subconscious internal system and to linguists' attempts explicitly to codify – or describe – that system. With regard the latter, its scope can be broad enough to refer to the abstract system underlying all languages ... or, more narrowly, to the system underlying a particular language... . It can also refer to a particular school of linguistic thought ... or to a specific compendium of facts for a general audience....

In sum, grammar can be understood in diverse ways. However, due to space constrains, this paper can not cover all the issues related to grammar and its definitions. Therefore, only four different types of grammar, found in the literature in the area, will be outlined in the following subsections.

2.1. Descriptive grammar:

Descriptive grammar is concerned with linguistic theory and language analysis (TONKYN, 1994), it is also referred to as *reference book* (TONKYN, 1994) or as *linguistic grammar* (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 1999). For Crystal (1997) and Larsen-Freeman (1999), this type of grammar rather than examining a great amount of linguistic structures superficially, should focus on a limited set of structures, treating and analyzing such sets thoroughly.

2.2. Prescriptive grammar:

Prescriptive grammar is commonly conceived as a collection of prescriptive rules (WILLIAM, 1994). Complementing this idea, in Crystal's (1997) definition, this type of grammar, besides laying down the rules which govern the correct use of language, also serves as a usage book. This type of grammar has also been recognized as a normative one (PALMER, 1971) as it dictates what is 'correct' or 'incorrect', what is 'good' or bad 'grammar'.

2.3. Learners' grammar or interlanguage:

The learners' grammar equates the learners' psycholinguistic grammatical system (TONKYN, 1994). It can also be associated to the term 'interlanguage', coined by Selinker (1972, cited in ELLIS, 1994). In an interpretation of Selinker's work on interlanguage, Ellis' (1997) states that it refers to the learners' internal system of linguistic rules of a specific language, that is, the learner's mental grammar. Such a view is also corroborated by Hartwell (1985), who characterizes this grammar as being abstract and unconscious.

2.4. Pedagogical grammar:

According to Crystal (1997), this pedagogical grammar is specifically directed to teach both foreign and first languages (L1); in the last case, a pedagogical grammar would help developing awareness of the L1. Crystal also

states that pedagogical grammars are generally associated with textbooks, as such type of grammar is widely used at schools. Mohammed (1996) complements this definition by stating that pedagogical grammars, besides language analysis, also contain metalinguistic terms and concepts. Even though, as Mohammed affirms, this type of grammar should be simplified in order to facilitate its use while helping learners achieve linguistic competence.

It is also useful to consider the aims of pedagogical grammars. In this sense, Corder (1973) reminds us that the objective of such grammars is to provide teachers with 'facts' of the language in a way that will help presentation to students. In this way, pedagogical grammars do not offer methodological proposals, instead, they present teachers with data in a way that can be directly presented to students.

Assuming, as Monhammed (1996) proposes, that pedagogical grammars are the type of grammar learners need, than it may also be reasonable to consider that this is the type of grammar is the one a teacher needs in order to promote learning. It is equally reasonable to argue that this type of grammar is the one of most interest in the research here proposed, as the central focus of this study is the *teaching* of grammar.

Having outlined four types of grammar, *descriptive*, *prescriptive*, *interlanguage*, and *pedagogical*, a final remark concerning this issue must be made. Greenbaum (1987, cited in CHALKER, 1994) recognizes that the terms *descriptive grammar* and *pedagogical grammar* may overlap. Based on this assertion, it is plausible to ponder that all the types of grammar overlap in some degree, after all, the boundaries are not so rigid.

3. POSITIONS REGARDING THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR IN THE FL CLASSROOM

Throughout the history of foreign language teaching, grammar has played diverse roles in the methodological approaches to foreign language teaching. Equally, second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have addressed the role of grammar in second language acquisition/learning in different ways. As a whole, in both fields the views went from the total absence of grammar to an exclusive attention to it. This section, thus, presents three trends, the unfavorable, the favorable and the conciliatory ones.

3.1. The case against grammar

According to Ellis (1994), the role of grammar has been questioned both by researchers (DULAY & BURT, 1973, as cited by ELLIS, 1994; KRASHEN, 1982) and educators (NEWMARK, 1966, and PRABHU, 1987, as cited by ELLIS, 1994).

In SLA research, certainly, the most diffused controversy about grammar has been posed by Krashen (1982), who claims that foreign languages are better mastered by natural means, that is, without formal instruction [3].

By making a distinction between learning and acquisition, the author affirms that only through subconscious experiment of the language (acquisition), a learner is able to develop fluency. The author, thus, advocates that grammar has no role to play if the aim is communication.

In foreign language teaching pedagogy, the claim against grammar inspired approaches like the Natural Approach, in which grammatical analysis is totally avoided, and the Communicative Approach at its stronger v which totally rejects grammar instruction.

Underlying Krashen's and other researchers' (DULAY & BURT, 1973, Newmark, 1966, and PRABHU, 1987, cited by ELLIS, 1994) claims is the idea that learning in the classroom should emulate that which happens in untutored settings. In this way, the learner would develop his/her interlanguage naturally, without presentation or practice of structures or rules. Such a view, as demonstrated in item 3.2. of this paper, has already been challenged.

3.2. The case for grammar

Differently from the position against grammar, the case for grammar has only found support in foreign language pedagogy, SLA research, on the other hand, does not give support to this view.

In foreign language pedagogy, the most radical position in favor of grammar has been the Grammar-Translation Method, in which grammar plays a central role, with explicit statement of rules. Also, in the Cognitive Code Approach, grammar was considered important and could be presented both deductively or inductively.

In SLA; however, researchers could not find evidences to argue that formal instruction was the only necessary condition for language learning (ELLIS, 1994). It is only possible to affirm that "*certain* [italics mine] linguistic properties cannot be acquired by L2 [second language] learners (...) unless they receive instruction in them" (ELLIS, 1994, p. 657).

The idea that underlies the favorable position regarding grammar is that, if not all, at least some linguistic properties are acquired only through instruction. This view is the other extreme of the view presented in section 3.3. of this paper and, as will be observed in the next section, has also been criticized.

3.3. A conciliatory view

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[3] According to Ellis (1994, p. 611) the term 'formal instruction' is used to refer to grammar teaching.

Likewise the first position regarding grammar, the conciliatory view has also found followers in both SLA research and foreign language pedagogy.

SLA research has recently claimed that there is a role for grammar. Ellis (1994), for example, remarks that formal instruction may not be necessary to acquire an L2, but it helps learning in accelerating the process of acquisition. Schmidt (1994; cited in SCHMIDT, 1995) and Schmidt and Frota (1986, cited in SCHMIDT, 1995) go even further and affirm that 'noticing', that is, conscious attention, is necessary for learning to occur. In agreement with these ideas, Long (1991; cited in IZUMI & BIGELOW, 2000) more recently coined the term 'focus on form', to refer to the integration of form and meaning.

In conformity with this idea, foreign language teaching pedagogy has started to view grammar as being part of the learning process. In this sense, grammar teaching is seen as being more than teaching form, but as teaching form, meaning and function together (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 1991).

This perspective on the role of grammar instruction draws on both previous views in order to show that a conciliation could foster better results in terms of SLA. In addition, according to Gil (2002), this conciliatory view is fundamental for promoting language development in the classroom, and, if teachers are well informed about the hybrid relationship between form and communication, they can take more informed decisions.

4. GRAMMAR TEACHING AND TEACHERS' COGNITIONS

Classroom Research has started to approach the classroom in a descriptive way, in order to understand teachers' and students' behaviors. Recently, this type of research has drawn on the area of Teacher Education to investigate teachers' cognitions, on the premise that teachers' behaviors can be best understood by accessing the personal theories underlying such behaviors. The first studies which followed this tradition were not related to foreign language learning, but to other subjects such as chemistry and science (BRICKHOUSE, 1990, BRISCOE, 1991, both cited in BORG, 1999c). Only more recently, foreign language studies focusing on teachers' cognitions started to emerge. Nevertheless, up to now studies addressing teachers' cognitions related to the issue of grammar are still scarce. Most studies were developed outside Brazil, some examples are Williams (1994) and Borg (1998; 1999a; 1999b; 1999c). In Brazil, there are also a few studies, such as the ones by Carazzai (2002), Gil and Carazzai (2007), and Almeida (2003).

Wiliams (1994) was probably the first researcher to investigate the views of English language teachers about grammar. In his article, the author discusses teachers' views of grammar and its teaching, obtained through a quantitative empirical study he carried out with 81 practicing teachers engaged in an MA course. The author, as one of the course providers in a grammar component, was concerned as to whether what was offered was considered relevant by the students. Thus, he investigated student-teachers' views of the appropriate content and methodology of the course.

In his study, Williams identified categories that emerged from the participants' answers. Some of the predominant categories were 'awareness' (as opposed to 'competence'), 'description of English grammar, and 'how to produce correct and appropriate sentences', revealing that most teachers viewed grammar in the traditional way, that is, related to parts of speech and parsing. However, inconsistently with their views of what grammar is, when asked about teaching methods or students' needs related to grammar learning, most teachers said that students do not need covert knowledge of grammar. In fact, teachers believed they, the teachers, had to have knowledge of grammar in order to take appropriate decisions regarding its use in the language classroom.

More recently Borg's (1998; 1999a; 1999b; 1999c, 2001) articles have shed light into teachers' theories about the teaching of grammar in more comprehensive ways. His articles are mainly based on a qualitative research he carried out with some in-service (English as a foreign language) EFL teachers in Malta, aimed at describing classroom practice in formal instruction and interpreting data based on teachers' classroom observations and interviews. Borg's papers provide a better understanding of teachers' practices and cognitions about grammar teaching, by presenting teachers' cognitions, their origins and the way they influence teachers' practices.

Both Williams (1999) and Borg's (1998; 1999a; 1999b; 1999c) articles have been, to some extent, pioneer in the teacher education area, in that terminology and grammar are not common topics of investigation when related to teachers' cognitions and practices. Nevertheless, it should be said that Borg's study is more comprehensive, since it explores not only teachers' beliefs, but also the way such beliefs inform their work.

In Brazil, there are also only a few studies which focus on teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching, such as the ones carried out by Almeida (2003), Carazzai (2002), and Gil and Carazzai (2007). In her study, Almeida (2003) investigated the use of metalanguage in two EFL teachers' classes and the factors which influenced the teachers' practice. Carazzai (2002), and Gil and Carazzai (2007) present a study with nine EFL teachers about grammar and the teaching of grammar. In her dissertation, Carazzai (2002) explores the nine teachers' beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching in a broader way, while on the paper by Gil and Carazzai (2007) the authors focus on only one of the teachers investigated by Carazzai (2002), in order to uncover how this teacher's beliefs could be contextualized with her teaching practice.

5. FINAL REMARKS

This paper has presented a review of the literature on grammar (its definitions and types), grammar teaching in the EFL classroom, and teachers' beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching.

I have shown that grammar, grammar teaching and teachers' beliefs are still underdeveloped areas of research, and that researchers have not reached

a consensus yet. The intention in the review was not to give a final answer to any of these controversial issues. In fact, the review served as a means of understanding the theories that may underlie EFL teachers' beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar.

As a final remark, it should be said that this paper can help teachers and prospective teachers to gain more understanding of the ways grammar can be dealt with in the EFL classroom. In this regard, the article can help teachers to understand the different views on grammar, and the ways it can be dealt with in the EFL classroom. Certainly, there is no simple recipe by which one can always teach grammar to all students. However, by observing their own classes, and by trying to uncover the theories underlying their practice, teachers may be in a better position to take decisions

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