Integrative L2 Grammar Teaching: Exploration, Explanation and Expression

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of L2 grammar teaching to ESL students with the focus on form and meaning. A method of integrative grammar teaching, consisting of three major stages (a) *exploration*, (b) *explanation*, and (c) *expression (EEE)*, is proposed. To illustrate how each of these stages function, several experimental lessons were conducted. The paper describes and discusses the lessons themselves, their rationale, and their implementation of the proposed method. An evaluative questionnaire conducted after the experimental lessons, shows that students preferred to learn L2 grammar using the *EEE method*, as opposed to form-based or meaning-based only approaches.

Introduction

Beginning in 1970's interest in the teaching of 'real-language' has increased as scholars have become more and more interested in the language used in various social and cultural settings. As a result, there has been a rapid shift of research and practice from audiolingual and grammar-translation methods to the exploration of communicative language teaching, and much attention has been paid to focusing on global and integrative tasks, rather than on discrete structures. In her entry to the Routledge Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics, Savignon (forthcoming) makes clear that "communication cannot take place in the absence of structure, or grammar, a set of shared assumptions about how language works...." Therefore, as she continues, Canale and Swain (1980) included grammatical competence into their model of communicative competence. However, a review of the research starting from 1970's (Ellis, 1997) shows that communicative L2 teaching was perceived as a departure from grammar in favor of focusing on the meaning only. Comparison of communicative (also referred as meaning-based) to form-based (also referred as structure-based) approaches in L2 teaching shows that communicative language teaching enables students to perform spontaneously, but does not guarantee linguistic accuracy of the utterances. On the other hand, form-based approaches focus on the linguistic and grammatical structures, which makes the speech grammatically accurate. But this accuracy is observed in prepared speech only, and students lack the ability to produce spontaneous speech.

There are not many studies that compare communicative to form-based approaches. Prabhu (cited by Beretta & Davies, 1985) conducted an experiment in communicative language teaching and found that the experimental group, which received meaning-based instruction, did well on the meaning-based test, but showed low results on the discrete-point test. The control group, on the other hand, having received structural instruction, performed better on the grammar structure tasks, rather than on the global and integrative tests. The outcome of this experiment is quite logical and obvious and can be explained by the washback effect. Students' performance was better on the tasks they were trained for. The question then rises, what method is the most effective? It has become popular these days to refer to the goals and needs of students. Therefore, if students need grammar for communication, it should be taught communicatively, that is, meaning-based. On the other hand, if students need the grammar knowledge to be able to translate from L2 to L1, and that is what they are going to be graded on, then form-based approaches will be more appropriate. However, these are polar opposite positions that leave no room for nuance.

In learning an L2 grammar, students face a dilemma. On the one hand, students need to know the rules, as that is what they are tested on at schools. On the other, with a number of foreign visitors, or living in an L2 country there is a good need for communication in an L2. That is why there is a need to look at the ways of combining *form* and *meaning* in teaching foreign languages.

Integrative Grammar Teaching

As a possible solution, integrative grammar teaching combines a form-based with a meaning-based focus. Spada and Lightbown (1993) have also argued "that form focused instruction and corrective feedback provided within the context of communicative interaction can contribute positively to second language development in both the short and long term" (p. 205). Thus, integration of form and meaning is becoming increasingly important in current research. Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell (1997) call it "a turning point" in communicative language teaching (p. 141), in which "explicit, direct elements are gaining significance in teaching communicative abilities and skills" (p. 146). Kumaravadivelu calls this a "principled communicative approach" (cited by Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell, 1997). Of course, depending on the students and their particular needs, either form or meaning can be emphasized. But in having various students with different needs in the same group, or having various needs in the same students, an integrative grammar teaching approach creates optimal conditions for learning for everyone in the classroom. Musumeci (1997) mentions the idea of connecting *form* and *meaning* in grammar teaching as a developing trend in reference to the proficiency oriented curriculum. She points out that students should be able to learn explicit grammar rules as well as have a chance to practice them in communication in the authentic or simulation tasks. Interestingly, Musumeci advocates giving students a chance to look at the language on a sentence level to see how certain grammatical rules are applied.

Integrative grammar teaching, which presupposes students' interaction while learning, can be viewed as a cognitive process of learning an L2 that reflects the sociocultural theory proposed by the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978). In talking about the development of a child's brain and his socialization, Vygotsky argues that there is a strong relationship between learning and cognitive development, in which cognition develops as a result of social interaction and sharing the responsibility with a parent or a more competent person. From an early age, children look to their parents for clues to acceptable social behavior. This brings us to Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) in which there are two main stages of an individual's development. The first stage is what a child or learner can do by himself; the second stage is his potential, what he can accomplish with the help of another, more competent person. The distance between two points is called the *zone of proximal development*. Vygotsky also introduces the notion of a *mediator* - a person who helps students to accomplish what they cannot do by themselves. According to Appel and Lantolf (1994) and Lantolf and Pavlenko (1995), the role of the mediator in teaching an L2 is placed on an L2 teacher, whose task is to direct students in the right direction and help them reach the second stage in the ZPD.

Similar to Vygotsky's theory is the often-criticized Krashen's (1981, 1985) *Input Hypothesis*, also well-known as the "*i +1*" hypothesis. According to this hypothesis *i* represents students' current level of L2 proficiency, and *+1* is level of the linguistic form or function beyond the present students' level. Krashen's *Input Hupothesis* and Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development* are basically describing the same cognitive process of social interaction in students' development. For Krashen, optimal input should be comprehensible, i.e. focused on the meaning and not on the form. In this study students will be focusing on the form, but actively, through *communicative, meaning-based, exploratory assignments*. Even though well-criticized for lack of empirical evidence (Faerch & Kasper, 1986; Gregg, 1984; McLaughlin, 1987, etc.), the significant contribution of the Input Hypothesis to the field of applied linguistics is that it shows how teachers can focus on the actual level of students, adjusting the complexity of the material so that learners will be able to reach what initially was beyond their level.

In this research I would like to share my understanding of integrative grammar teaching, combining *the form* and *the meaning*, and propose what I call the ***EEE method***, which consists of three equally important stages: *exploration, explanation*, and *expression*.

- **Exploration** is the first stage of integrative grammar teaching. This stage is characterized by "*inductive learning*." Students are given sentences illustrating a certain grammar rule and are asked as a group to find the pattern and, with the help of the teacher, to formulate the rule. Many scholars have arguing against passive or inactive learning (see, for example, Johnson, 1995; and others) in which teachers refer to a textbook for explanations of rules. I completely agree with this critique. Students should be given opportunities to figure out everything by themselves, receiving help only when necessary. To make the task easier in the beginning, some grammatical forms or endings can be highlighted. Students tend to prefer assignments that allow them to explore the language. The knowledge they obtain becomes theirs and it is often much easier to remember. Exploration, then, works as an excellent tool for motivation.

- **Explanation** is the second stage of learning. As students find sequences or patterns in the examples they used during the *exploration* stage, the teacher or the students can summarize what was previously discovered, now focusing on the form. In some situations it may be essential to go to the textbook and together with students relate 'textbook rules' with the examples and findings of the *exploration* stage. The *explanation* stage is quite important because students feel safer when they know the rules and have some source to go back to in case of confusion or for future reference. Depending on students' proficiency, confidence, and actual performance, this stage can sometimes be omitted. However, students should be aware of and experience the strategies they may use to refer to the explicit rules, if needed.

- **Expression** is the third and last stage of the process. After discovering certain grammatical patterns in the *exploration* stage and getting to know the rules in the *explanation* stage, students start practicing the production of meaningful utterances with each other in communication and interactive tasks. The rationale of this stage is to provide students experience in applying their acquired knowledge in practice by making meaningful utterances. On the one hand, this may also serve as a motivation technique, since learners can actually see what they can do with what they have learned. On the other, the expression stage gives them the opportunity to practice communicating under the teacher's supervision, which usually assures the students that they can produce a correct utterance. Communicative interaction will be better if it is content-based, which allows students to relate it to something they care or know about, thus making it authentic.

To show how the proposed method of integrative grammar teaching can function and what students' attitude towards it will be, several lessons were conducted to see how the method really works and what its potential is. The subjects were 10 undergraduate international students from Russia (n=4), Ukraine (n=2), Taiwan (n=1), and China (n=3), whose TOEFL scores were lower than 500 points. All students were enrolled into the ESL program and had previously experienced grammar teaching in their home countries. That explains the use of more complex grammatical constructions, compared to the rules used in the study. However, their mistakes in the first and third stages show that students have some knowledge, but it is not systematized. This experimental study was conducted during out-of-class time as free tutoring. The lessons were audio-taped and transcribed for analysis of classroom discourse.

As we examine the excerpts from the ESL lessons that were conducted based on the EEE method, the explanation and interpretation of the patterns of classroom participation will be provided. The topic of the lesson presented in Excerpts one, two, and three is "The formation and use of the present simple tense."

Excerpt 1.

The rule: The use of the ending -s with verbs in the present simple tense.

Stage 1. Students were given the following sentences and were asked to find the grammatical pattern. All instruction was done in English.

1). **I** go_ to school *every day*.

2). My **mother** work**s** at the IBM company.

3). **Water** boil**s** at 100 C.

4). My **friends** play_ tennis with me.

5). **They** ride_ bicycles.

1. T: Now, I want you to look at the board. You will see several sentences. In some of them we add "-s" to the verb, in some we do not. (T points at every sentence.) Thus, where ending "s" is, it is underlined (sentences 2 and 3). In sentences where we don't have "-s" (points at 1, 4, and 5) the underlining shows where it could be. Words in bold determine whether we should add "-s" to verbs or not. Your task will be to think why we sometimes use and sometimes don't use "-s" with verbs. Imagine yourself being scholars who are finding the pattern or making a new rule. Do you see any sequence?
2. Chien: because of the ... how do you say the ... the nouns in the first.
3. T: OK, so we do not use ending -s with "I", right?
4. Chien: Yes.
5. T: Ok. We don't use it with an "I". Do we use it with "mother"?
6. Chien: Yea.
7. T: Is it only with "mother" or with any noun?
8. ...
9. T: ok is "mother" singular or plural?
10. Olga: Singular, right?

11. T: If instead of "mother" we use a different word, such as "father" or "son" will we put ending "s" or not?
12. Olga: Yea, because that singular, right? If it is singular we should put "s."
13. T: But "I" is also in singular.
14. Olga: Yea
15. T: And "mother" is in singular.
16. Olga: Yea
17. T: So, why do we add "s" to the verb used with "mother" and don't add "s" with "I"?
18. Olga: ...
19. Chien: Because I is a first ... what is that?
20. T: First person.
21. Chien: Ye, and that's the third person.
22. T: That is a third person. Right. So, we do not add "s" with the nouns in the third person. Good, so, if we pass to "Water boils at 100 C". What is here?
23. Olga: We use -s in singular, right, and that is a third person, no not a third person ...
24. Alex: Third person? Yea.
25. T: Third person. That is correct. Ok, now let's go to the examples number 4 and number 5. Here we have "friends play" and "they ride."
26. Olga: That is plural, right? My friends play tennis with we, that is right because that's the plural, right?
27. T: Hu hu.
28. Olga: And they ride cycles. That's right, because it is plural too.
29. T: Good. So, can we form a rule?
30. Chien: Yes, you mean?
31. T: In what cases we add
32. Alex: -s at the end of the verbs?
33. T: Yea.
34. Alex: If the noun is singular and third person and this is present simple tense we add -s at the end of the verbs.
35. T: And if it is in plural?
36. Alex: we don't put -s.

Teacher-Student Interaction in Exploration of the New Rules

Excerpt one is a good example of an initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) interactional sequence (Mehan, 1979). The teacher begins by introducing the topic for group exploration and then elicits students' responses. The way the teacher gives the task in turn 1 is actually amazing and potentially very powerful: "Imagine yourself being scholars who are finding the patterns or making a new rule. Do you see any sequence?" This invitation to participate had a tremendous effect on the students. It contained several implicit messages. One was that because "making new rules" is a discovery, it is acceptable to make mistakes; students need not to be afraid of talking and expressing the thoughts. Another was encouraging confidence and students' potential, who were responsible for investigation and participation in the learning process. The flow of teacher-student dialogue, as a rule, depends primarily on the students' reactions, responses, and their understanding of what is to be learned. If students do not understand something, or misinterpret the rule, the teacher tries to control it and puts them on the right track by paraphrasing their statements or with leading questions. This occurs in turn 12, Olga overgeneralizes, saying "If it is singular we should put '-s.'" The teacher quickly responds in turn 13 by shifting students' attention to the first sentence "I go to school every day," by saying "But "I" is also in singular," thus, telling them that the pattern they have found should be clarified or revised. Moreover, in turns 15 through 17, the teacher guides the cognitive thinking of the group by using leading questions, keeping the students' thinking under control. Here he says "But 'I' is also in singular [turn 13] and 'mother' is singular [turn 15]. So, why do we add -s to the verb used with "mother" and don't add -s with "I"?" [turn 17]. But a couple of times, in turns 18-20 and 31-32, students initiated the co-constructioning the teacher-student dialogue, when some learners took the opportunity to answer teacher's question, which were addressed to a different student. We will get back to this later.

The classroom interaction is governed by the teacher and by the students, a situation which creates optimal conditions for learning. Thus, in turn 2, Chien does not know how to call "I" from the first sentence and asks the teacher to help him "because of the ... how do you say the ... the nouns in the first." Responding to Chien's implicit request, the teacher does not give him the grammatical term Chien is expecting in order not to confuse the other students with terminology. However, it might have been done. By his answer in turn 3, "OK, so we do not use ending -s with 'I,'" instead of saying the word "pronoun," the teacher gives a clue to the group that an

inductive style of learning is more important than the use of terminology and that they are expected to say what they see in a way that makes them feel comfortable. They were encouraged not to worry about the metalanguage. However, the interactional sequence (teacher-student communication) established at the beginning, breaks several times into "student-student" interaction. Thus, in turn 19, Olga answers the question, which was initially expected from Chien, saying "Because it is ... what is that ..." He knows the answer but does not have the lexical competence to respond immediately. In turn 24, Alex, breaking the student-teacher sequence, enters the discussion and helps with Olga's confusion "We use -s in singular, right, and that is a third person, no not a third person ...," by saying "Third person, yea."

The break in the teacher-student response sequence is a vivid example of how ZPD theory works. The teacher starts from where the students are and with his help they improve their knowledge of grammatical structure. As soon as they reach a certain level on which they (or at least some of them) feel confident, they are eager to show their understanding of the subject matter by, for example, breaking into the student-teacher dialogue. It completely agrees with Lantolf (1993) who emphasizes that ZPD is negotiated between the teacher and the student(s).

Paraphrasing is an important technique used in cognitive learning. Instead of giving the explicit answer, the teacher employs different strategies to help them discover the answer by themselves. In turn 7, the teacher says, "Is it only with "mother" or with any other noun?" and, not getting any answer from the group, the teacher rephrases the question in turn 9: "is 'mother' singular or plural." Thus, the teacher gives contextual clues as to what is expected. The clue turns out to be essential and in turn 10, Olga enters the discussion, saying "Singular, right?" In turn 30, the teacher asks Chien "Ok, can you formulate the rule?" Chien was eager to speak but did not understand the question, which explains his words ("yes, you mean?"[turn 31]). That made the teacher become more detailed in giving the task. "In what cases we add," in turn 32, was enough for Alex to grasp what is expected; moreover, he continued for the teacher: "'s' or 'es' at the end of the verbs?"

Inevitably, at least at the beginning of integrative grammar teaching, students look to and ask the teacher for clarification and confirmation that they are saying the right things. Vivid illustrations of this can be found in turns 3, 10, 24, 26, 32, when either by rising intonation or with the help of the clarifying word "right?," students expected approval on behalf of the teacher. Interestingly, it looks as if students picked up "right?" from the teacher, who used it first for clarification in turn 3. The response to students' request for clarification is usually done by the teacher in the form of a brief message ("hu, hu" [turn 27]). Sometimes the teacher does not give direct approval, but rather catches the correct idea from a student, extends it, and keeps the discussion going.

The analysis of the types of questions used by the teacher in the activity is reflected by students' participation. The activity starts with Yes/No questions (turns 1, 3, 5, and 9). They are primarily used when students participate only slowly. Thus, to ensure they are not lost, the teacher says, "OK. We don't use it with "I," do we use it with "mother"?" [turn 5]. When the students' participation decreases, alternative questions are used as the teacher reinforces and encourages students. There may be several explanations to students' slowing down. The first may be that the instructional method was new and even though students were told what was expected of them, they were not sure about what to do. The second may be in the nature of each new task. At first, when students were introduced to the unknown format, it was new and took much time to figure out how they were supposed to behave. However, when the learners grasped the idea about the formation of the tense and were active in their responses, the teacher used *wh*-questions, which challenged them to think and directed them in the right way [turns 22, 31, 35].

This classroom participation structure follows the IRE interactional sequence. As Johnson's (1995) research shows, the teacher and students set implicit rules of interaction. At the beginning, at turn 1, students are waiting for the teacher to initiate the discussion by giving an assignment. Then, starting from turn 2, once students are asked a question, they receive the responsibility for completing the information cycle by interpreting what they see to make up grammatical rules. As it was stated above, in some cases some students break the established rule by answering their peer's questions without waiting for the teacher. As we saw, the teacher supported such break-ups, since it involved several students in the discussion, thus giving equal opportunities for interaction.

Excerpt 2.

Stage 2. In the *explanation* stage, the teacher ends the first stage and tells the students the explicit grammatical rules. Sometimes, depending on the level of difficulty of the particular grammatical construction, students may be asked to open the book to a certain page and with the teacher go through the rule.

T: Very good. You proved to be very good scholars and found the rule correctly. You were right. In using the present

simple tense, we add ending s (-es) to the verb in the first person singular, that is, when it refers to 'he,' 'she,' and 'it,' like in our examples: 'My mother work**s** at the IBM company,' and 'Water boil**s** at 100 C' (shows on the board). In the other cases, like you can see here (points at the other examples) we have just the infinitive of the verb or the way it is in the dictionary without 'to.' You can use Present Simple tense to describe what you or others usually/often/sometimes do. For example, "My wife's name is Linda. She works at the Giant. She is a cashier. She likes to talk to people," and so on. Or we can use this tense to talk about facts that represent a universal truth. For example, "The sun rises in the East. Water boils at 100 C."

Even though this task is similar to the grammar explanations typical in the learners' L1 countries, the teacher tried to make this "routine" activity cognitive and that is why he compares examples used in the first stage with examples given in the textbook. Even though it sounds simple, this technique has a great effect on learners. It serves as a bridge between what students consider "theory," or what is usually given in textbooks, on the one hand, and "practical use," what students have discovered, on the other. In the **explanation** stage it is important to make a connection between the examples and the explicit rules. This connection will help learners build on what they already have discovered. After the explanation of the explicit rules, the teacher again gives students meaningful examples of how and in what situations the tense can be used. For example, the specific example about the teacher's wife illustrates the rules in a content-based utterance, which can be a good technique for modeling. After discovering the rules and providing students with models of their usage, it will be interesting to see how learners are going to use their knowledge in the actual interaction.

Excerpt 3.

Stage 3. Expression. The teacher divides students into pairs and gives them the task.

1. T: Now split into pairs and tell your partner about each of your family members, friends, relatives: where they live, where they work, what they like to do, and so on. You can imagine some things, if you want. Like if you do not have a brother, imagine that you do and think what he does. After you listen to each other's stories, you will be asked to report to the whole group about your partner's family or friends. Ok? Do you have any questions?
2. Ss: ...

   Students split into pairs and began working in pairs. Interestingly, the tape recorder had been placed near one pair (Olga and Alla), who apparently did not see it. Their discussion was extremely valuable and interesting.
3. Olga: So what we need to do?
4. Alla: I will tell you about my family and you tell me about your. Then I will tell them about you and you about me.
5. Olga: So I ... not tell them about me?
6. Alla: No. You will tell them about me and I will tell them about you. Is it ok?
7. Olga: ye.
8. Alla: ok. My family is very big. I have mother, father, two sisters and a brother.
9. Olga: Wow, How old are they?
10. Alla: I don't know about parents. Tanya, my sister is 12, Dasha, another sister is 16, and Anton ... my brother is 14.
11. Olga: They are smaller than you.
12. Alla: Yes. So, now I will tell you about them.
13. Olga: OK
14. Alla: Tanya go ... goes to school. She likes to read books about love.
15. Olga: Wow. I like about love also.
16. Alla: Dasha plays on the piano. She goes to the musical school in my town. She plays very good. My brother Anton likes video games. He plays SEGA. And my parents works ... oh work at school.
17. T: How are you doing here? Do you have any questions?
18. Alla: No, it's ok.
19. Olga: it's ok.
20. T: ok.
21. Olga: Your parents teach?
22. Alla: Yes, they are teachers and they teach mathematics. Now, what about you?
23. Olga: ok. My family is small. My mother, father and I. My mother work at factory.

24. Alla: You must say "works".
25. Olga: ok. Works at factory. Why?
26. Alla: because mother is one, singular and third person, remember?
27. Olga: oh, yes. I forgot. My father works in his office. He is a businessman. He like ..ss to read newspapers about politics and likes to eat tasty food.
28. Alla: Does your mother cook or you go to the restaurants?
29. Olga: Yes.
30. Alla: what yes?
31. Olga: ah?
32. Alla: does your mother cook and you eat at home or you go to a restaurant? (more emphatically)
33. Olga: oh, at home. We eat at home. Yes, my mother cook..ss good food.
34. Olga: so, what do we need to do now?
35. Alla: he will ask me to tell about you and you will tell him about me.
36. Olga: ye, ye, ye.
37. T: Ok. Now your time is up. Now everyone will need to tell the whole class about your partner. Who wants to start.

   In transcribing, I decided to pass other students' answers and go to the pair near the tape-recorder.
38. T: OK. Now, it is your turn. Who would like to begin, Olga or Alla?
39. Alla: I want.
40. T: ok.
41. Alla: Here is Olga. Her family is small. Her mother works at the factory and her father is a businessman. He likes tasty food, and he ... goes to the restaurants. And her mother cooks good food. And Olga studies English, he he.
42. T: Very good. It is so nice if a woman cooks well. Right? Ok. What about you Olga? Tell us about Alla's family.
43. Olga: Alla's family is big. Her father work and mother work, I mean her father and mother work at school. They teach mathematics. Her sister plays on the piano, and another sister reads books about love, hehe.
44. T: So, Alla has two sisters.? And one plays the piano. Interesting.
45. Olga: yes, she has two sisters. And she has one brother. He like(s) SEGA ... likes to play ... SEGA.

At the beginning of excerpt three, the teacher establishes the structure for student-student interaction. Arranged in pairs students take turns telling about their families using Present Simple Tense. Presumably, every student will have an equal opportunity to be the leader when telling about his family and then change the roles. The way it turns out in the classroom, though, shows the complexity of the group interaction. In turn 1, the teacher asks if there are any questions. Nobody asks any because there will be an opportunity to clarify the assignment with the peers and nobody wants to show that he/she did not understand the task. Once students are in a group, they assign themselves roles. In this case, the role distribution is based on "who knows what to do." Immediately after the students split into pairs, Olga asks Alla about the assignment "So what we need to do?" [turn 3]. Thus, from the very beginning in this particular pair Alla, being asked and being referred to as to the expert, will be playing the role of a leader.

Being a self-imposed leader and hence implicitly responsible for the completion of the task, Alla several times shifts back to the major topic of the discussion. We can see this in turn 12, "Yes, so now I will tell you about them." In turn 15, Olga reacts to the previous phrase and says that she "like[s] about love too." Alla simply ignores Olga's comment and sticks to the core topic of the discussion.

As leader, Alla seems to consider herself responsible for grammatical accuracy during the activity. She corrects herself, for example "Tanya go ... goes to school" [turn 14], "My parents works ... work at school" [turn 16] and she also suggests the right answer when her partner makes errors. In turn 23, Olga makes a grammatical mistake, saying "My mother work at factory." Alla immediately corrects her giving the correct for of her sentence "You must say 'works'" [turn 24]. Her correction leads to the explanation of the rule, in turn 26, "because mother is one, singular, and third person, remember?" Using the word "remember," Alla is trying to relate a particular grammatical feature from the context to the previous stages, thus showing the implementation of form in producing meaningful utterance. In some cases, Alla focuses on the content and asks Olga to elaborate when eliciting information about her mother [turns 28-32]. "Does your mother cook or you go to the restaurants?"[turn 28]. Olga does not understand the questions and responds "yes" [turn 29]. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) see the source of this misunderstanding in incorrect intonation. Quite often ESL/EFL students pronounce Yes/No questions and alternative questions with the same falling intonation, which does not show to the interlocutor the choice. In turn 30, Alla tries to clarify what the right answer (from the choice) is, saying "What yes?" It was not enough for Olga, who does not understand what she needs to say "Ah?" [turn 31]. That makes Alla clarify the question more emphatically, making it more explicit "Does your mother cook and you eat at home or you go to a restaurant?"

Excerpt 3 represents a meaning based task, which reflects the nature of social interaction. It enables students to simulate a real-life situation, asking follow-up questions and reacting consequently. For example, in turn 9, after hearing that Alla has brothers, Olga interrupts her and asks "How old are they?" Or, in turn 28, after Alla heard that Olga's father likes to eat good food, she asks "Does your mother cook or you go to the restaurants?" What family members usually do is not important from the perspective of the task, but rather is a natural reaction of a listening interlocutor. Furthermore, in turn 11, after Alla tells her brothers' ages, Olga gives a remark "They are smaller than you" [turn 12]. Or after Olga heard that Alla's sister Dasha likes to read books about love [turn 14], she responds in turn 15, "Wow. I like about love also." Thus, the major advantage of combining form and meaning is that in practicing the form in meaning-based tasks, students negotiate the meaning in their L2. That results in spontaneous use of the target language.

Another interesting thing is that Alla, playing the role of the dyad's leader, is focusing on the form. For example, in turn 24, she says "you must say works." As for Olga, in the opposite, she is concentrating on the meaning. As I mentioned before, she shifts the natural flow of the interaction to subject matter that she finds more interesting [turns 9, 11, and 15]. Interestingly, in turn 21, Olga still remembers that Alla's parents work at school [turn 16] when the teacher interrupts the discussion to offer help [turn 17]. After the teacher leaves she restarts the flow of the discussion by asking Alla "Your parents teach?" Focusing on both form and meaning, even though doing so may be good, is very difficult to do. It seems that when Olga is focusing on the form, she uses the right form of the verb, for example, in turn 25, (speaking about Alla's father) "... works at factory." At the same time, in turn 27, "He like ...ss to read," and turn 33, "My mother cook ...ss good food," when Olga focuses on the meaning, she forgets about the form. That is exactly what Pica (1985) argues is the trouble for L2 learners when they switch their attention from the form to the meaning.

Group work in the third stage of the *EEE instructional method* is very powerful. Students are often less comfortable asking the teacher questions. Peer interaction creates a certain micro-world that enables the students to negotiate the assignment, clarify tasks, and even provide each other with corrections. It definitely develops their strategic competence (Savignon, 1972). In excerpt 3, students twice rejected the teacher's help and coped with the problem alone. It can be assumed, even though we obviously cannot be sure, that if the students did not have the opportunity to work and negotiate the meaning in groups, some questions would remain unsolved.

The last part of the excerpt (tuns 38-45) shows the way the teacher reacts in listening to the students' talk. Instead of interrupting, which would be disruptive, the teacher listens to the very end and then corrects the mistakes by repeating the sentence in the grammatically correct way. In turn 43, Olga says "... plays on the piano," which is a typical mistake of ESL students whose L1 is Russian, in which the preposition 'on' identifies the object of the activity. The teacher, then, in turn 44 repeats and rephrases the sentence, emphasizing and modeling the correct use "So, Alla has two sisters. And one plays the piano. Interesting."

Although groups can be very effective, teachers should not be naive about group interaction. Even though it looks like students are creating meaningful utterances by themselves, the instructor holds the responsibility for making sure that there is no misuse, that 'leaders' do not impose wrong forms and rules, and that students have equal opportunities to participate and express their thoughts. In turn 18, Alla very abruptly makes it clear to the teacher that his help is not wanted. However, we cannot be sure that Olga wanted the same. Thus, teachers need to find other strategies and techniques of controlling what is going on in groups, without explicitly "invading" a group.

An Evaluative Questionnaire

The method worked fairly successfully with the students. They were willing to respond and participate in classroom communication. To find out their attitudes towards learning grammar using the EEE method, an anonymous evaluative questionnaire was administered to the group after several lessons of integrative grammar teaching. The questions were formulated in such a way that the learners would be able to express their attitudes towards each task of the new method, as well as towards form-focused instruction only. The reliability of the instrument was investigated using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (t(10)=26.28 at p<0.001). Respondents were asked to indicate, using a five-point Likert-type scale (+2 to -2), their reaction to a series of statements by selecting one of the possibilities. The scores of the questionnaire were adjusted in such a way that a positive response meant a positive attitude towards integrative grammar teaching. The mean score was 1.33, which signifies the students were positive towards the EEE method. The questions on the questionnaire are presented in Appendix.

Conclusion

This paper described a way of combining form and meaning in teaching L2 grammar to ESL students. What I call the *EEE method*, consisting of three stages (*exploration, explanation*, and *expression*) has been proposed. A series of experimental lessons were administered to ESL students to study the patterns of classroom interaction during each of the suggested stages. As the analysis of the lessons shows, in the first, **exploration stage,** learners look at certain sentences and discover a grammatical pattern under an instructor's supervision. This stage also involves cognitive learning. Instead of being given an explicit rule, students spend some time discussing and discovering grammatical patterns, which, as the survey shows, helps them understand the rules. A teacher is given the role of the mediator working within the zone of proximal development. He starts at the point where his students are and pushes them, with his help, to grow and improve their L2 competence. In the second, **explanation stage**, the teacher explains explicit rules, which, as Lightbown (1980) and Pica (1985) show, will make their speech more grammatically accurate. It is important for the teacher to connect the rules to the examples from the exploration stage, which builds on what students already know, as well as provides content-based examples for the third stage. In the third, **expression stage**, students use new structures in interaction, producing meaningful utterances. This stage prepares L2 learners for spontaneous L2 use by helping them focus equally on form and on meaning in using their language in communication. Finally, the evaluative questionnaire, which was administered to determine the attitudes of the students towards a new method of grammar teaching, showed that students liked the method and thought its work was effective.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

Questionnaire

What is your preference for integrative grammar learning?

Please circle the number that best describes your attitude.

(**SD** - Strongly Disagree, **D** - Disagree, **U -** Undecided, **A** - Agree, **SA** - Strongly Agree)

Question	SD	D	U	A	SA
1. You learn English grammatical rules easier through exploration, rather than through reading the rules in a textbook.	1	2	3	4	5
2. You don't like discussing topics in small groups.	1	2	3	4	5
3. You think it is helpful to know explicit grammatical rules, which you could use in creating utterances in L2.	1	2	3	4	5
4. You think you cannot learn a foreign language in group interaction.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Exploration of grammar rules helps you to remember rules.	1	2	3	4	5
6. You feel comfortable practicing new rules under an instructor's supervision.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel safe when I know explicit grammar rules.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Integrative grammar teaching is less interesting than reading the rules in a textbook.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I do not like challenging tasks.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I feel very confident in using English, even though I do not know all the rules.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Learning grammar is a waste of time.					
12. I have more opportunities to use English spontaneously when using an integrative method.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Integrative grammar learning is boring.	1	2	3	4	5