Grammar Learning Preferences of Turkish Undergraduate Students of Translation-Interpretation

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Abstract

The present study aimed to discover the grammar learning preferences of Turkish undergraduate students attending translation-interpretation department of a Turkish university. Upon the review of the relevant literature, a survey questionnaire was administered on the students to find out their grammar learning preferences. The research is quantitative in nature. The participants were 100 undergraduate students whose genders, classes and majors varied. The results of the survey were analysed through in depth and detailed statistical analysis. Statistical analysis was also implemented to reveal if there exist statistically significant differences between different genders, classes and departments. To test the validity and reliability of the survey, varimax rotated subscale analysis, croanbach alpha and item-total correlation coefficients were calculated. Besides, T-test, Repeated Measures, and ANOVA were used to test the interaction of dependent variables with independent variables. The study revealed that the participants defended the use of formal instruction in grammar teaching either after or before communication takes place in the foreign language.

Keywords: *Grammar Teaching Approaches, Focus on Form, Focus on Forms, Student Preferences*

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Introduction

With the introduction of constructivism, the term "student-centred learning" came into existence and the role of the teacher in a classroom evidently changed from the focal point of the class to the facilitator of learning. From a point of view that the teacher was the source and transmitter of knowledge, the dominant opinion came to be that students were to be driven to learn, produce and exploit the knowledge gained in their lives (Roblyer et al., 1997). In other words, as Motschnig-Pitrik & Holzinger (2002) suggest, constructivism, unlike behaviourism which is based on habit formation and knowledge, seeks to achieve competence.

The term competence was first put forward by Chomsky (1965), and then by Hymes (1966) since he found Chomsky's definition inadequate. Later on, Canale and Swain (1980) extended the definition and divided the concept of competence into four types, grammar competence, sociolinguistic competence, discursive competence, and strategic competence. According to Canale and Swain (1980), grammar competence is related to vocabulary and grammatical rules. Sociolinguistic competence includes communicative purposes, situations and the appropriateness of the language used. Discursive competence has to do with different types of texts and lastly, strategic competence deals with the effective transmission of the message through the use of communication strategies. Communicative competence has become the aim of language teaching as the influence of communicative approach increased (Savignon, 1997).

Explicit vs Implicit Instruction

Grammar teaching can be categorized into two types, explicit and implicit. Implicit instruction focuses on having the learners pick up language without teaching rule by rule and on the other hand, instruction is defined explicit if the purpose of teaching is to create grammatical rule awareness (DeKeyser, 1995).

Although both types are widely preferred, they are not without their shortcomings. According to Ellis (2001), implicit instruction leads to the memorization of patterns and sentences. However, a high level of competence is difficult to reach with adult learners without considerably strong analytical skills (DeKeyser, 2000), which may cause only a limited level of achievement in terms of different types of competences. On the side of explicit grammar instruction, the long time that learning grammatical rules consciously would take appears to be a serious problem (Murphy & Hastings, 2006). In addition, as stated by Ponniah (2008), learners of foreign languages pay attention to forms and rules only when a grammar test is at hand, not while partaking in actual communication.

Focus-on-Form or Focus-on-Forms?

Teaching grammar has been a matter of debate for a long time and different approaches towards teaching of grammar have been put forward. Mainly, there are two approaches to grammar teaching according to Long (1988, 1991) in Sheen (2002): "focus on form" and "focus on forms". Long (1991:45-6) in Sheen (2002) defines the former as having students pay attention to structures as they occur in lessons by chance to clarify meaning or to strengthen communication and the latter as the teaching of individual grammatical items in different lessons. Ellis's definition of focus on form is "any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form" (2001a:1, 2) and this activity should serve communicative purposes instead of teaching any grammatical item. In this respect, it is assumed that learners are exposed to comprehensible input.

Krashen and Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach suggests that comprehensible input, that is, input slightly above the level of the learner -i+1-, is solely adequate for L2 acquisition to take place. Related to this, Ellis (2008) views the second language as "a tool for communicating rather than as an object to be analyzed". According to Willis and Willis (2007), learners are not able to control the way they learn a foreign language. These views claim that the use of language for communicative purposes without formal instruction fosters learning.

Apart from the two approaches mentioned above, one can also talk about a third approach, the integration of focus on form and focus on forms. In this kind of a grammar teaching approach, both focusing on form and grammatical practice for communicative purposes are emphasized (Burgess and Etherington, 2002). As Brumfit (1984) suggested, teachers should help learners both with communication and correct use of language. DeKeyser (1998) stated that focus on form was not always adequate in terms of pronunciation teaching and thus a focus on forms was essential in the case mentioned. Swain and Lapkin (2002) also supported explicit grammar teaching within fluency activities that are based on meaning.

Therefore, it could be said that focus on form and focus on forms approaches could be used together interconnected in classroom environment and a teacher does not necessarily have to choose between either approach (Spada and Lightbown, 2008).

Many experimental studies support the view that L2 acquisition and grammar learning are fostered through focus-on-form. Haight, Herron and Cole (2007), in their study with 47 college students enrolled in a second-semester French class, found out that guided induction of grammatical structures made a better contribution to the learning of grammatical structures.

The effects of teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions on various characteristics of incidental focus on form was studied by Yuqin Zhao and Bitchener (2007) and they found an association between the types of interaction and types of focus on form. Moreover, they portrayed that vocabulary was the most commonly attended linguistic aspect.

On the side of the teachers, the use of focus on form was confirmed by Basturkmen, Loewen, and Ellis (2004). In their study, they investigated the teacher beliefs about focus on form and discovered that teachers resorted to focus on form; although how they do it differed.

As a matter of fact, explicit grammar teaching is still a point of debate in the world of English Language Teaching. Ellis (2006) stated that it is still in the centre of debate as it has always been. One could come across with a lot of studies confirming the necessity of explicit grammar teaching like that of Anderson (2000), in which he defends the view that learners first develop a deductive way of processing knowledge and the use of that particular knowledge becomes automatic in time, thus acquiring cognitive skills cannot take place incidentally.

What is more, numerous empirical studies support the use of explicit grammar teaching in a foreign language class. For instance, Genesee (1987) discovered that input-based teaching types could not produce higher levels of grammatical accuracy in comparison to instructed grammar teaching and this was in line with a meta-analysis of 49 studies by Noms and Ortega (2000) who found out that the isolation of grammatical structures and meta-linguistic analysis revealed better results than implicit grammar teaching.

Another study by Robinson (1996) asserted that a higher level of accuracy was achieved through instructed grammar teaching than implicit ways of grammar teaching. In a similar manner, Erlam (2003) also observed higher scores in his post-tests, among the groups who were taught deductively. Radwan (2005) also portrayed that explicit grammar teaching resulted in better results than implicit grammar teaching.

Scheffler and Cinciała (2011) found out that learners of English as a foreign language could come up with explicit rules for the language they used accurately while speaking English. Therefore, they concluded that learners may find metalinguistic descriptions comprehensible and noticing is also a significant part of the intaking process. Moreover, Scheffler and Cinciała (2011) concluded that grammar rules assist language learning due to the fact that they promote the figuring out of one's output.

There are also studies which show that teachers are not against explicit grammar teaching. Borg (2006) and Schulz (2001) reported that teachers thought that explicit study of grammatical structures was necessary and that fostered the learning of L2. If so, through explicit grammar teaching, learners' errors can be analysed an corrected through explicit feedback.

As for error correction in communicative activities, Lyster (1998) stated that the correction of grammatical errors could be made explicitly, too. Moreover, Ferris (2004) defends that learners should be made aware of their errors through negative feedback. In a similar fashion, Varnosfadrani and Basturkmen (2009) advised that teachers give students metalinguistic feedback whenever it is possible.

Likewise, Ohta (2001) observed that even the students who are not addressed can benefit from corrective feedback.

Taking into account the different approaches towards the teaching of grammar, the present study aimed to discover the grammar learning preferences of Turkish undergraduate students attending translation-interpretation departments.

Methodology

In the present study, survey method was used. The results were evaluated quantitatively.

Participants

Table 1.

Distribution of Students According to Genders, Classes and Departments

			TOTAL
Gender	Male	41	100
	Female	59	
Class	Freshman	26	100
	Sophomore	18	
	Junior	15	
	Senior	41	
Major	English	74	100
	German	26	

The participants were 100 volunteer students attending Translation and Interpretation department at a Turkish University. 59% of the participants were female (n=59) and 41% were male (n=41). 26% of the participants consisted of freshman students, 18% sophomore students, 15% junior students and 41% senior students. English Translation-Interpretation students took up a 74% of the participants and German Translation-Interpretation students covered 26%. Ages of the participants varied between 18 and 29.

Data Collection

For data collection, a scale was developed by the researcher to determine which grammar teaching approach –explicit or implicit- the students preferred (Appendix A). The three point Likert scale contained 22 items with three choices (1=Disagree, 2=Undecided, 3=Agree) about different aspects of grammar teaching. The scale was piloted to ensure its reliability, and then it was administered on the participants in classroom environment by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Varimax Rotated Factor Analysis, Croanbach Alpha and Item-Total Correlation coefficients were calculated to test the validity and reliability of the scale. To measure the interaction of dependent variables with independent variables, T-test, Repeated Measures and ANOVA were administered.

Data was collected in classroom environment by the researcher in order to provide the participants with any guidance needed during the responding procedure, and it took approximately 30 minutes for each class to respond to all the items in the scale.

Scale Development Analyses

Students' Grammar Learning Preferences scale consists of 22 items to identify if the students prefer focus on form, focus on forms or an integrated version of grammar teaching approaches.

After the administration of the scale, KMO value was found to be above 0,6 and the Bartlett's test was significant (p<0,01), which indicated that factor analysis could be conducted.

Varimax rotated factor analysis was administered to check the structural validity of the scale and 5 subscales were discovered. Only the first three subscales were analysed in detail and the rest were left out of the study since they were not considered by the researcher to measure the grammar teaching approaches preferences (Appendix A).

For the 3 subscales which were chosen by the researcher, Croanbach's alpha values and item-total correlation (rit) coefficients were calculated and it was found that all 3 subscales were internally consistent; total item correlation changed between 0.39 and 0.73 (Appendix B). Furthermore, the subscales had Croanbach's Alpha values of 0,81, 0,76 and 0,76 respectively, which indicated an acceptable level of reliability.

Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for each item and subscale were calculated and each item within subscales were found out to have significant correlations (p<0,05) and the determinant value was found out to be 0, which indicated that there was no multicollinearity among the items.

Findings

Table 2.

Mean and Standard Deviation Values for Each Factor

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Integrated Approach	100	2,0600	0,71344
Focus on Forms	100	2,0917	0,56077
Focus on Form	100	1,6300	0,62004

Table 2 demonstrates the mean and standard deviation values for each of the factors. It is seen in the table that "Focus on Forms" approach ($\bar{x}$=2,0917) and the "Integrated Approach" ($\bar{x}$=2,06) had higher mean values in comparison to "Focus on Form" approach. The preferences of the students were the most homogenous (sd=0,56077) in "Focus on Forms" approach and the most heterogeneous (sd=0,71344) in the "Integrated Approach".

To test any significant difference among the mean values of each approach, repeated measures tests were held and the results revealed that there was significant difference among the values (p<0,05) (Table 3).

Table 3.

Difference Level among the Mean Values Of Approaches (MVA)

Source	MVA	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
MVA	Linear	9,245	1	9,245	45,609	,000
	Quadratic	4,056	1	4,056	5,926	,017
Error(MVA)	Linear	20,068	99	,203		
	Quadratic	67,765	99	,684		

To see how each factor differentiated from one another, Bonferroni test results were interpreted (Table 4).

Table 4.

Bonferroni Test Results

(I) Approach	(J) Approach	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.[a]	95% Confidence Interval for Difference[a] Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Integrated Approach	Focus on Forms	-,032	,111	1,000	-,303	,239
	Focus on Form	,430[*]	,064	,000	,275	,585
Focus on Forms	Integrated Approach	,032	,111	1,000	-,239	,303
	Focus on Form	,462[*]	,101	,000	,216	,707
Focus on Form	Integrated Approach	-,430[*]	,064	,000	-,585	-,275
	Focus on Forms	-,462[*]	,101	,000	-,707	-,216

As seen in Table 4, the comparison of the means of "Integrated Approach" and "Focus on Forms" did not disclose any significant difference (p>0,05). However, the mean value of the approach, "Focus on Form" was found out to be significantly lower (p<0,05) than the means of the other approaches.

Two t-tests were administered successively to find out any significant difference between genders and between departments, however, the results revealed no significant difference according to genders and departments of English Translation-Interpretation and German Translation-Interpretation.

Table 5 displays the means and standard deviation values related to the participants' preferences according to their classes.

Table 5.

The Means and Standard Deviation Values According to Classes

CLASS		Integrated Approach	Focus on Forms	Focus on Form
Freshman	Mean	2,2788	2,0577	1,7404
	N	26	26	26
	Std. Deviation	0,7393	0,5943	0,7499
Sophomore	Mean	1,7361	2,2500	1,8333
	N	18	18	18
	Std. Deviation	0,6991	0,5491	0,6243
Junior	Mean	2,0667	2,1222	1,6000
	N	15	15	15
	Std. Deviation	0,7225	0,5436	0,5071
Senior	Mean	2,0610	2,0325	1,4817
	N	41	41	41
	Std. Deviation	0,6703	0,5568	0,5431

Table 6.
One Way ANOVA Results

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The Integrated Approach	Between Groups	3,134	3	1,045	2,122	,102
	Within Groups	47,256	96	,492		
	Total	50,390	99			

	Between Groups	,639	3	,213	,670	,572
Focus on Forms	Within Groups	30,493	96	,318		
	Total	31,132	99			
	Between Groups	1,976	3	,659	1,752	,161
Focus on Forms	Within Groups	36,084	96	,376		
	Total	38,060	99			

To see if the means mentioned had any significant difference among each other, a One Way ANOVA was conducted and it was seen that there was no significant difference according to classes in terms of their grammar learning preferences.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to determine which grammar teaching approach students preferred. The analysis of the scale demonstrated that the participants preferred Focus on Forms and Integrated approaches equally. Due to the existence of a significant difference in favour of these two approaches, it could be said that a majority of the students, regardless of their genders, classes and majors, do not prefer Focus on Form, that is, language teaching without formal grammar instruction. The results imply that the students do not feel comfortable with the absence of explicit grammar teaching and they believe implicit grammar teaching is inadequate and unfavourable. These findings reflect similarities with the findings of Pazaver and Wang (2009) and Ismail (2010); in the mentioned studies, the participants claimed that they believed grammar teaching was necessary to learn a foreign language.

The reason for this attitude may be the fact that most students are used to learning a foreign language through traditional teaching techniques and approaches of their teachers. As a result, students may be feeling more secure and motivated with the existence of formal instruction. When they are exposed to implicit grammar teaching techniques, they feel as if they lost control of their learning, which causes discomfort. However, the high preference level of the Integrated Approach suggests that the students are also well aware of the importance of being in a communicative environment where the foreign language being learnt is continuously practiced. On this issue, further study might be necessary to develop techniques for improving communicative confidence to prevent over-reliance on theoretical grammar knowledge.

As dealt with in the previous sections of the present study, explicit and implicit types of grammar teaching are not without their drawbacks. While merely focusing on form requires a vast amount of cognitive process, focusing on forms and studying grammatical rules takes a long time to internalize. Therefore, resorting to the stronger sides of both approaches in order to achieve communicative, grammar, discourse and strategic competences may prove useful guides for teachers and learners.

To sum up, the findings of the present study suggest that the students feel the need to receive formal grammar instruction and they do not believe that they could learn a foreign language without it. Taking into account also the relevant literature which supports explicit

grammar teaching, teachers of foreign languages should not neglect to search for the expectations and preferences of learners and make use of it in order to foster learning and increase learning motivation.

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Appendices

Appendix A : Factor Analysis

Table 1. Rotated Component Matrix					
Component					
	1	2	3	4	5
1. The aim of foreign language teaching is to teach both accurate communication and accurate grammar.	0,029532	-0,01409	-0,00158	0,761559	-0,03724
2. Communication in a foreign language class should take place after the necessary structures are taught.	-0,48904	0,336203	0,022854	0,14821	0,067386
3. A foreign language class should be based only on meaning and form.	0,116082	-0,08751	0,785394	0,004766	-0,06053
4. I should learn grammatical structures from my teacher's explanations before everything else.	-0,36977	0,256712	0,022096	0,065933	-0,56255
5. In order to communicate in a foreign language, I should learn both meaning and individual structures.	0,049775	0,419526	-0,19571	0,4372	-0,30088
6. A foreign language lesson should only focus on meaning and communication.	0,283474	-0,17064	0,722937	-0,05333	0,160994
7. In a foreign language lesson, the teaching of structures should be mainly emphasized.	-0,60511	0,303752	-0,11922	0,310332	-0,13203
8. In foreign language teaching, the aim is to teach a new grammatical structure in each lesson.	-0,20106	0,751752	0,006577	-0,06142	0,007414
9. In foreign language teaching, the aim is to communicate and understand a text without grammar teaching.	0,308024	-0,15523	0,567163	-0,34329	0,160202
10. In order to understand a text, it is necessary to study its grammar first.	-0,07497	0,638196	-0,37737	0,035435	-0,07536
11. In order to communicate in a foreign language, I should learn each grammatical structure individually.	-0,17556	0,727616	-0,15416	-0,06634	-0,01859
12. In a foreign language class, meaning and form should be taught first, grammar should come afterwards.	0,68722	-0,09674	0,330667	-0,08508	0,181056
13. In a foreign language class, the primary aim is to use the language and the secondary aim is to study grammar.	0,711309	-0,25725	0,20167	0,167021	0,222881

14. In foreign language teaching, the aim is to learn communication before individual grammatical structures.	0,548494	-0,27151	0,276658	0,201319	0,196508
15. Foreign language lessons should be conducted on a communicative basis without grammar instruction.	0,474453	-0,0096	0,5218	-0,10322	0,005289
16. The primary aim of foreign language teaching is to enable learners use structures accurately.	-0,21536	0,575067	0,106965	0,489121	0,035069
17. In a foreign language class, the main focus should be on meaning, communication and grammar equally.	0,15918	0,090863	-0,53759	0,323477	-0,21975
18. A foreign language lesson should begin with communication and language use, and continue with grammatical analysis.	0,813886	-0,01601	0,011329	0,054674	0,021466
19. I should learn grammatical structures without instruction, through discovering in context.	0,366135	0,035011	0,200626	-0,14763	0,675004
20. In order to understand a text, both meaning and grammar should be analyzed.	-0,02154	-0,09072	-0,29804	0,696145	0,063084
21. I should learn grammar by both discovering in context and explicit instruction.	-0,0435	0,045546	0,063263	0,057282	0,803531
22. A foreign language lesson should be based on communication through accurate use of grammar.	-0,35432	0,414751	-0,24523	0,393261	-0,16427

Appendix B: Item-total Correlation Coefficients, Significance Levels of Pearson's Correlation Coefficients and Croanbach's Alpha Values

Factor 1 : Integrated Approach	rit	P
12.In a foreign language class, meaning and form should be taught first, grammar should come afterwards.	0,63	p<.01
13.In a foreign language class, the primary aim is to use the language and the secondary aim is to study grammar.	0,73	p<.01
14. In foreign language teaching, the aim is to learn communication before individual grammatical structures.	0,56	p<.01
18.A foreign language lesson should begin with communication and language use, and continue with grammatical studies.	0,60	p<.01
	Croanbach's Alpha	
	0,81	
Factor 2 : Focus on FormS	rit	p
2.Communication in a foreign language class should take place after the necessary structures are taught.	0,40	p<.01
4.I should learn grammatical structures from my teacher's explanations before everything else.	0,39	p<.05
8.In foreign language teaching, the aim is to teach a new grammatical structure in each lesson.	0,54	p<.01
10.In order to understand a text, it is necessary to study its grammar first.	0,50	p<.01
11.In order to communicate in a foreign language, I should learn each grammatical structure individually.	0,50	p<.01
16.The primary aim of foreign language teaching is to enable learners use structures accurately.	0,49	p<.01
22.A foreign language lesson should be based on communication through accurate use of grammar.	0,55	p<.01
	Croanbach's Alpha	
	0,76	
Factor 3 : Focus on Form	rit	p
3.A foreign language class should be based only on meaning and form.	0,54	p<.01
6.A foreign language lesson should only focus on meaning and communication.	0,64	p<.01
9.In foreign language teaching, the aim is to communicate and understand a text without grammar teaching.	0,51	p<.01
15.Foreign language lessons should be conducted on a communicative basis without grammar instruction.	0,51	p<.01
	Croanbach's Alpha	
	0,76	

Appendix C : Grammar Learning Preferences Scale
Dear Participant, the results of the questionnaire below will be used in a
scientific study.

Thank you. Kutay Uzun

Age :

Gender :

Major :

Class : Item	Disagree	Undecided	Agree
1.The aim of foreign language teaching is to teach both communication and accurate grammar use.			
2. Communication in a foreign language class should take place after the necessary structures are taught.			
3. A foreign language class should be based only on meaning and form.			
4. I should learn grammatical structures from my teacher's explanations before everything else.			
5. In order to communicate in a foreign language, I need to learn both meaning and individual forms.			
6. A foreign language lesson should only focus on meaning and communication.			
7. A foreign language lesson should firstly focus on the teaching of grammatical structures.			
8. In foreign language teaching, the aim is to teach a new grammatical structure in each lesson.			
9. In foreign language teaching, the aim is to communicate and understand a text without grammar teaching.			
10. In order to understand a text, it is necessary to study its grammar first.			
11. In order to communicate in a foreign language, I should learn each grammatical structure individually.			
12. In a foreign language class, meaning and form should be taught first, grammar should come afterwards.			
13. In a foreign language class, the primary aim is to use the language and the secondary aim is to study grammar.			
14. In foreign language teaching, the aim is to learn communication before individual grammatical structures.			
15. Foreign language lessons should be conducted on a communicative basis without grammar instruction.			
16. The primary aim of foreign language teaching is to enable learners use structures accurately.			
17. Foreign language lessons should focus on grammatical structures as much as meaning and communication.			
18. A foreign language lesson should being with communication and language use, and continue with grammatical analysis.			
19. I should learn grammatical structures without formal instruction, by discovering them within the context.			
20. In order to understand a text, both meaning and structures should be analyzed.			
21. I should learn grammatical structures through the explanations of the teacher after I discover them myself.			
22. A foreign language lesson should be based on communication through accurate use of grammar.			