

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING PROFESSIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CULTURES

23 and 24 September 2010

THE INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE CONFERENCE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING PROFESSIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CULTURES 2010

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Turkish Prospective English as a Foreign Language Teachers' Awareness of English Grammatical Terms

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Abstract— **The present paper presents issues related with teachers' knowledge of grammatical terms. Specifically, it intended to compare knowledge of grammatical terminology of two groups of prospective teachers.**

Index Terms—**Foreign language education, grammatical terminology knowledge, prospective teachers, teacher education.**

I. Introduction and Literature Review

There has been a large body of research on language teachers' pedagogical and content knowledge [1].

More specifically, studies on teachers' linguistic knowledge mainly focus on its importance and impact [2, 3], and its relationship with issues such as content knowledge, learners' perceptions, and instructional/pedagogical practices [4, 5].

However, studies on language teachers' explicit grammatical knowledge are not abundant. In fact, this is considered to be an essential component of a language teacher [6, 7]. Of the few studies on this issue researchers preferred to focus on mainly practicing in-service teachers but not on pre-service teachers. The lack of sufficient and comprehensive research on this area gave the impetus for the present study.

The findings presented in this paper are part of a larger research project, the aim of which was to investigate Turkish prospective EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers' metalinguistic awareness related to grammar.

The present paper presents issues related with teachers' knowledge of grammatical terms. Specifically, it intended to compare knowledge of grammatical terminology of two groups of prospective teachers.

Teachers should be competent and equipped with a profound basis of implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge because of both the nature of the instructional style and the necessities of their profession. Knowledge of grammatical terminology has always been an import component of the professional standards expected of the language teacher, regardless of the methodological trends.

In fact, despite the rise of communicative movement in language education, language lessons are still conducted in grammar-based traditional ways in many school settings, including Turkish classrooms.

II. Methodology

A. Participants and Setting

The participant group consisted of 50 freshmen and 53 sophomore student teachers studying at the ELT (English Language Teaching) department of a state university in Istanbul, Turkey.

A background information questionnaire was developed and administered by the researchers. Based on this questionnaire, demographic data are presented in Table 1 (remaining percentages are due to missing information on the background information questionnaire). Of the participants, 30% were males and 70% were females. Students' ages ranged between 16 and 23. Seventy percent of the participants were graduates of Anatolian teacher training high schools, while other participants were from other high school types. Anatolian teacher training high schools are special in that they provide their students with additional pedagogical courses and extra points to enter faculties of education in the national university entrance exams. Almost half of the participants (48%) indicated having studied English for more than ten years. In addition, 21 of the participants (20%) perceived their own English level as intermediate, whereas 70 students (68%) reported their level as advanced.

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TABLE I.
SUMMARY OF THE PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Background Information Items		n	%
Grade level	1st year	50	49
	3rd year	53	51
Gender	Male	31	30
	Female	72	70
Age	18-20	65	63
	21-23	36	35
	16-17	1	1
Perceived English level	Beginner	0	0
	Intermediate	21	20
	Advanced	70	68
Years of English	0-5 years	8	8
	6-10 years	43	42
	10 years and more	49	48
High school type	Anatolian T training	72	70
	Super	2	2
	Private	2	2
	Regular	10	10
	Anatolian	16	16

B. Data Collection and Analysis

For the larger study, a 60-item language awareness test (Language Awareness Test) composed of two sections to measure the grammatical knowledge of language teachers developed by Andrews (1999) was administered to the 103 pre-service teachers.

For the purposes of this study, the findings of the three tasks in only Section 1 will be presented (which we have labeled as grammatical terminology knowledge). These tasks are geared toward testing teachers' explicit knowledge of grammatical terminology. The first two tasks included 18 items and tested participants' ability to recognize grammatical terms (which we have labeled as metarecognition), while the third task included 12 items and tested their ability to produce appropriate metalinguistic terms (which we have labeled as metaproduction). Each participant received two scores out of 100, one for metarecognition and one or metaproduction.

Data were analyzed by running statistical tests within each group and across groups.

III. RESULTS

An independent samples t-test ($p<0.05$) was conducted to compare the metarecognition and metaproduction scores for the two groups (first year and third year students).

In terms of total meta scores, there was no significant difference in scores for the first year students ($M=58.10$, $SD=10.88$), and the third year students [$M=57.58$, $SD=11.51$; $t(100)=0.23$, $p=0.81$].

In terms of metarecognition and metaproduction scores analyzed separately, there was no significant difference for the first year and the third year students.

TABLE II.
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST FOR GRAMMATICAL TERMINOLOGY KNOWLEDGE

	1st yr	3rd yr			
	M	M	Sig.	Df	T
Grammatical terminology knowledge	58.10	57.58	0.81	100	0.23

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) ($p<0.05$) was conducted to explore the impact of high school type on metarecognition and metaproduction scores. Subjects were divided into five groups according to their high school type (Group 1: Anatolian teacher training high school; Group 2: Super high school; Group 3: Private high school; Group 4: Regular high school; Group 5: Anatolian high school).

In terms of metarecognition scores, there was no statistically significant difference for the student teachers grouped in five high school types [$F(4, 96)=0.45$, $p=0.76$]. Similarly, in terms of metaproduction scores, there was no statistically significant difference [$F(4, 96)=1.32$, $p=0.26$].

A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to explore the impact of years of English on metarecognition and metaproduction scores. Subjects were divided into three groups according to the number of years they studied English (Group 1: 0-5 years; Group 2: 6-10 years; Group 3: more than 10 years).

The results were statistically nonsignificant for both the recognition [$F(2, 96)=0.64$, $p=0.52$] and production [$F(2, 96)=0.48$, $p=0.61$] of grammatical terms.

Finally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of language-related activities and their frequencies, as asked in the Background Information Questionnaire on metarecognition and metaproduction scores. Of all the activities that were asked, the one on Grammar will be discussed here. Subjects were divided into three groups according to the frequency of studying grammar on their own (Group 1: frequently; Group 2: sometimes/rarely; Group 3: never).

There was no statistically significant difference for the students who studied grammar in these frequency levels in terms of neither metarecognition [$F(2, 99)=1.12$, $p=0.32$] nor metaproduction scores [$F(2, 99)=0.10$, $p=0.90$].

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, based on the differing nature and intensity of English lessons in various high school types in Turkey, and different lengths of English study that the participants received, one would expect to see differences in the grammatical terminology knowledge test scores.

However, this was not the case and there could be multiple reasons.

Secondly, the student teachers who indicated studying grammar frequently on their own did not outperform the ones who rarely or never studied grammar. This can be due to various reasons such as ineffective study skills and weaker grammatical knowledge in the first place.

Last but not least, there was not a significant difference between Year 1 and Year 3 students in terms of grammatical terminology knowledge scores. This means that the two years of study at the Department of English Language Teaching did not further the student teachers' knowledge of English linguistic terms.

As a matter of fact, when the means of the grammatical terminology knowledge scores of the two student teacher groups are analyzed, it is seen that both groups scored quite low despite the fact that they have been exposed to English for many years where they were predominantly exposed to grammar-based instruction.

It can be concluded that no matter what kind of language teaching methodology will be used by the prospective teachers and the extent of grammar instruction they will be providing in their future career, it seems unquestionable that language teachers have to be highly knowledgeable and competent of the grammatical system of the language that they teach. Therefore, additional and profound courses to develop and improve prospective teachers' knowledge of grammar should be included in teacher training programs.

In conclusion, further research is called for on this issue. For example, prospective teachers can be compared with experienced teachers in order to explore whether in-service practice plays a role in teachers' awareness of grammatical knowledge.

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