

A PLACE FOR GRAMMAR IN AN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES CURRICULUM

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I. Introduction

With the increasing popularity in the late seventies and throughout the eighties of "communicative" approaches to language teaching, the centrality of grammar in the language curriculum has been severely called into question, and direct grammar teaching is sometimes even disparaged as being altogether useless. There seems to be a growing consensus that "focus on form" has been overemphasized, and that "focus on meaning" is a more productive guiding principle for language pedagogy.

One reason for this shift is the move toward thinking of language ability in broader terms than previously, and the concomitant expansion of language teaching goals; instead of focusing on developing students' grammatical competence, the more prevalent stated goal of language teaching now is to develop students' "communicative competence," which is seen to encompass pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence as well as linguistic competence. This emphasis on "language in use" entails that the language actually be used for communication in the classroom as much as possible.

Another reason, for de-emphasizing focus on form is that even if the goal of language teaching is specifically taken to be the development of grammatical competence, there is little support in findings from second language acquisition (SLA) research that this goal can be reached by direct grammar teaching.

Nevertheless, many language teachers' intuitions, and/or their students' demands, force them to the conclusion that, despite what the literature says, grammar instruction must have an important role, if not an essential one, in producing competent speakers of a language. The process of resolving the conflict has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, it generates healthy professional debate at conferences and in journals. One recent example from Japan is the special issue of *The Language Teacher* (June 1989) devoted specifically to this controversy. Of particular interest are the opposing views taken by Beers and Rittmaster (co-directors of the Kobe Steel Company's International Communication Program), and the provocative position taken by Luppescu (1989a) in "Why I Don't Teach Grammar," which provoked an impassioned rebuttal by Folse (1989), "Why This Unwarranted Attack on Grammar?" and response by Luppescu (1989b) in a later issue. Another good example of the professional scrutiny to which the teaching of grammar is being subjected is the LULTAC Conference for which this paper was written, where at least nine of the presented papers dealt directly with this issue.

The negative side of the controversy is that many teachers (and more dangerously, teacher trainers), lacking the time, incentive, and/or research skills to work toward a real solution, decide to ignore the research and theoretical literature and simply follow their own instincts. This tendency leads to a widening gap between theory and practice that can only hinder progress in the field.

As one small step toward trying to reconcile the ideals of theory with the realities of practice in relation to the teaching of grammar, this paper will first review recent literature relevant to the teaching of

grammar, and then describe the approach that one English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Program, the Intensive English Program at the International University of Japan, has taken toward the incorporation of a grammar component into its curriculum. Some preliminary results will be offered, and the prospects and limitations of this approach will be discussed. The purpose is not by any means to suggest that the IUJ approach should be emulated, but rather simply to make explicit the assumptions, approaches, pressures, and procedures which underlie current state of curriculum development in a particular program, with the hope that directions for improvement in the IUJ programs and in other programs may be revealed.

II. The Grammar Teaching Controversy: Some Recent Contributions

One of the first major challenges to grammar as an organizing principle for language courses came from the many studies during the seventies, e.g. Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974), Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1974), Larsen-Freeman (1975), which were designed to determine the order in which learners acquired certain grammatical morphemes. Despite the various ages and native language backgrounds of the subjects, and the types of instruction they received, these learners were found to acquire the grammatical morphemes under consideration in pretty much the same order. This led to the now widely accepted notion that just as in first language acquisition, there is an internal syllabus that second language learners follow, and that instruction is not likely to do anything to alter it. Although these studies served to highlight the importance of what the learner brings to the task of learning a language, their explanatory power was limited in that there were no clear relationships among the morphological items that were found to be in sequence.

Later, more focused research was done on the acquisition of particular grammatical sub-systems such as negation (see Schumann 1979 for review), interrogation (e.g. Butterworth and Hatch 1978), and relative clauses (e.g. Gass 1980). Compelling evidence was thus, provided that there are developmental stages that learners go through in learning the grammar of a second language. The important implications of these studies for grammar instruction was that teaching features out of sequence, along correcting learners' developmental errors, was likely to be ineffective and possibly even harmful, by interfering with the learner's process of moving naturally through stages of acquisition.

One of the researchers involved in the morpheme studies of the seventies, Krashen (e.g. 1982), is the scholar most closely associated with the position that teaching grammar is little use in producing competent speakers of a second language. He is well-known for his arguments that comprehensible input is the necessary and sufficient condition for language acquisition, and that conscious learning can never become acquisition. He therefore, advocates using classroom time for providing roughly-tuned comprehensible input with no focus on form. Although Krashen's rigid learning/acquisition distinction has been taken to task by many scholars (e.g. Gregg 1984), his arguments on the importance of comprehensible input are still widely accepted.

Another criticism of Krashen, however, is that he underestimates the importance of output. Evelyn Hatch (1978) first highlighted the

importance of output by proposing that discourse was not built up from grammar, but rather that grammar emerged from discourse in other words, by attempting to participate in conversations and learning how to interact verbally, learners would also be developing the grammatical structures necessary for conversation to proceed. Based on this idea, Long (e.g. 1981) and others have produced a body of research highlighting the importance of interaction, and the negotiation of meaning that takes place therein, for SLA. Long has subsequently been working toward applying these findings to the "Task Based Language Syllabus," (1985, 1989, and to appear) which will be discussed later. Long believes that a focus on form may be useful, but in the context of particular language tasks, not in the isolation of particular forms.

In contrast, to the trends in the literature cited above, Richards (1985) and Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988) find the evidence against grammar teaching inconclusive and argue that there is a need for explicit grammar teaching, especially at certain specific stages of proficiency. Although they acknowledge the dangers of overemphasis on form, they invoke the work of Higgs and Clifford (1982), who provide anecdotal evidence from their work with intensive language courses for military personnel to assert that without a sufficient emphasis on accuracy in the early stages of learning a second language, learners are likely to fossilize as their communicative needs move too far ahead of their grammatical knowledge. These learners thus, become unable to move further along the continuum toward native-like proficiency, remaining forever "Terminal Twos," in reference to a score of 2 on the Foreign Service Institute Oral Proficiency Ratings. As to the types of grammar treatment indicated, Richards suggests that they should be chosen according to the types of proficiency that are being aimed at, and Celce-Murcia and Hilles recommend an "eclectic" approach.

Ellis (1988, 1989) attempts to make more explicit what is actually meant by grammar teaching, categorizing it into two components: practice and consciousness raising (CR). He then reviews a range of studies to show that while the former has proven itself to be ineffective, the latter has much potential for accelerating acquisition. The aim of CR instruction is to raise learners' awareness of the forms and functions of grammatical structures, without expecting that the learners will immediately be able to use the structures in free production. As an example of CR, Ellis presents a "problem-solving" task in which learners, starting with a brief but contextualized text, need to specify what modal verbs would correspond to what meanings. Ellis argues that while the explicit knowledge gained from CR may not be immediately usable by the learner, it will contribute to implicit knowledge at some later time, by "sensitizing the learner to the occurrence of specific features in the input which otherwise, would not be attended to." (1988:37)

On this point, Ellis could derive support from a case study by Schmidt and Frota (1987) of Schmidt's acquisition of Portuguese. Schmidt and Frota found that learning about a grammatical feature through instruction was not enough to be able to make productive use of it, but that the resultant explicit knowledge of the feature would tend to make it more noticeable when it appeared in subsequent input. After being noticed in the input, the feature was then likely to be available for productive use. Schmidt and Frota hypothesize that this principle of the

learner consciously "noticing the gap" (between a target form in the input and the learner's current non-targetlike form) is a crucial part of acquisition process.

Whereas Ellis and Schmidt and Frota concern themselves mainly with the process by which conscious knowledge derived from formal instruction comes to be usable in naturalistic settings, Rutherford (1988) goes into great depth in considering what sorts of consciousness need to be raised in order to promote language development. Rutherford thinks of CR in much more specific terms than does Ellis. He argues that the goal of language instruction should be to speed learners through the process of "grammaticization," which he believes to be the central process by which interlanguage comes to approximate the target language. Grammaticization entails increasing dexterity at balancing semantic and discoursal demands through grammatical means; learners can purportedly achieve this dexterity through heightened awareness of the nuances of word order, syntactic-semantic distance, noun-to-verb ratio, and coordination and subordination. The actual activities Rutherford proposes for effecting CR are judgement and discrimination tasks (concerning grammaticality, semantic interpretation, lexical choice, presupposition, discourse appropriateness, etc.), and task completion and problem-solving, in which learners actually have to act on their grammatical intuitions.

It should be noted that while Rutherford asserts that language curriculum should be grammar-centered, he also claims that the actual, grammatical content of the syllabus should not be specified. Rather, language content should be chosen according to various non-linguistic criteria, and then should be exploited grammatically as appropriate for the material and the particular learners involved.

In contrast, to Rutherford, Pienemann (e.g. 1989) is convinced that grammatical content should be specified. Based on several empirical studies, Pienemann and his associates have outlined a model of acquisition which includes developmental sequences for a wide range of morphological and syntactic features, for both English and German as second languages. Some initial work has also been done in applying the model to Japanese (Yoshioka and Doi in press). Pienemann argues that the developmental sequences are caused by psychological speech processing constraints, and that attempts to teach grammatical structures out of sequence will be counter-productive. On the other hand, his data suggest that teaching a grammatical feature when the learner is ready for it will accelerate the learner's progress into the next stage. Although Pienemann makes no prescription for teaching methodology, a grammatical syllabus is clearly implied.

Taken collectively, the works cited indicate that a consensus is far from being reached on the issue of a proper role for grammar. Although there are trends in terms of why traditional grammar teaching is undesirable, the proposals for how a focus on form might be best incorporated into a language curriculum are diverse. The remainder of the paper outlines one program's ongoing struggle to deal with the issue of grammar instruction in a principled but practical way.

III. The English Language Program Curriculum At the International University of Japan (IUIJ)

The English Language Program at IUJ was set up to prepare Japanese and other non-native English speaking students to enter one of the two English-medium graduate schools that IUJ operates: International Relations or International Management. The program currently consists of a pre-matriculation Intensive English Program (IEP) and two subsequent terms of credited EAP coursework. Since the content areas in which our students will have to work are fairly specific and we are able to gather abundant information concerning their academic demands, we have developed a "content-based curriculum" (Snow and Brinton 1988, Brinton, Snow, and Wesche 1989) to help the students fulfill those demands. However, although academic course content guides the choice of materials for our courses that content does not dictate the selection and sequencing of the skills that we teach. In that sense, we have tried to develop a task-based syllabus (Long 1985, 1989), in which we choose real world tasks that the students will have to accomplish (e.g. term papers, a Master's thesis, oral presentations of quantitative analyses), break them down into task types, and then devise series of pedagogical tasks to bring the students gradually closer to their goals.

In content-based and task-based language teaching, there are as yet no clear guidelines on how grammar instruction might fit in. Long (1988) suggests that a focus on grammar might be incorporated through brief "interruptions" of meaning-based lessons when students make errors which are (1) systematic; (2) pervasive; and (3) remediable. Until 1989, the IUJ approach was to treat grammar this way, and to give it more intensive treatment on an individual basis, most often in the form of feedback on pieces of planned discourse, such as a draft of a writing task or a videotape replay of an oral presentation. If we found that several students were having the same sort of grammatical difficulty, we would plan a lesson for the whole class based on that problem, but it was always clear that our emphasis was on developing particular study skills applied to a certain type of content. Language was assumed to develop through the process of doing study skills-oriented pedagogical tasks, and those study skills were also thought to compensate for limited language knowledge. For example, our experience indicated that in content professors' reactions to student writing, surface level grammatical errors and slightly inaccurate vocabulary were less likely to be noticed in a term paper that was very clearly organized with main points well supported than in one where these areas were weak, even if the language was somewhat stronger.

For the most part, the study-skills orientation in IUJ EAP curriculum has proven successful. The students feel well prepared for their academic courses after our program, and we receive few complaints from professors in the content areas. Nevertheless, numerous shortcomings have also been discovered. The first was that since the "compensatory" study skills were taught through the medium of English, the least proficient students, who were the ones who needed the skills the most, were the ones who were the least prepared to learn them. This situation became more noticeable as the range of English skills of incoming IUJ students gradually widened, leaving the 1989 Intensive English Program to deal at the same time with a range of English levels from 640 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language and 4 (=near-native) on the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) oral

proficiency ratings, to TOEFL 410 and FSI 1+. It must be remembered also that all of these students would face the same challenges in terms of academic course load after the twelve weeks of the IEP.

Another problem that we faced is inherent in the nature of EAP as a type of English for Special Purposes (ESP) program. Whereas many ESP programs train learners in areas in which the language will be of equal or lesser importance to non-linguistic skills and knowledge (e.g. engineering, computers), most EAP involves training for areas where there is a strong emphasis on language use itself for a period of at least two to four years. Although specialization in a particular academic field narrows down the language that the learner has to deal with, the learner is still expected to understand, and to produce, a quite sophisticated range of language. At IUJ, the International Relations course is heavily language-based, and that of International Management while maintaining a significant quantitative component, also places severe demands on students' language abilities, particularly reading and speaking. There are many times when small linguistic miscues lead to large misunderstandings, and academic settings are often not conducive to the cooperative negotiation of meaning through interaction. We could not possibly hope for the students to get by if we settled for equipping them with a good, technical, vocabulary but rudimentary, grammatical ability.

A third problem is the one alluded to in the introduction of the paper: many students believe that they can benefit from a formal grammar component in their language program, and quite a few teachers tend to agree with them. Although both groups could be wrong, the evidence is sufficiently mixed to give them the benefit of the doubt. It was also felt that providing such a component would also increase student motivation, put them psychologically at ease, and enhance the credibility of the entire program.

IV. The Introduction of the Accuracy Development Component

In response to the suggestions of students in their course evaluations for a "systematic" treatment of grammar, and to those of the teachers who felt that students at the lower proficiency levels were "spinning their wheels" in our heavily study skills-oriented curriculum, we added a 45-minute per day Accuracy Development (AD) course to the 1989 Intensive English Program (see Figure 1 for an outline of the whole student day). The general goal of the course was stated as simply "to improve students' accuracy in both written and spoken English," but there was much debate about what the content of the course should be, with the final compromise being the adoption of a textbook featuring "communicative" grammar exercises for in-class work (Jones 1985), and another one offering brief grammatical explanations for review with facing-page fill-in-the-blank exercises for homework (Murphy 1987). In both oral and written activities, students were instructed to be accurate, and were corrected as much as possible when they were not. There were short weekly error detection quizzes on the grammar points covered, bi-weekly student recordings on a picture description task, and supplementary activities according to the teacher and level (there were 8 different teachers and levels). In reality, as much as 40% of the class time was used answering students' questions, a phenomenon which will be discussed later as both a strength and weakness of the course.

Figure 1

A Typical Program Day

TIME	ACTIVITY
7.00-7.30	Morning Warm-up and Jogging
8.20-9.30	Text Skills I
9.40-10.50	Text Skills II
11.00-11.45	Language Lab
11.45-12.30	Accuracy Development
12.30-1.30	Lunch
1.30-3.00	Computer Assisted Instruction
3.10-4.20	Seminar Skills I
4.30-5.40	Seminar Skills II
6.00-7.00	Dinner
7.30-8.30	Video Programs
8.30-9.30	Computer Room (assignments)

V. Results

In terms of student performance, the results of the 1989 Intensive English Program exceeded our expectations, although it is impossible to isolate with any confidence the most crucial contributing factors to the program's success. Starting with the basic measure of overall proficiency, the pre-and post-program TOEFL scores are presented Table 1.

Table 1
1988 Mean TOEFL Scores (without AD)

	<u>Listening</u>	<u>Structure</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Pre IEP</u>	<u>49.62</u>	<u>53.94</u>	<u>54.44</u>	<u>526.46</u>
<u>Post-IEP</u>	<u>52.35</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>53.88</u>	<u>544.1</u>
<u>Gain</u>	<u>2.73</u>	<u>3.06</u>	<u>-0.56</u>	<u>17.64</u>

1989 Mean TOEFL Scores (with AD)

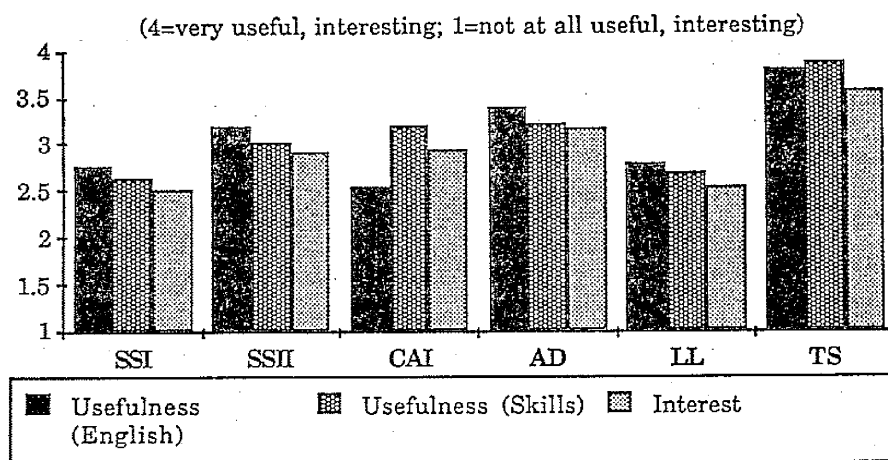
	<u>Listening</u>	<u>Structure</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Pre IEP</u>	<u>49.51</u>	<u>51.56</u>	<u>50.51</u>	<u>504.88</u>
<u>Post-IEP</u>	<u>51.98</u>	<u>58.32</u>	<u>55.39</u>	<u>552.29</u>
<u>Gain</u>	<u>2.47</u>	<u>6.76</u>	<u>4.88</u>	<u>47.41</u>

The overall gain on TOEFL of over 47 points (compared with less than 18 the previous year) was of course, gratifying to the program staff, but what seemed especially significant to those involved in the AD component is that although the Structure section was the highest at the beginning of the program (mean=51.65), students were still able to make their largest gain there (post-IEP mean=58.32; mean gain=6.62). They also made significant gains on a pre- and post-IEP picture description task measured according to percentage of error-free T-units ($t=6.25$, $p<0.0001$) and T-units/total errors ($t=3.17$, $p<0.0016$), and a multiple-choice grammar test focusing on the items selected for the AD syllabus ($p<0.001$).

Judged also on the basis of course, evaluations completed by the students, AD was a surprising success. Among the six components of the IEP, it ranked second in all categories: Usefulness (English), Usefulness (Skills), and Interest Level (see Figure 2). Not only that, but the most frequent comment that students made in the section for open-ended comments was that the class time for AD should be increased.

Figure 2

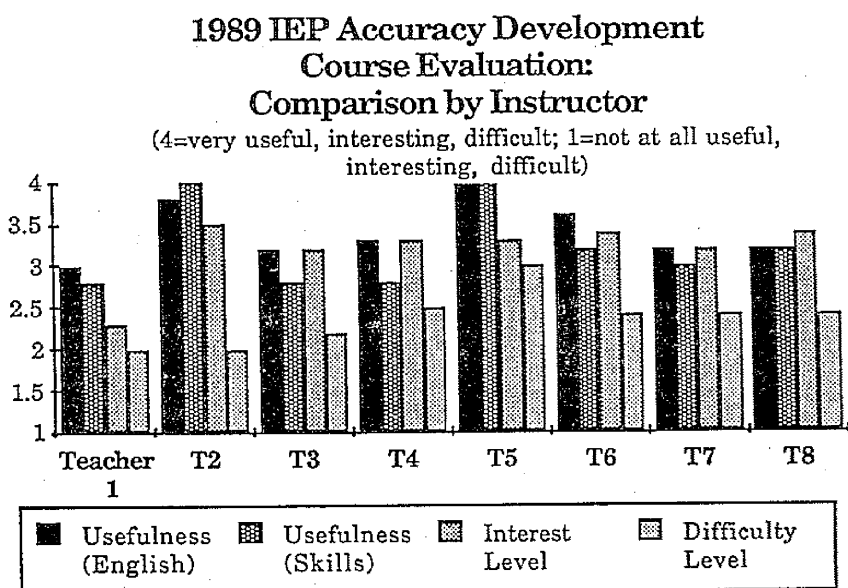
1989 I.E.P. Program Evaluation: Comparison by Courses



The troubling aspect of the AD course evaluations was that when the results were broken down according to instructor, they were very inconsistent (see Figure 3), much more so than in any other component of the program. This tends to indicate that students' perceptions of the value of the course had as much to do with the instructor as the curriculum. Judging from the classes that the present author observed (at least one per instructor), the main source of fluctuation seems to have been the instructor's approach to giving useful (and true) on-the-spot grammar explanations in response to student questions. Another important variable appeared to be the instructors' effectiveness in

adapting the set lesson plans to the appropriate level for their group of students.

Figure 3



Finally, the course evaluations completed by the instructors who were asked to teach the course indicated a basically favorable attitude toward AD, which was another surprise considering that at least half of them were skeptical about its worth at the outset of the program. Although they claimed to have enjoyed teaching the course and they believed that it had been worthwhile for the students, there was no consensus among them about what aspect of the course made it successful or enjoyable.

VI. Discussion

In the context of the recent literature on grammar teaching, the soundness of IUJ's 1989 AD course is dubious at best. The core of the syllabus was an inventory of discrete grammatical items selected from one of two textbooks, the same basic syllabus was used for all levels and styles of learners, and the main activity of the course was the practice of these grammatical items. The "communicative" grammar exercises of the textbook could be criticized on the grounds that they neither succeed in focusing on form nor on meaning. But, if the course was fundamentally unsound, what accounts for its popularity and the students' encouraging results?

Before offering any speculation, it is only fair to state that it is impossible to state with confidence whether AD was successful, and if so why, because there was no controlled experimentation; only post hoc interpretations can be offered. It would be perfectly plausible to argue that the performance results of the students were due to the influence of other courses, and might have been even higher without the existence of

AD. Moreover, even if AD was in fact, so successful in its own right, there was so much variation within and among sections of the course in terms of how the time was spent that there is no way to isolate the successful factors. That being said, we do believe the course to have been successful, and what follows are some possible reasons why.

First, it is conceivable that what was taught was learnable. In other words, the argument that a fixed grammatical syllabus would interfere with the learners' natural syllabus may not apply to our students. It is likely the case that learners at this fairly advanced level have already surpassed most or all constraints on what is learnable. Secondly, it could be that Japanese learners are well-trained to learn efficiently from explicit grammar rules, based on their extensive secondary school experience with English grammar and their general orientation toward and skill at rote memorization. Or it could be that the somewhat communicative practice in AD provided the necessary catalyst for activating the more explicit grammatical knowledge they accumulated in secondary school. Another possibility is that the 45 minutes per day of focus on form provided an effective complement to the six hours of daily communicative involvement with the language. Perhaps this time was useful, or even necessary, for sorting out the overwhelming amount of input that bombards the learner in an intensive program. Most of these explanations would seem to be consistent with the idea proposed in slightly different form by both Ellis and Schmidt and Frota: that explicit knowledge, in combination with the subsequent "noticed" appearance of a feature in natural discourse, can lead to the acquisition of that feature.

Another possible reason for the course's success was the fact that in a sense it was tuned to the levels and styles of the individual students. As mentioned before, a certain amount of time each day was devoted to students' questions. Although the explanations given by the instructors were not always reliable, the process of formulating questions about grammar and receiving more or less informed explanations (and evaluating the quality of the instructor's explanations) gave the students additional data with which to refine or correct previous hypotheses about grammatical structures and relationships. Moreover, since students knew they would have such a chance every day, they were apt to think more about grammatical problems that came up in other courses or in their assignments, and either note them down or keep them in mind until the next AD class. Thus, in addition to giving the students an opportunity to pursue grammatical problems that they were particularly concerned about, the existence of the class probably also caused them to be tuned in to language more of the time.

Concerning error correction, although it was admittedly inconsistent, the students appreciated it and there is little reason to suspect that it was deleterious in any way. It is not known if all the students' errors were remediable, but learners do need negative evidence to reformulate their hypotheses, and direct correction by the instructor is certainly an efficient way to provide that negative evidence. The arguments about interfering with natural sequences carry less weight with more advanced learners, and the related argument about inducing avoidance may not apply if learners feel that one of the purposes of the class is to experiment with structures they would not venture to use in normal communication.

Another important issue that needs to be mentioned here is that of the separate status of the AD course. Proposals concerning focus on form from Long, Ellis, Rutherford, and others stipulate that it should be incorporated into a syllabus which teaches something else in other words, there should be an overarching focus on meaning. Granted, the evidence is incontrovertible that learners do not learn one item at a time, but from this fact it does not necessarily follow that classroom grammar treatment cannot be organized into manageable chunks. Just as it is sometimes desirable when reading in a foreign language to wait until the end of a chapter to look up all the unknown vocabulary, it may also be preferable under some circumstances to save up grammatical uncertainties for consolidated treatment rather than move abruptly back and forth between focus on meaning and focus on form. Especially for more advanced learners, who can often repair their own communication breakdowns and who can put considerable intellectual and/or affective investment into classroom communication, "focus on form" interruptions could prove to be more annoying than timely.

It also must be pointed out that in the IUJ Intensive English Program we happened to have the "luxury" of trying out an independent grammar component in addition to considerable instruction where focus on form intervention was embedded within a focus on meaning syllabus. If our classroom time were limited (as it is during the regular academic year), we certainly would not have created an independent AD component. Nevertheless, in retrospect, the merits of having a certain block of time designated for focus on form seem worthy of further consideration.

VII. Conclusion

The experience of the IUJ Intensive English Program in the summer of 1989 demonstrates that there may well be an important role for the teaching of grammar, in EAP as well as in other types of language programs. Although research has provided compelling evidence that certain kinds of grammar teaching in certain situations are unlikely to succeed, there is still plenty room to move within the limitations that have been indicated. There is much work to be done, for example, in confirming and refining Pienemann's acquisitional sequences, in developing and testing new consciousness raising tasks along the lines suggested by Rutherford and Ellis (see Dickens and Woods 1988 for one such attempt), in determining more precisely the effect of explicit knowledge on the ability to notice grammatical features in a learner's input, and in specifying how a combination of focus on meaning and focus on form can best be put to use in promoting language acquisition. For IUJ, as for other institutions, this will require vigorous effort in terms of designing 'focus on form' tasks which are psycholinguistically justifiable, and then in developing accurate measures and following tightly controlled procedures for determining the results of using those tasks. Judging from the reactions of the students at IUJ this year, such effort promises to be well worthwhile.

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