Theories of grammar and their influence on teaching practice: Examining language teachers' beliefs

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ABSTRACT

Teacher language awareness and its relationship to pedagogical practice (Andrews, 2003) have been identified as significant contributors to the teaching of grammar. Various TESOL programs teach pedagogical and theoretical grammar in different ways and some focus on specific approaches to grammar teaching, which include systemic functional grammar, transformational grammar, traditional grammar and lexical grammar. Discussions with graduate and former teachers however indicate that they feel under-prepared to teach grammar. This paper is part of a research project that examined the current needs of English language teachers and their opinions and attitudes towards grammar teaching. Questionnaires and interviews were used to elicit data on teachers' beliefs on the importance and use of certain theories of grammar and their current English grammar practices. The results highlight the teachers' reported use of a combination of theories in grammar explanations and their belief that a variety

of grammar theories should be part of teachers' 'pedagogical content knowledge' to address the teacher and student needs. The results have important implications for language teacher education and the design of grammar courses in University language teacher education.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is a vexed, if not controversial, area of language teaching and learning. Whether the debate is about how to teach grammar, how to integrate grammar into a communicative approach, whether to teach grammar at all, what sort of grammar to teach, or the effectiveness of explicit grammar teaching, there are unresolved debates about the place of grammar in language learning and in language teaching (e.g., R. Ellis, 2006; Thornbury, 1999). In recent decades, there has been considerable research on teachers' cognition, teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and teachers' language awareness and the way these beliefs interact and influence grammar teaching (Andrews, 2003; Borg, 2003a). This paper contributes to the area of teacher beliefs by focusing on the theories of grammar that teachers find useful and apply in their language teaching.

On the basis of current theory and experience, it has been pointed out that future language teachers need an understanding and knowledge of different types of grammar and will need to know how to apply it in different circumstances (Hughes & McCarthy, 1998). Prospective language teachers need both grammatical knowledge and the skills" pedagogical content knowledge", to teach grammar (Andrews, 1997; Shulman, 1987). This paper contributes to the research on pedagogical content grammar knowledge by specifically examining the teachers' use of different theories in the teaching of grammar, on which there is little literature.

BACKGROUND

The motivation for this paper comes from our work in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Program at an

Australian University. The program provides post-graduate courses in TESOL to a range of students, both local and international. Each cohort in the program includes native speakers and non-native speakers of English, students with and without language teaching experience, students with and without other types of teaching experience, as well as students who are interested in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) to young learners, young adults or older adults. This diversity of the student population is one of the strengths of the program – it provides a richness in the backgrounds, interests and future prospects and plans of students.

However, along with a richness created by the differences in background, language learning experience and teaching experience of students, comes differences in grammatical and linguistic knowledge. It is these differences which provide challenges for the program. Students undertake such courses in order to achieve a suitable qualification to allow them to teach English, but also so that they can feel confident in their knowledge and skills in English, in language learning and in language teaching.

The first reason, then, for doing this research was to better meet the needs of our students, based on our observations that most students lack grammatical knowledge and/or an ability to explain that knowledge effectively and appropriately. In addition, feedback from students indicated that it was the area of grammar teaching that many of them felt most insecure about. Thirdly, it was observed that TESOL programs in different institutions in the country focused on different grammatical theories in their courses. Therefore with this research we wanted to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and its application in teaching practice.

Definitions, theories of grammar and grammar teaching

There are many different definitions of grammar (R. Ellis, 2006; Purpura, 2004), which are influenced by a number of approaches to grammar teaching. The following section will discuss the grammar

theories that have been proposed and their contribution to our understanding of grammar. The discussion of each theory is often done in comparison with another theory (see Butt, Fahev, Feez, Spinks & Yallop, 2000; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Hughes & McCarthy, 1998). Butt *et al*. (2000) introduce and explain systemic functional grammar by contrasting it with traditional grammar. Hughes and McCarthy (1998) define discourse grammar in contrast to traditional grammar, but also in contrast to functional grammar. For example, they describe systemic functional grammar as "essentially a text-grammar, that is to say, the choices are examined in relation to how the finished product, the text, comes to be as a result of choices made from predetermined systems, whereas discourse grammars are more process-oriented and are interested in any individual interactional factor that may influence moment-by-moment choices in context" (p.264).

There are also a number of articles which provide overviews of these theories of grammar, or grammatical paradigms, that have been influential in language teaching. Derewianka (2001), for example, provides an overview and brief history of traditional grammar, structural grammar, transformational generative grammar and functional grammar. As she points out, there are a number of functional grammars, but it is Michael Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) which she notes as being particularly influential in language teaching (p.256). In addition, she recommends an eclectic approach to the use of grammars in teaching.

A more thorough coverage of the variety of functional grammars is provided by Tomlin (1994), who details four main types of functional grammars, of which the third is Halliday's SFG, and the fourth is what he calls "North American functionalism", (which includes linguists such as Chafe (1971, 1980, 1987), Givon (1979, 1987) and Hopper and Thomson (Hopper, 1979; Hopper & Thomson, 1980) cited in Tomlin (1994)). This "North American functionalism" is at the heart of the majority of descriptive grammars of the past 40

years and describes language with reference to form, meaning and function (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005).

Hughes and McCarthy (1998), as well as Purpura (2004), make the point that some 'grammars' are better suited or not suited, to teaching particular areas of grammar. For example, Hughes and McCarthy (1998) argue that traditional grammar does not "deal satisfactorily with ellipsis, wh-clauses, articles, patterns of tenses" (p.282) amongst other things. Purpura's (2004) discussion of the development of functional grammar in terms of the work done on cohesion by Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1989), underpins the value of approaching coherence and cohesion from the perspective of systemic functional grammar.

Pedagogical grammars are those used to teach grammar to language learners and are based on more complete and detailed theories of grammar. They are "often a simplified version of a more theoretical grammar" (Derewianka, 2001, p.241) and they depend on "an adequate descriptive grammar of the target language" (Tomlin, 1994, p.141). Hughes and McCarthy (1998, p.268) point out that pedagogical grammars provide rules "that work for most learners in most situations". Our paper attempts to explain the kind of pedagogical grammar teachers use and the theories of grammar that underpin it.

R. Ellis (2006), like Purpura (2004), lauds the pedagogical grammar of Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) as an example par excellence of a grammar book, based on descriptive grammars, which is useful for language teachers. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, p.5) highlight the fact that they have "drawn from a number of different linguistic schools of thought" in developing their pedagogical grammar, and acknowledge that there are insights to be gained from different types of analysis and indeed that particular theories can account for particular aspects of grammar, but underpinning all of this, is the interrelationship between form, meaning and use (p.4).

While R. Ellis (2006) argues that "the choice of which type of grammar to use as a basis for teaching is not a major source of controversy; descriptive grammars that detail the form-meaning relationships of the language are ascendant" (p.87), within the Australian ESL context at least, SFG has been extremely influential (e.g., Butt *et al.*, 2000; Derewianka, 2001; Macken-Horarik, 2005). One of the arguments proposed by SFG proponents is that SFG focuses primarily on meaning and is therefore best suited to language learning – especially when using a communicative approach. For that reason, we wanted to find out the extent to which SFG and other approaches were used by teachers. In our paper, we focus on four approaches: traditional, structural, systemic functional, and discourse approaches, as we consider them to be the most influential. The lexical approach (Lewis, 1993, 1997), and other functional approaches, are also useful but they are not dealt with in this paper.

Teacher beliefs and grammar training

It is important to mention here the studies that have examined teachers' beliefs and attitudes to grammar and their knowledge in grammar teaching. One study which looked specifically at the approach to grammar that teachers took in the classroom was done by Horan (2003), who compared the influences of traditional grammar, systemic functional grammar and structural linguistics in grammar teaching. Her study employed questionnaires which she distributed to 24 schools in Sydney, Australia in 1998. The schools included mainly primary and secondary schools and 3 intensive language schools. The findings revealed that (a) traditional grammar continues to hold an influential position in grammar teaching; (b) in teacher-training and in syllabus and teacher reference material, SFG is dominant; and (c) there is very minimal awareness of structural linguistics. Horan, through the use of certain questions, revealed that teachers with SFG background did not have a good knowledge of basic grammatical concepts such as verbs and nouns. Horan suggested that the overemphasis of SF grammar and traditional grammar in the teachers' training had produced a gap in teachers'

knowledge which was sometimes inadequate in explaining grammatical concepts. This paper, together with the various TESOL programs' focus on systemic functional grammar, has been the starting point and inspiration for conducting this research. Given the dominance of SFG in teacher training and the gap in teachers' knowledge, we wanted to examine teachers' opinions about the importance of different theories and whether there are any particular theories that underpin their grammar practices.

Horan's (2003) findings on lack of grammatical knowledge lend support to Borg's (2001) argument that teachers' knowledge about grammar, and beliefs about their knowledge, have implications - for their practice - in the classroom. Using a case-study approach, he found that ELT teachers' perceptions of their knowledge of grammar may influence (p.27):

- the extent to which they teach grammar; their willingness to engage in spontaneous grammar work;
- the manner in which they respond to students' questions about grammar;
- the extent to which they promote class discussion about grammar;
- the way they react when their explanations are questioned; and
- the nature of the grammatical information they provide to students.

This necessitates studies such as this one, which aims to look at teachers' use of theories in grammar teaching. Our study also discusses the relationship between grammar training and grammar teaching.

Another study by Borg and Burns (2008) examined teachers' beliefs and practices about the integration of grammar and skills teaching using respondents from 18 countries. The research pointed out that teachers disagreed with the idea of teaching grammar in isolation and reported high levels of integration of grammar and

skills teaching. The study also revealed different ways in which teachers integrate grammar with skills. This included grammar in context, task-driven grammar work, grammar after skills work, and reactive focus on grammar. Finally, the teachers provided evidence of the effectiveness of grammar teaching practices which included an increase in learner participation, increase in student confidence and in student satisfaction.

That lack of teachers' grammatical knowledge has also been highlighted as a problem by Brinton and Holten (2001), who examined the role of grammar teaching in content-based instruction. Brinton and Holten (2001) point to a lack of relevant training as one reason that teachers may not be successful in integrating grammar into a content-based instructional framework: "how to mine a content-area text for potential grammatical and lexico-grammatical items to teach; how to explain and practise structures within the rich context in which they were found; or how to achieve a proper balance between letting content or letting student error patterns drive the selection of grammar structures to be taught" (p.249).

Clearly, not all teachers, or pre-service teachers, lack grammatical knowledge. As Horan (2003) noted, traditional grammar continues to hold an influential position in grammar teaching. For teacher trainers, the challenge is often to deal both with pre-service teachers with limited grammatical knowledge and to deal with those who come with a strong background in traditional grammar. Gordon and Harshbarger's (2003) study of their own TESOL program, discusses the need to both "help language teacher learners break away from the deeply ingrained habits of traditional pedagogical grammar thought and practice" while at the same time give them the grammar skills to develop the language skills of their language learners, as well as the linguistic knowledge to do both of these things (p.41). Like Horan (2003), they highlight the important role of linguistic training in developing good teachers of grammar.

Another important study in the field of teacher beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching was conducted by Burgess and

Etherington (2002). Their study focused on the attitudes of English for academic purposes (EAP) teachers in the UK to grammar teaching and their students' problems with grammar (p.436). Burgess and Etherington's (2002) study is closely related to our study as it discusses questions about teacher beliefs in relation to grammar and definitions of grammar. Burgess and Etherington posed two questions in their research. They asked "which beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching were most widely held by EAP teachers in their study, and whether there was a bias towards decontextualised presentation of grammar and away from discourse-based approaches" (p.437). Their findings showed, amongst other things, that EAP teachers viewed grammatical accuracy as integral to language and communication and that EAP teachers believed their students expected them to present grammar points explicitly (p.440). In addition they found that most teachers felt that formal instruction helped learners to produce grammatically correct language (p.441). Their study clearly demonstrated the importance of grammar teaching in an EAP context and investigated attitudes to implicit and explicit approaches to grammar teaching. Our study expands their work by focusing on different theories of grammar underpinning these approaches to grammar teaching.

Finally, Purpura (2004) argues that the two grammar definitions he discusses – both syntactocentric and communication based – "have shaped how language teachers conceptualize grammar in their work" (p.20). He argues that teachers do not draw exclusively on any one theory but draw on both perspectives in their grammar teaching to meet the needs of their students (p.21). The "communication-based perspective" views grammar as a set of norms, preferences and expectations that are used to convey meaning (Purpura, 2004, p.16), and the "syntactocentric view of language" includes the metalanguage with which we talk about language. Our study also examines how and whether the teachers' use of theories reflects these two perspectives.

THE FOCUS OF THIS PAPER

This paper stems from a research project that aimed at examining teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching, the relationship between teachers' knowledge and practice and the types of theories that underpin teachers' grammar practice. The research questions of the project were:

1.   What are language teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar?
2.   What do teachers know about grammar and how does that affect their teaching?
3.   Is there a relationship between teachers' background and knowledge of grammar theories and their grammar teaching as reported by the teachers?
4.   Which grammatical theories underpin teachers' explanations of grammar?

This paper aims to elaborate the results of the last 2 research questions that relate to the way theories of grammar are used in teachers' explanations, as we concluded that this is an area that deserves further research. As the overview of the literature indicated, it has been pointed out that teachers should employ a variety of theories and approaches in teaching grammar. Researchers have also suggested that specific theories are appropriate for teaching certain grammatical phenomena (McCarthy & Hughes, 1998), although researchers and practitioners emphasise the use of systemic functional grammar (Butt *et al.*, 2000). There is significant research that examined teachers' beliefs about grammar in various contexts, especially in the UK and in EAP contexts, but more research is needed to identify teachers' beliefs and practices with a view to understanding the grammar skills required by English language teachers, especially in the Asia-Pacific contexts (Borg, 2003b; E.M. Ellis, 2006). In his review of research on teacher cognition of grammar teaching, Borg (2003a, p.106) confirms the need for research that examines the teachers' perceptions of grammar and their relationship to the teachers' teaching practices

and a need to relate teachers' practices to grammar theory (Borg & Burns, 2008). Thus, this paper extends this line of inquiry by providing a better understanding of teachers' needs and views about grammar, and most importantly the theories employed in teaching grammar, as this has implications for the TESOL and grammar curriculum.

METHOD

Participants

A form of convenience sampling was used to collect data. 72 participants filled in questionnaires about their attitudes to grammar and their use of different theories in grammar teaching. Questionnaires were first distributed to graduates of the University's MA TESOL program due to their links with the university and ease of approaching them. They then distributed the questionnaires to other friends or colleagues they had in the institutions that they were working in overseas. Questionnaires were also given to ESL teachers who were working in local institutions at the time of the data collection. This sample size exceeds the number of 30 which Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) describe as the minimum for useful statistical analysis. From this sample, 5 teachers – 2 native speakers (NSs) and 3 non-native speakers (NNSs) for consistency – were selected from the ones who volunteered for qualitative interviews.

The questionnaire respondents included native and non native speakers, ESL and EFL speakers, speakers of different genders, ages and ethnic backgrounds and various teaching experience in grammar. The participants' countries of origin include Singapore, China, Japan, Vietnam, Russia, Turkey, Britain, Australia, USA, Canada and the Maldives. The participants who answered the questionnaire included 34% males and 66% females. The participants' ages ranged between 21 and 60+. 60% identified themselves as non native speaker teachers, 32% native speaker teachers and 8% bilingual. 53% of the participants spoke 2 languages

including first language (L1), 27% spoke 3 languages, 3% spoke 4 languages and 2% spoke 5 and 12% were monolingual.

Data collection and analysis

Two main methods were used in this research, questionnaires and interviews. These two methods were appropriate in collecting information about the teachers' attitudes and beliefs in teaching as they combined qualitative and quantitative results. The use of two methods in the data collection and interpretation was part of the method of triangulation (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; McDonough & McDonough, 1997) which aimed to improve the validity of the findings and allow the interpretation of results from various perspectives.

Questionnaires were employed first as they provided an economical way of collecting information from a large population. "Opinion surveys" are a very popular instrument used in language learning to examine teachers' attitudes and beliefs about language teaching (Brown, 2001). Questionnaires were distributed to 100 participants, of which 72 members responded. It asked questions about the teachers' attitudes and beliefs about grammar teaching and their reported use of various approaches in grammar teaching. They included a range of questions (ranking questions, open ended and multiple choice questions) to allow variation in interpretation. A copy of the complete questionnaire is found in Appendix A.

The questionnaire was first piloted with 5 ESL and EFL teachers with at least 10 years of experience in grammar teaching and the final questionnaire was designed based on their comments. This improved the validity of the research method employed in the study (Wagner, 2010). The questionnaires were then distributed manually to participants or via e-mail and participants were asked to post the information to the researchers' address or to deliver their answers to the participants' business pigeon holes. In addition, an online survey tool "survey monkey" was used to reach international participants who were asked to fill in the questionnaire online anonymously. The

results were collected both manually and online and were then collated and tabulated on the computer using the Excel program.

Statistical analyses of the quantitative aspects of the questionnaire were conducted using the Excel program. Relative frequencies and average scores were calculated for multiple choices and Likert scale questions respectively (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). Qualitative responses were first included in the Excel program and then further categorized and coded through a discussion by both researchers.

Interviews were also conducted with 5 teachers to date to elaborate the answers given in the questionnaire and also to provide a comprehensive picture of the participants' attitudes to grammar teaching. A face-to-face, semi-structured interview process was used. The interview questions are provided in Appendix B. The interviews lasted 40 minutes to 1 hour each, were digitally recorded with the interviewees' permission and transcribed in English. All participants were informed about the confidentiality of their answers and were sent information letters before the interviews informing them about the ethical considerations of the project. The participants also signed consent forms agreeing to the anonymity of the project and the protection of their privacy. The interviews were transcribed in full and are kept in password safe computers to maintain privacy issues.

The results in the following section include answers from both questionnaires and interviews. As the focus of this paper is the use of theories in grammar teaching, responses from only five of the questionnaire items are presented in this paper. Other findings are summarized at different parts of the paper.

Qualitative results from questionnaires and interviews were categorized based on their frequency of occurrence and are added where necessary to elaborate on answers provided in the questionnaires. We realize the limitation of using 5 qualitative interviews in the data analysis but this was a trial project from which other papers have arisen that go beyond the scope of this paper. The possibility of participants' varied interpretations in the questionnaire

items is largely minimised first by the careful piloting of the questionnaire and second by the population which consisted mainly of University graduates. We recognize that data presented here represent teachers' reported beliefs and practices, and we do not draw conclusions about the teachers' actual practices.

The 5 questions presented in the discussion section include 2 multiple choice questions (1 and 2 below) and 3 ranking questions (4-6) where the participants had to rank the answers in terms of their usefulness and provide an explanation for their responses. They are questions 11, 12, 14, 15, 16 in the complete questionnaire (see Appendix A). The reasons for including the answers to these 5 questions are that they provide answers to the research questions. Questions 3, 4 and 5 confirm responses to question 2 and also provide insight into the theories that teachers identify in practice through a selection of activities.

1. What background do you have in grammar?
2. In your experience, what kind of skills and knowledge do beginning English language teachers need to teach English grammar nowadays?
3. What type of activities do you think are most useful in teaching passive voice?
4. What type of activities do you think are most useful in teaching gerund and participles?
5. What type of activities do you think are most useful in teaching articles?

FINDINGS

To provide the general framework of the findings below and to offer evidence for the validity of the responses to the questionnaire items provided in this section, it is important here to summarise the major findings of this research. First, all participants highlighted the importance of grammar in second language learning (Q9). This supports the findings by Burgess and Etherington (2002), R. Ellis (2006) and Borg (2003b). Language teachers offered a variety of

reasons explaining why grammar is important in language teaching, but an interesting dichotomy emerged in the participants' responses. The majority of the answers offered by non native speaker teachers emphasised the fact that grammar is the starting point and the foundation of language learning in EFL situations. On the other hand, native speaker teachers thought of grammar as having a secondary role in language learning, that of providing quality in second language (L2) competence, accuracy to language proficiency and an ability to use language appropriately. The difference in opinions may stem from the fact that NNS teachers rely heavily on grammar as it is the primary tool that can help the students build confidence due to the lack of naturalistic data whereas native speakers view grammar as a tool that assists language learning and not an end in itself.

Another useful finding was that 55% of teachers agreed that grammar should be both integrated with other skills and taught on its own, while 37% believed that it should be taught integrated with other skills and 8% thought it should be taught on its own. This finding contradicts Borg and Burns (2008) study, in which 84% of their teachers disagreed with the statement that "grammar should be taught separately, not with other skills such as reading and writing" (p.466). This may be so due to the nature of their study which focused on integration of grammar with macroskills and most significantly the nature of the question. The result of our study indicates that grammar needs to be taught not only integrated with other skills, as proposed by task-based language (TBL) and communicative language teaching (CLT) literature (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004) but also as a separate component. This lends support to the findings on the theories of grammar that they consider important, as a range of theories is endorsed by almost all teachers.

Coming to the questions that pertain to this paper, teachers were asked about their background in grammar to possibly identify any relationship between their studies in grammar and their teaching preferences in grammar teaching. Figure 1 presents teachers' study background. It was found that 36% had completed a linguistics unit,

39% studied traditional grammar, 18% did a systemic functional grammar unit in their studies and 42% pointed out that they learnt much of their grammar through their teaching experience. 5% chose "other" which comprised grammar skills in a Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) course or grammar through learning other languages. It can be observed from the results that the majority of teachers had done a grammar course in their undergraduate studies. Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents indicated that their teaching experience was a useful way of learning grammar. In the interviews, it was suggested that the way grammar was learnt affected the way teachers' approached grammar in their teaching. For example, an experienced Australian male teacher mentioned that his background in traditional grammar was crucial in teaching because all ESL and EFL textbooks presuppose and employ this type of grammar. He went on to say that through his teaching experience he learnt this type of grammar better: "*It is a bit sort of prescriptive in a way but it's meant to help the students deal in the language with the situations that they're going to be dealing in, and not have to worry about other bits of language that they're actually not going to be using*". He also pointed out that as he was not taught functional grammar, it was difficult to employ it in his teaching: "*Because I find functional grammar, although I've done a lot of investigation of it, very difficult to talk about*". This indicates that the teachers value and highlight the amount of grammar knowledge they gain during their teaching experience and suggests, similar to previous studies (Borg, 2001; Burgess & Etherington, 2002), that substantial training in grammar teaching is important in preparing teachers adequately to teach grammar.
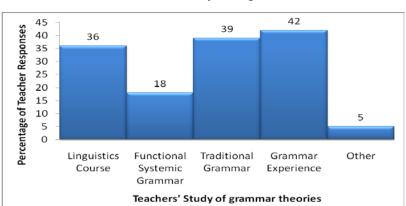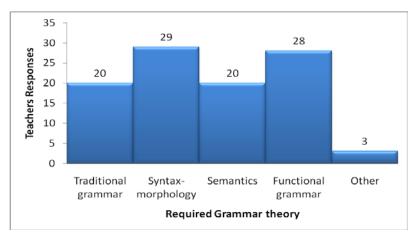
FIGURE 1
Teachers' study background

One of the principal aims of this project was to identify the kind of knowledge that participants draw on when teaching grammar and whether any specific grammar theory dominated or drove their teaching. In this question teachers were asked to choose from four types of grammar that were influential in grammar teaching. These were traditional grammar, syntax and morphology and semantics which would be described as linguistics and systemic functional grammar. For this question, we did not include other functional grammars or discourse grammar, but we included some of the strategies from these types of grammar in subsequent questions to identify their use by the teachers. The results (as shown in Figure 2) suggest that 20% of teachers believe that traditional grammar is significant in grammar teaching; 29% highlighted their use of syntax and morphology; 20% draw on semantic knowledge and 28% use functional grammar in their teaching. 3% selected "other" which included information about discourse and social context. However, the results underline the importance of various components in grammar teaching, which include linguistics, traditional grammar and functional systemic grammar. They also highlight that there is no single grammar theory that is used exclusively by teachers and

that can cover all aspects of grammar learning and teaching. This supports arguments by researchers about what grammars teachers should use (Derewianka, 2001; Gordon & Harshbarger, 2003). Comparing the results of the last two questions, it can be observed that although the teachers' background in grammar affects their teaching, they seem to draw on more grammar theories than they have training in. This could relate to the grammar materials that teachers are exposed to in their teaching. It also confirms the "practical and experiential" nature of grammar teaching as Borg and Burns argue (2008, p.478) and calls for integration of SLA research and teachers' cognition in grammar training.

FIGURE 2
Knowledge required to teach grammar

To validate the teachers' response to question two and elaborate on how different theories are used, the teachers were asked specific questions about the strategies they employed in teaching grammatical phenomena. The choice of the grammatical phenomena was based on the researchers' expectations that different knowledge was required for the chosen grammatical phenomena and on previous literature (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; Hughes & McCarthy, 1998; Purpura, 2004). In three questions, the participants

were asked to choose between given answers, which drew on the grammatical theories they were asked about in no particular order, and then they were asked to rank these answers given, on the basis of how important or useful the strategy was in explaining the grammatical phenomena. The results represent the average ranking score for each of the strategies in a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the most important strategy. Although a number of participants ranked the answers, 25% of the respondents found it hard to rank the answers and suggested that each of the answers was useful depending on the context. This confirms the results of the previous question, and argues for the importance of various theories in grammar teaching and suggests that a multifaceted approach to teaching grammar needs to be part of the TESOL grammar curriculum. The grammatical aspects that the participants were asked about were passive voice, gerund and participles and definite and indefinite articles.

With regards to passive voice (see Figure 3), the most popular strategy, with an average of 1.83, was found to be teaching the transformational change, which refers to the object becoming subject and the subject moving to the end of the sentence. This strategy is hypothesized to be related to traditional and structural grammar (see Derewianka, 2001). The most frequent reason given for using this strategy was that this method is the easiest and most straightforward, especially for the beginner to intermediate levels. The next most popular strategy that teachers used, with a score of 2.05 was to explain passive voice in terms of agency and the emphasis on the event. The participants emphasized that the deletion of agency and the emphasis on the event, displays the actual function of passive voice over active and it is this use that will enable speakers to use it meaningfully:

The choice of the subject of a sentence is important in that the subject very often indicates the focus of the matter being stated. And the voice that goes with it determines the choice between active and passive voice use of the verb, or agent. The style of communication,

oral or written, informal or otherwise, will also have some bearing on the choice of the voices.

The use of old and new information is knowledge based on the information structure and discourse organization in a clause (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; Ward & Birner, 2001). The use of passive voice in discourse was also seen as important and received a score of 2.75. Teaching passive voice by examining a range of texts received third position with a score of 2.73. The last two strategies were regarded as being useful because of their contribution to learners' understanding and use of passive in authentic contexts. The results reveal that traditional and structural grammar and semantics are crucial in teaching passive voice with information about discourse and textual functions being rated of secondary importance.
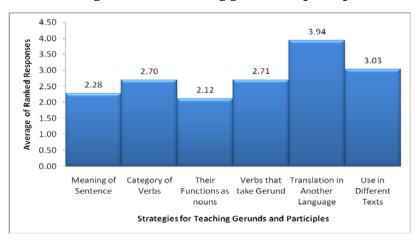
FIGURE 3
Strategies used for teaching passive voice

With regards to gerunds and participles, a similar diversity of opinions was noted. It can be seen in Figure 4 that a variety of strategies were considered useful in teaching this grammatical phenomenon. The most popular strategy, which received an average score of 2.12, was discussing their function as nouns and verbs which is related to their semantic and syntactic roles. The teachers indicated

that due to the different ways in which those notions can be expressed in the learner's L1, this method is more appropriate. The following two techniques received almost equal popularity among teachers with 2.70 and 2.71. The first strategy involves discussing gerunds as a subcategory of verbs which is a strategy that relates to structural and traditional grammar, as it views participles as belonging to a specific part of speech/word class. The next strategy involves knowledge of syntactic relationships and sentence structure as it discusses the context in which gerunds and participles are found, usually after specific verbs. Many participants suggested that gerund and infinitives are confusing to students and teaching the collocations of verbs is an effective way of helping them to distinguish their use. Finally, exploring the use of participles in different texts was considered a useful strategy as it gave students an awareness of the situational context in which those grammatical phenomena occur and draws on knowledge of functional grammar. Last but not least, translation was not very popular but still received some support from teachers.

FIGURE 4
Strategies used for teaching gerund and participles

The last question asked the participants to rank the strategies used to teach articles. In Figure 5, it can be observed that the first strategy, examining the article use in a paragraph, was the most popular answer receiving an average of 2.09. This strategy was assumed to rely on the concepts of discourse, as it looked at the concepts of (in)definiteness of nouns and reference in context. The participants argued that this was the simplest way to teach articles in a restricted context and provide sufficient practice. One participant noted "At paragraph level, students have the opportunity to grasp not only the usage but also the use of articles in a short text while paying attention to word and sentence sequence". The next most popular strategy was teaching articles by rules followed by examples, which is the basic traditional method of teaching grammar. Participants who favoured this grammar strategy suggested that their experience of teaching in this way has resulted in success and that there are some general rules that encapsulate the use of articles which would help students' first use. A native speaker male teacher suggested "I am finding that the best way to teach articles is to introduce my "simplified [80%] rules", consolidate this with practice and later provide students with more detailed rules to help them towards 100% accuracy". The third strategy was the teaching of articles through comparison of different texts, which is based on the principles of functional grammar. Respondents argued that the strategy of teaching articles in texts can help improve the students' critical thinking and inductive learning; moreover by examining its use in different contexts, they can develop an awareness of the use of articles and are better able to remember their use. The articles' position in a sentence was the forth most popular with 3.19% while translation to another language was seen as the least popular strategy with an average of 3.89%. This strategy was appealing to teachers because it highlights the article's position in a sentence and provides information about sentence structure.
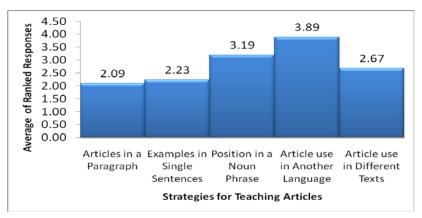
FIGURE 5
Strategies used for teaching articles

DISCUSSION

One of the central questions of the research project was to find out whether the participants' background in grammar theories affects their teaching techniques and strategies. This has been identified by Borg (2003b) as an important area of future research. The questionnaire results and interviews indicated that there is a relationship between the teachers' knowledge and their reported teaching practices. When comparing Figures 1 and 2, it can be observed that the participants' background has some similarities with the grammar theories they claim they employ in their teaching; the only minor difference was their increased use of SFG in their explanations, despite their lack of background training in it. However, although the SFG component was selected in Figure 2, it did not seem to be as prominent in the answers that related to the use of strategies in different grammatical phenomena, (see Figures 3, 4, 5) although it still served an important role in their grammatical explanations. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is that answers that related to discourse grammar (and which some researchers might categorise as part of systemic functional grammar)

seemed more important. This could also be a result of the chosen grammatical phenomena, which might not require understanding of systemic functional grammar. However, the teachers' use of SFG and discourse grammar in the specific questions (Figures 3, 4, 5) suggest that they have probably learnt those approaches or techniques during their teaching experience, for example through the materials they use. This underlines the significance of grammar teaching experience which also contributes to gaining confidence with grammar teaching, as seen in the results of the question discussed in the previous section and suggests that grammatical development continues with teaching practice. The teachers' use of different theories in grammar teaching and the reasons for their confidence also suggest that an openness to approaches is significant in language teaching and can help teachers develop more techniques and approaches through teaching practice.

The final aim of the project was to identify the teachers' beliefs about their use of theories in grammatical explanations. Although previous researchers have indicated the importance of various theories for grammar teaching, there has not been much research which has examined teachers' use of such theories in their grammar teaching (Borg & Burns, 2008). Through general and specific questions that asked participants to discuss their strategies in teaching grammatical aspects in the questionnaire this study has revealed that teachers employed knowledge from many theories, such as structural linguistics, traditional grammar, systemic functional grammar, and discourse approaches and did not employ one single theory or only the theory they were trained in. This result supports the suggestions of Liu and Master (2003) and Derewianka (2001) that "grammar teaching is not thus an enterprise onto itself but one rooted in linguistics, language teaching and education in general" (Liu & Master, 2003, p.3). This may suggest that an openness to other approaches and an understanding of the use of different skills and theories need to be part of a TESOL curriculum to provide prospective language teachers with a more adequate preparation for ESL/EFL grammar teaching.

This research also supported previous researchers' proposals that certain grammar theories are more appropriate for teaching different grammatical aspects. For example, the discourse approach to grammar more adequately explains issues such as ellipsis, cohesion, reference, topic fronting, tense-function correlations while the value of traditional grammar is in discussing the form of tenses and subject verb agreement (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; Hughes & McCarthy, 1998). More research is required in this area to improve teachers' knowledge and use of different theories in teaching grammatical phenomena. It should also be mentioned that the approaches and techniques used by the teachers in explaining grammar are based on the two views of grammar which have been proposed by Purpura (2004), the communication-based perspective, and syntactocentric view of language. The first view of grammar is reflected in the answers that relate to discourse grammar, semantics and systemic functional grammar and the latter is seen in answers that are based on traditional grammar and syntax. Both these views influence and drive the grammar approaches that teachers draw on to explain grammar.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper has discussed English teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and their reported employment of grammar theories in language teaching. The teachers are in agreement with current research studies which point to the fact that more than one approach is required in grammar teaching and that knowledge of syntax and morphology, semantics and pragmatics as well as functional grammar offer different perspectives for the explanation of grammatical phenomena. Moreover, the teaching of linguistics is important in the teaching of grammar, because it contributes to teachers' understanding of grammar (see Horan, 2003). It was also suggested that different grammatical phenomena can be explained using different grammatical theories, and that focusing on one particular type of grammar does not prepare teachers adequately for language teaching.

Borg and Burns (2008) emphasize that teachers' mental lives offer an important path for understanding L2 grammar teaching. They are also found to influence teachers' practices, hence an understanding of teachers' conceptions is necessary and may have implications for designing grammar and methodology courses in the TESOL curriculum. Based on the findings of this research, the TESOL grammar courses could benefit from:

- incorporating a good understanding of different theories of grammar;
- nurturing a multiperspective approach to grammar; and
- focusing on explaining how different approaches contribute to our understanding of grammatical phenomena.

This research, despite its small scope and limitations, has opened some avenues for further research in grammar teaching. Future research in this area is important and should take into account teachers' actual practices and their employment of different theories of grammar. Moreover, more interviews with the teachers about their understanding of different grammar theories should be conducted, in order to further validate the findings in the questionnaire and provide more details on teachers' conceptualizations of grammar. One of the areas of the study directly drawn from this research is the investigation of the use of various theories in teaching grammatical phenomena. While there have been suggestions in this project as well as previous research about the appropriateness of different theories in explaining specific grammatical elements, more comprehensive research is required on the strengths and weaknesses of each theory, from the teachers' and students' perspective as well as in actual teaching practices. This research could take into account the importance of the lexical approach (Farr, 2008; Lewis, 1993; O'Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007) and other functional approaches not explored in this paper (Derewianka, 2001; Tomlin, 1994). It has also been noted by previous researchers that textbooks rely on specific theories of grammar, therefore an examination of the way grammar is presented in

textbooks would provide a more complete picture of the theories required and an understanding of teachers' needs in explaining it.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS AND KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED FOR TEACHING GRAMMAR IN ESL AND EFL

This survey is part of a research project which aims to identify aspects of grammar knowledge required for TESOL teachers. It is not a test of your knowledge or abilities but an understanding of the skills required in TESOL training. All answers will be treated with confidentiality. We appreciate your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact the researchers _____

1. Sex: Male   Female

2. Nationality: _____

3. 3. Age group: 21 - 30   31 - 40   40-60

4. Is English your first language? (tick as appropriate)
    - ☐   Yes
    - ☐   No

5. How many languages do you speak including your first language?
    - ☐   1
    - ☐   2
    - ☐   3

6. Academic qualification in teaching. (tick as many as appropriate)
    - ☐   A teacher's certificate in _____ from (country)
    - ☐   A diploma in _____ from (country)
    - ☐   A bachelor's degree in _____from (country)
    - ☐   A master's degree in _____from (country)
    - ☐   A doctorate in _____from (country)
    - ☐   Others; please specify _____ from (country)

7. Number of years teaching experience (English) _____

8. Levels you have taught (circle as many as appropriate):

-Beginners - Intermediate - Advanced - Primary - Secondary – EFL   -ESL

9. In your experience, do you think grammar teaching is important and why?

_____
_____
_____

10. How do you think grammar should be taught and why? (tick as many as appropriate)
    - ☐   On its own

☐   Integrated with other skills

☐   Both

WHY?

_____

_____

11. What background do you have in grammar? (tick as many as appropriate)

☐   You did a grammar course in your TESOL teaching qualification

☐   You did a Linguistics course

☐   You did a course on Functional systemic grammar

☐   You did a course on traditional and structural grammar

☐   You got grammar experience during your teaching. Please provide details

_____

☐   Other. Please provide details

☐   _____

_____

12. In your experience, what kind of skills and knowledge do beginning English language teachers need to teach English grammar nowadays? (tick as many as appropriate)

☐   A good understanding of traditional grammar: nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives

☐   An understanding of the syntax in a sentence and morphology of words

☐   Understanding of semantics – meaning of words and pragmatics their use

☐   Functional grammar: how grammar is used in texts and conversations to convey interpersonal, textual and ideational meaning

☐   Other; please explain

13. What are some difficulties that you face in explaining grammar to students? Provide some examples

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. What type of activities do you think are most useful in teaching **articles**? Choose from the following the activities and rank them starting from 1 as the most useful. If you do not think an activity is useful, it does not need to be ranked.

☐   You teach articles by examining their use in a paragraph

☐   You give the rules followed by examples in individual sentences

☐   You discuss their position in a noun phrase

☐   You compare it with article use in another language

☐   You compare article use in different types of texts

☐   Other_____

Please explain why you ranked one of the activities as the most useful (1)

_____
_____

15. What type of activities do you think are most useful in teaching **gerund and participles**?

Choose from the following the activities and rank them starting from 1 as the most useful. . If you do not think an activity is useful, it does not need to be ranked.

    ☐   You discuss their meaning in the sentence
    ☐   You discuss them as a subcategory of verbs and how they differ from verbs
    ☐   You discuss whether they function as nouns, verbs or adjectives in a sentence
    ☐   You point out the types of verbs that go with gerund
    ☐   You translate them in a different language
    ☐   You explore their use in different types of texts
    ☐
    ☐   Other_____

Please explain why you ranked one of the activities as the most useful
(1)_____
_____

16. What type of activities do you think are most useful in teaching **passive voice**?

Choose from the following the activities and rank them starting from 1 as the most useful. If you do not think an activity is useful, it does not need to be ranked.

    ☐   You explain the transformational changes from active to passive in terms of subject and object position
    ☐   You discuss the concepts of agency and event in the sentence
    ☐   You discuss the use of passive voice in terms of new and old information in the text
    ☐   You compare passive voice use with another language
    ☐   You explore the use of passive voice in different types of texts
    ☐   Other _____
Please explain why you ranked one of the activities as the most useful (1)
_____
_____

17. What type of activities do you think are most useful when explaining the following items: **like, love, responsible, charge**? Choose from the following the activities and rank them starting from 1 as the most useful.

☐   You give their meaning in other words
☐   You provide examples in sentences
☐   You provide examples of the kinds of objects and subjects they take
☐   You explore their use in different texts
☐   Other_____

Please explain why you ranked one of the activities as the most useful
(1)_____
_____
_____

18. What strategies do you use to explain vocabulary? (tick as many as appropriate)
☐   You explain the meaning of the sentence in different words
☐   You explain how this word is used by giving context
☐   You provide examples of the kinds of objects the word takes, or
      prepositions or complements it occurs with
☐   Other
      _____
      _____

19. What do you think is the key to successful grammar teaching?
_____
_____
_____

20. Are you confident in teaching grammar?
☐   Yes, why? _____
☐   No, why not? What would make you more confident?
_____
_____
_____

21. To what extent do you feel that a sound understanding of grammar assists you as a language teacher?
_____
_____
_____

Make any other comments if you like:

_____

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Follow up to grammar questionnaire

Preliminary comments:

Thanks for agreeing to do a follow up interview to the grammar questionnaire you've already filled out. I'm just going to get you to elaborate on some of the questions you responded to so that we can develop a fuller picture of your experience of grammar teaching and your thoughts about grammar and grammar teaching.

1. In question 10, we asked you how you think grammar should be taught and why? (On its own, Integrated with other skills, and Both). Can you expand on your answer? In particular, I'd like to know why you hold that view.

2. Related to that question, can you give an example of how you would integrate grammar with other skills? (If interviewee thinks grammar should be integrated with other skills.)

3. In question 11, we asked about your background in grammar. I'll show you the question. Can you tell me more about your background (e.g., the linguistics course you did; the grammar course in your TESOL qualification)? How did this background (training/education in grammar) help in your teaching? (i.e., Can you explain the value of your training to your grammar teaching?)

4. Question 12 in the questionnaire asked about the kind of skills and knowledge that beginning English language teachers need to teach grammar and a list of grammar types (e.g., functional grammar; an understanding of syntax) was provided. How do you use these skills in your teaching? Which of these types of grammar come up most frequently, or is most important, in a grammar course? Out of all the knowledge, are there any aspects of grammar skills that you think are important in a grammar course for teachers who study to be language teachers?

5. Based on your experience, do you have any insights about what the main problems that teachers have in teaching grammar? (i.e., from discussions with other teachers).

6. How do you think your experience of teaching (e.g., who you taught, the amount of grammar in the course, the levels, ESL/EFL) has influenced your approach to teaching grammar and your beliefs about grammar teaching?