Chapter 8
Cognitive Skills through CALL–Enhanced Teacher Training

Jane Vinther
University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

ABSTRACT
The efficacy of computer-based activities that can incorporate grammar as well as language acquisition is at the centre of debates in CALL and SLA. The concern for this chapter is the integration of CALL in the language classroom in a blended learning environment that includes the acquisition of grammatical content and its effect on language acquisition at a level where the learners are proficient users and communicators. The courseware under investigation was shown to be an effective learning tool for the metalinguistic curriculum and the acquisition of particular English structures, such as tenses and adverbials, but not for morphology. The results give grounds for the conclusion that, if the courseware invites students to apply cognitive skills (rather than mere drills), there will be an effect on language acquisition through the knowledge of grammar.

INTRODUCTION
The availability of computer-assisted language learning tools which help students to learn the formal aspects of language and which assist them in the acquisition of an associated metalanguage (i.e. linguistic terminology) seems limited at present. The acknowledgement of the need for such input and training facilitates is growing but availability of appropriate tools is still scarce. This is so despite the obvious strength of computer applications to provide platforms for individualized options which allow students to operate at their own pace with a focus on their particular individual needs. There may be a link from this need for computer applications to the continuing debate on the usefulness and desirability of metalinguistic knowledge (i.e. knowledge about

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-065-1.ch008
language) in language learning. The issue needs to be viewed from two perspectives: 1) the role of explicit knowledge in language-learning performance and competence, and 2) the requirement of metalinguistic knowledge as part of the education of future language teachers. For both of these, the objective is a subsequent enhancement of autonomous learning as well as facilitating the readiness to receive instruction at an academic level.

Depending on the particular language taught, and the proficiency level aimed at, the language teacher-training programs at university level will need some inclusion of the formal aspects of the language in question for the reasons. The role for grammar in language learning in general is debated (see for instances Long, 2007, pp. 139-168), but there is a growing understanding of the need to include grammar instruction in the language learning classroom. “Many teachers and researchers currently regard grammar instruction as ‘consciousness raising’ [...] in the sense that awareness of a particular feature is developed by instruction even if the learners cannot use the feature at once” (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002, p.6). One prominent proponent of the role of grammar is Sharwood Smith who states that awareness of grammar “is a necessary step, many people believe, toward fully mastering any language” (2008, p.179). In teacher education, there is the further concern that language teachers should be equipped with the rudimentaries of a language description inventory and the ability to read and understand pedagogical grammars and expositions on language learning in order to make decisions in the language classroom.

This chapter will describe and discuss a study based on a linguistic and pedagogical tool developed specifically with the aim of giving the users the possibility of working systematically and individually with the subject matter at a level which is appropriate for high-proficiency student teachers at the tertiary level. The study was centred on CALL courseware developed from the belief that metalinguistic knowledge has a place in its own right as well as being a facilitator in the language learning process for high-proficiency learners. The participants in this study utilised the visual interactive syntax learning (Visl) tool to develop and enhance their knowledge of word classes and syntactic structures in English. The Visl courseware is available in several languages, and there are applications for a variety of proficiency levels, including elementary school.

BACKGROUND

Several studies in a number of countries have found that language teachers often appear to lack sufficient background knowledge of the metalinguistic syllabus, including the lack of a metalanguage in which to talk about language (see for instance Newman & White, 1999). The same is the case for student teachers in Danish universities. When Danish and other Nordic students enter university, they are already proficient users of English with eight to ten years of English language learning behind them. They are basically treated like native speakers in the expectations they are met with concerning reading and comprehension skills. However, they lack knowledge of some of the formal aspects of the language and the ability to discuss linguistic and conceptual aspects of the language in metalinguistic terms (Borg, 2003; Vinther, 2004). Grammar is an unfamiliar concept to many of them, and the little explicit grammar instruction they did receive in their pre-university education was on a very basic level and functional/pragmatic in nature.

The communicative approach, although originally incorporating grammar, now focuses on the expression of meaning and attitudes minimises linguistic awareness, ignoring the fact that the two are intimately related. Ranta sums up the situation in this way, “In reaction to behaviourism, SLA researchers have emphasized the emergence of grammatical forms in learners’ interlanguage rather [than] the correctness of their production”
Related Content

The Analysis of Examination Scores
(2015). Intelligent Web-Based English Instruction in Middle Schools (pp. 132-165).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-analysis-of-examination-scores/119318?camid=4v1a

ICT and Language Learning at Secondary School
www.igi-global.com/chapter/ict-language-learning-secondary-school/19806?camid=4v1a

A Qualitative Case Study on Changes in a Five-Year One-To-One Laptop Initiative
www.igi-global.com/chapter/a-qualitative-case-study-on-changes-in-a-five-year-one-to-one-laptop-initiative/134613?camid=4v1a

The Impact of Academic Podcasting on Students' Learning Outcomes
www.igi-global.com/chapter/impact-academic-podcasting-students-learning/20038?camid=4v1a