



The Role of Grammar in Communicative Language Teaching: An Exploration of Second Language Teachers' Perceptions and Classroom Practices

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Abstract

The purpose of the present qualitative case study was to look into second language (L2) teachers' perceptions and classroom implementations of grammar instruction with regard to communicative language teaching (CLT). The study focused on individual teachers' perspectives of CLT because teachers' perceptions of their pedagogical skills have an impact on how they teach (Bandura, 1993, 1997). Participants were six college level teachers who taught Spanish as L2 in a major university in the Southern United States. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and document and record collection. The findings indicated that there was a mixture of perceptions regarding the inclusion of explicit grammar instruction in a CLT classroom. The findings also revealed that teachers' perceptions of what they deem to be effective L2 instruction are influenced by their experience as learners as well as their observation of student learning. The results suggest that teachers' beliefs are generally reflected in their classroom practices, but exceptions may occur due to departmental regulations. Pedagogical implications for teacher education and world language methods courses were drawn up based on the findings of the study.

1 Introduction

The idea of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been expanded since the mid 1970s. CLT was also greatly influenced by the early version of Long's (1983a, 1983b, 1996) Interaction Hypothesis. Since then, second language (L2) instructors have been encouraged to employ communicative ways of teaching in their classrooms. The focal point of CLT was almost exclusively on meaningful interaction through the use of spontaneous speech during pair and/or group work. There are various methods for teaching communicatively, for example, immersion, task-based instruction, structured input, and The Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). One controversial aspect of CLT is the role of grammar instruction. Krashen's (1982, 1985) Monitor Theory suggests that grammar instruction is unnecessary and has a very minimal effect on second language acquisition (SLA). Since the revised version of the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), CLT scholars have become interested in integrating form-focused instruction with communicative activities (Spada & Lightbown, 2009). Pica (2000) argues that communicative teaching that focuses mainly on meaning with very little attention

to forms are not adequate to prepare learners for attaining native-like proficiency. As such, the role of grammar in CLT needs to be justified. Instructors' pedagogical practices and their decisions regarding teaching methods are heavily influenced by their teacher beliefs. This study aims at examining the perceptions of grammar instruction of six college level teachers who teach Spanish as L2 and at exploring how they implement grammar instruction in their CLT classrooms.

2 Background of the study

2.1 Communicative Language Teaching and communicative competence

The fundamental goal of CLT is to develop learners' communicative competence in L2 through communication and interaction with others (Brown, 2002; Canale & Swain, 1980; Mochida, 2002). An important aspect of communicative competence is related to effectiveness and appropriateness of speech during the process of communication, as described by Rickheit and Strohner (2008). They state that "whereas effectiveness describes the outcome of communicative competence, appropriateness connects it with the situational conditions of the actual social interaction" (Rickheit & Strohner, 2008, p. 16).

The term communicative competence was first used by Hymes (1972, 1974) to refer to a speakers' capability to speak a language with linguistic proficiency and to use language appropriately in different social contexts. Savignon (1972) describes communicative competence as the ability to function in a truly communicative setting that allows learners to communicate with other speakers effectively and spontaneously. Savignon (1976) further explains that communicative competence is dependent on the negotiation of meaning between speakers, because communication is spontaneous. Speakers need to negotiate meaning based on what is unclear to them.

To achieve communicative competence, learners need to be competent in four aspects: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Swain, 1985). According to Canale (1983) and Canale and Swain (1980), linguistic competence, which is also called grammatical competence, concerns learners' use of lexis, syntax, and structures. Sociolinguistic competence concerns learners' appropriate use of language in different situations and settings. Discourse competence refers to the speakers' ability to form oral and written language appropriately and meaningfully. As suggested by the term itself, strategic competence relates to the use of strategies that can be used to make up for the inadequate abilities in other aspects of competence.

Researchers have investigated the acquisition of each competence (see Meyer, 1990; Rintell, 1990; Sato, 1990; Swain & Lapkin, 1990). These studies provide evidence that each competence plays a significant role in the acquisition of communicative competence. However, teachers seem to deemphasize grammar accuracy in their CLT classrooms (Wang, 2009). According to Savignon (2002), there is a difference between communicative competence and communicative ability. Communicative competence refers to the ability to interpret information, express oneself, and negotiate meaning. Communicative ability refers to the ability to comprehend meaning and to use forms appropriately. This implies the importance of grammar learning in order to achieve a higher level of communication. In the context of CLT, whether or not grammar instruction should be included has been a controversial topic.

2.2 The role of grammar in Communicative Language Teaching

There is a mixture of beliefs regarding grammar instruction. Some scholars support the exclusion of grammar learning (e.g. Prabhu, 1987), while other researchers emphasize the need to include grammar teaching in CLT (e.g. Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Nassaji, 2000; Spada & Lightbown, 1993). Krashen's (1982, 1985) hypothesis of acquisition versus learning has had an influence on the notion that focusing solely on meaning is sufficient for SLA. In his hypothesis, Krashen claims that there is a distinction between acquisition and learning. He believes that acquisition happens naturally, provided

that learners receive sufficient comprehensible input, and that only acquired knowledge can lead to fluent communication. Also, Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis proposes that explicit form teaching only serves as a tool for monitoring learners' language. That is, learners learn grammatical rules only to monitor the correctness of their language use, which is in addition to what has been acquired. However, the advocates of explicit grammar instruction argue that it is inadequate to acquire a L2, if meaning is the only focus.

Long (1991) differentiates between focus on forms and focus on form. He defines focus on forms as learning grammar rules, and focus on form as drawing learners' attention to grammar in activities and tasks. In the past two decades, some researchers have returned to the investigation of form-focused instruction in CLT (e.g. Celce-Murcia, 1991; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 1993; Long & Crookes, 1992). The studies on language accuracy of students in an immersion program in Canada provide important evidence that form focused instruction is needed (e.g. Harley & Swain, 1984; Swain, 1985). These immersion students received massive amounts of input and had plenty of interaction in the program for a period of time, but their utterances still contained grammatical mistakes. As a result of excluding form-focused instruction, the learners' output lacked in accuracy (Williams, 1995). Despite the negative reports about immersion programs in regard to language acquisition, research also indicates the success of French immersion programs in Canada. The students in the programs outperformed those who learned French as a separate subject in their overall proficiency in French as well as their knowledge of the target language culture (Cummins & Swain, 1986; Lessow-Hurley, 2009). Many educators misunderstand focus on form as teaching and learning grammatical rules. However, form-focused instruction does not refer to presenting rules to students.

A number of studies (e.g. Doughty, 1991; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Lightbown, 1991; Trahey & White, 1993; White, 1991) have examined the effectiveness of focusing on form and indicated that students with form-focused instruction outperformed those without instruction on the targeted forms. The results of these studies are very important, because they support the role of form-focused instruction. Some teachers think that form-focused instruction and communicative activities, where the focus is on meaning, should be separated. Teachers believe that drawing students' attention to grammar, while they are engaging in meaning, may have harmful effects (Lightbown, 1998). However, some scholars argue that form-focused instruction and communicative activities should be combined. Students pay more attention to target forms, and the forms become more memorable, if students learn them in context (Foto, 1994; Lightbown, 1998; Nassaji, 2000; Wang, 2009). One way to present grammar communicatively is through structured input activities (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Structured input is a type of instruction that directs learners to pay attention to the target language through arranging input from the instruction. These activities are called structured input activities. The basic notion of these activities is how learners encode grammatical forms through meaningful context. The purpose of structured input activities is to raise learners' awareness of the target structures with meaning.

2.3 Grammar instruction and teacher beliefs

Teacher beliefs play an important role in instructional decision-making and teaching practices (Johnson, 1994; Shavelson & Stern, 1981; Tillema, 2000; Wong, 2010). Teacher perceptions in regard to form-focused instruction have a great impact on whether they will incorporate grammar teaching in their classrooms (Fox, 1993; McCargar, 1993; Musumeci, 1997; Schulz, 1996). Several studies have been conducted to investigate teacher beliefs regarding grammar instruction (Edilian, 2009; Farrell, 1999; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Golombek, 1998; Ng & Farrell, 2003; Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001; Wang, 2009; Yim, 1993).

Farrell and Lim (2005) examined two English teachers' beliefs of grammar teaching in an elementary school in Singapore. The teachers believe that grammar instruction and providing grammar exercises for students are necessary. In addition, Wang (2009) reported in her study that the teachers agreed that grammar drills are important in language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, they also believe that students need communicative activities to enhance their speaking ability. Similarly, Rich-

ards, Gallo, and Renandya (2001) reported that the teachers in their study believe that explicit grammar instruction is essential in L2 learning, although they claimed that they adopted CLT in their teaching. There seems to be a discrepancy between L2 teachers' beliefs regarding grammar instruction in CLT and their actual classroom practices. As such, there is a need to investigate L2 teachers' perceptions and implementation of grammar instruction within a CLT context.

3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine college level L2 teachers' perceptions of grammar instruction and if they include grammar teaching in their CLT classrooms. In particular, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What are college level L2 teachers' perceptions of grammar instruction in communicative language teaching?
2. Do these teachers implement grammar instruction in their CLT classrooms? If so, how?

4 Methodology

In order to address the research questions for this study, the qualitative paradigm was chosen to investigate a phenomenon with details about how the teachers conducted their teaching through classroom observations (Preissle, 2006). A qualitative approach also allowed us to hear the teachers' voices regarding how they viewed grammar instruction in CLT through individual interviews. Additionally, a case study design was chosen, because we were interested in the experiences, insights, and voices of a particular group of second language teachers.

4.1 Participants

In the study, there were six participants who were graduate students and part-time instructors at the Spanish department in a major university in the Southern United States. The Spanish department required the instructors to use a CLT approach in their teaching. The participants' names are: Carla, Hugo, Lela, Marco, Patricia, and Raul (all pseudonyms). The participating teachers consisted of both native and non-native speakers of Spanish with various levels of teaching experiences, and of both males and females. Hugo, Lela, Marco, and Raul are native speakers of Spanish, whereas Carla and Patricia are non-native speakers of Spanish but have native-like proficiency. Hugo, Marco, and Patricia had several years of experience teaching language to both children and adults. Raul had one year of language teaching experience, while Carla and Lela had just begun teaching at the time of the study. We used purposeful maximum variation sampling in order to choose participants who would maximize the diversity of potential participants (Patton, 1990).

4.2 Data collection

Data collection took place over a period of three months. We triangulated the data by conducting non-participant observations and interviews, and collecting a variety of documents and records. Six classroom observations were conducted for each participant in order to capture in detail how and if any of the participants carried out grammar instruction in their CLT classrooms. We also took field notes with thick descriptions which offer details and rich data of these observations (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The field notes included what was happening in the class, the teachers' behaviors, the students' responses, as well as questions and thoughts that came up during the observations.

The three-step interviews, as suggested by Seidman (1998), were conducted with each participant. The purpose of the first interview (see Appendix A) was to focus on the participants' past experiences regarding L2 teaching and learning. The second interview (see Appendix B) focused on the participants' current teaching experience in detail, and the third interview (see Appendix C) was for the re-

searcher to understand why they did what was observed in their classrooms. All the interviews were tape-recorded for transcribing.

For the purpose of this study, syllabi, copies of textbooks used during the observations, and hand-outs from each participant were collected because documents and records often contain information that requires accountability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All of the participants used the textbook “¿Sabías que...?” written by VanPatten, Lee, Ballman, and Farley (2008). The syllabi listed class goals and objectives which reflected the values of the instructors or the department about L2 teaching. This source of information was analyzed and compared with the participants’ actual teaching from the observations and responses from the interviews.

4.3 Data analysis

Data were analyzed through ongoing and recursive analysis methods (Merriam, 1998). In addition, categorical analysis was employed in order to sort and code data into an assigned category (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). To look for evidence for categories and themes, the coding method was used. The data were coded using the open coding strategy (circling chunks, writing a word that indicated a category in the margin, and using various colors of highlighters for different themes), as described by Rossman and Rallis (2003), and Strauss and Corbin (1990). This process was employed continuously until the final concrete categories emerge and themes with appropriate codes were established.

4.4 Findings

From the preliminary data analysis, three major themes were found. They are: how they learned second languages, perceptions of grammar instruction in CLT, and teaching practices. The data were re-visited repeatedly in order to determine sub-themes for each major theme. Table 1 provides the definitions of each sub-theme.

<p>1) How they learned second languages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teachers’ second language learning experiences</i>
<p>2) Perceptions of grammar instruction in CLT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings about the importance of grammar instruction <i>Teachers’ perceptions about whether grammar teaching is important in a CLT classroom</i> • Ideal ways of grammar instruction <i>What teachers think to be an effective way to teach grammar</i>
<p>3) Teaching practices in CLT classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching practice and belief correspondence <i>Teachers’ classroom practices and their teaching beliefs match</i> • Teaching practice and belief misalignment <i>Teachers’ classroom practices contradicts with their teaching beliefs</i>

Table 1: Definitions of themes and sub-themes

4.4.1 How they learned second languages

The teachers generally learned their L2s in different ways. Some learned in a formal setting and did not have a good experience, which they attributed to their teachers' pedagogical practice. They generally did not like how their teachers focused a great deal on grammar and sentence structures. Other teachers who learned in a formal setting described their learning experience positively. They believe that when their teachers focused on grammar, it helped them a great deal in the learning process. Especially for Patricia – her teachers focused on traditional grammar drills and repetitions. This experience motivated her to continue to study Spanish in the future. Additionally, the teachers' methods that focused greatly on grammar and rules were shown to be strong foundations for learning in the experiences of Lela and Marco. For example:

Marco:

I started very young with a native private teacher ... This lasted one year and I learned the basics. This allowed me to have a chance first of reinforcing everything I learned in my private classes and build on from there ... In my opinion, grammar instruction has really helped me learn English, French, Italian, Japanese.

In addition to learning a L2 in a formal setting, some teachers learned their L2 in a natural environment and believe that it was a very effective way to acquire a L2. Carla learned Russian, English, and Spanish, all in natural settings. Patricia's experience in studying abroad in Spain also demonstrates how she developed the skill of speaking. She believes that studying grammatical rules and vocabulary of Spanish helped her a lot in her learning process. Her positive experience studying abroad in Spain also shows that learning and speaking in a L2 is effective in a natural setting.

As one might expect, the context in which different participants learned their L2s varied. The interviews with the participants also revealed that some learned in more formal settings, while others in natural settings, and yet others had a combination of both learning experiences. Their experience as learners had an impact on their perceptions of how a L2 should be taught.

4.4.2 Perceptions of grammar instruction in CLT

The teachers have different perceptions regarding grammar instruction in a CLT classroom. I divided their perceptions *to feelings toward the importance of grammar instruction* and *ideal ways of grammar instruction*. The former describes whether the teachers believe grammar teaching is essential in a CLT classroom and the latter refers to what the teachers think is an effective way to teach grammar.

- ***Feelings toward the importance of grammar instruction***

All of the participants believe that grammar plays an important role in L2 learning. However, their perceptions of whether or not grammar instruction is necessary differ. Some teachers believe that teaching grammar explicitly is not helpful for students' SLA process, while other teachers disagree with this belief. The following comments illustrate why the teachers think explicit grammar instruction is necessary:

Raul:

To me, an effective way, like I said earlier, is just a little bit of everything, focus on ... the different aspects like oral, listening, writing, a little bit of communicative, a little bit mechanical stuff like grammar ... a little bit of everything.

Marco:

There's a reference to Schmidt who says certain explanations ... explicit explanation of grammar before the activity, before being exposed to input can help acquisition ... even Schmidt says can help, may help because not every student is the same.

Lela:

Sometimes with some topics that are really hard ... hard for them because they probably don't have an equivalence in their language. That is why sometimes, yes, I think that explaining more grammar would be good for them. Things that we are not really used to in their first language.

Patricia:

At some point, they need to learn grammar, especially if they are going on to be a major or minor. There's nothing wrong with being able to talk about the language. It's from a university standpoint. I think that learning about the language also has its benefits.

Some teachers strongly disagree with the notion that explicit grammar instruction is an effective way to teach a L2. The explanations below indicate this belief:

Hugo:

Some of [my students] grew up with the grammar model, so they expect more grammar. So they expressed their desire to do more grammar and drills. So I said I can do the entire class in English, but then I will be teaching you grammar. What will happen at the end of the course, you may be able to conjugate a whole lot of verbs very well, but if you were out on the street, you wouldn't be able to understand. Worse than that, studies showed that besides teaching with the grammar approach you may be able to ace the test today but in the future you won't remember anything. That's just the way it is. So do you want to take the world to the test or take the work to the world?

It also appears that a teacher feels that explicit grammar instruction is helpful in a CLT classroom because it makes students feel safer.:

Carla:

I think [grammar teaching] is useful a little bit because [students] are thinking in those structures. So when you just show them a little bit of the difference between English and Spanish in some form, it just helps them to feel that they are getting it. They're like, "oh, ok now I see what the difference is." It helps them feel a little safer that they're going on the right path.

The participant teachers' beliefs about the importance of grammar instruction vary. Some believe that it is beneficial to students, while a few of them do not think that it is effective. A teacher indicates that a small amount of grammar teaching can be helpful only because it soothes students' learning anxiety.

- ***Ideal ways of grammar instruction***

The teachers' perceptions of an effective way to instruct grammar reflect their beliefs about the importance of grammar teaching. Some teachers think that an effective way to teach grammar is to provide students with explicit explanations, examples, and activities related to the grammar points. Some teachers clearly expressed that a communicative way of teaching, such as introducing grammar points through examples and activities, as well as using structured input is an effective method for grammar instruction. The following excerpts display the perspective of including explicit explanations to be more effective when teaching grammar:

Marco:

I think teaching grammar, just the grammar simply as one of the ways as letting them know what they are going to do. They understand that a little bit of a big picture ... maybe not explaining grammar, maybe comparing what you are going to do in Spanish to how it works in English and express them in personal sentences.

Patricia:

I guess it may be the best way to give a very explicit explanation with lots of examples of all of the different rules under the sun on a topic. And then immediately ask students to use it. I think grammar instruction maybe ... you should keep focus on what you are doing and also provide a lot of examples.

Some teachers are in strong favor of communicative methods, including structured input. They find teaching grammar communicatively to be more beneficial to students' acquisition. The comments below highlight this belief:

Lela:

We don't teach grammar at all. [Students] are the ones that come up with their own conclusions. Well yeah, they have some information from the book. However, we don't explain it in class. So, we have to work with structured input which is basically to provide them input as meaningful as possible so that they can like work with the language and they can like take it and acquire it, instead of learning it you know.

Hugo:

I believe that an effective way to teach grammar is to have a communicative approach in the classroom, to focus on oral production and listening, on comprehension and communication in the classroom because that's where the students are going to get it.

4.4.3 *Teaching practices in a CLT classroom*

The teachers generally show that their teaching beliefs correspond with their classroom implementations in most situations. For example, they provide grammar explanations and formulas when they agree that explicit grammar instruction is important in a CLT classroom. However, it also appears that two teachers' classroom practices contradict their beliefs due to restrictions by the required program.

- ***Teaching practice and belief correspondence.***

The teachers who believe that language teaching should include both communicative activities and grammar instruction practice these ideas in their classes. Marco's and Raul's implementations demonstrate this phenomenon. According to Marco's experience as a learner and his knowledge in L2 research, he believes that explicit grammar instruction is an effective way to help students understand the language. In his classroom practices, Marco provided his students with grammar formulas and explanations followed by communicative activities. He also created a handout which contained irregular verbs and rules about how they should be conjugated. After explaining the forms on the handout, Marco asked the students to talk to each other about their daily routines on a regular day while using the "yo" form they just learned.

Raul believes that explaining grammar rules to students before asking them to do activities is an effective way to teach a L2, because this is how he learned English and it worked for him. Raul's teaching belief reflects in his classroom practices in that he provided grammar translation and explanations to his students. In the fifth classroom observation, Raul introduced the subjunctive and conditional forms in Spanish – he first illustrated the structures of these two tenses by showing the students' examples with pictures associated with the sentences. The examples contained one Spanish sentence with the subjunctive and conditional forms highlighted and its English translation. After showing the examples to the students, Raul displayed two charts of the past subjunctive form. They also contained information about how to change verbs to their subjunctive forms as well as a few irregular verbs, for instance, "yo" → "iera," "tú" → "ieras," and "el/ella/ud" → "iera." Using the charts, Raul explained to the students how those verbs should be conjugated.

The classroom practices of Hugo and Carla also illustrate how the teachers' implementations match their beliefs. They believe that grammar instruction is necessary; only through communicative activities can students acquire the language successfully. Hugo's and Carla's practices correspond with their beliefs in that they did not explain grammar rules explicitly. Instead of talking about grammar rules, they displayed the structure of a grammar point on a PowerPoint slide followed by a number of sample sentences and pictures associated with the sentences. Carla introduced "yo" in Spanish and demonstrated how to conjugate verbs with "yo." Carla showed the students a few sample sentences, such as "Duermo una hora todas las noches" and "Tengo mucho trabajo esta semana." The

ending of the verbs “duermo” and “tengo” in the examples were highlighted. She read the sentences once and had the class read the target forms aloud. She then presented the rules of how to conjugate the forms on a PowerPoint slide along with a few more sample sentences. After showing students the pattern and the formulas of how to conjugate verbs with “yo,” she had several sentences, with verbs omitted, and pictures associated with the sentences on the PowerPoint slide. She asked the students to provide the appropriate form of verbs based on the actions shown in the pictures.

When covering “¿Y tú?” and “¿Y usted?” as presented in the textbook, Hugo presented the use of these two forms through pictures and sample sentences. Even though the sample sentences were taken directly from the textbook, Hugo looked for pictures of a young girl and an older business man and showed a few sentences about these two people to represent when to use “tú” and “usted.” Because the verbs are conjugated differently with these two forms, Hugo highlighted each verb in blue and the changes of the verbs in red. For instance, he highlighted “s” at the end of each verb for “tú” and “e” at the end of each verb for “usted” in red. He read each sentence once and talked about each picture in Spanish.

The above comments and examples from the observations illustrate that teachers’ beliefs are reflected in their classroom practices. Despite the existing regulation of not allowing the teaching of grammar in a traditional way, some teachers present grammar rules, because they find it to be effective. Other teachers refuse to explain grammar in their classrooms, because they believe that it is not helpful for the students.

• *Teaching practice and belief misalignment*

Two teachers’ implementations of language lessons were not aligned with their beliefs. It can be seen from Lela’s and Patricia’s beliefs and classroom practices. Lela believes that although learning grammar rules is not the most important aspect in the learning process, it is helpful for students to learn. Even though Lela believes that it will make it easier for students to understand the Spanish grammar if she explains it explicitly, she does not do so in class because of the restriction from the required program. She said, “I cannot explain grammar here.” Lela did not explain grammar in six of my observations in her class. When teaching the impersonal and passive forms of “se,” she first had her students read the grammar information in the textbook individually. Then, she had the students talk about what their responsibilities were in the class, using the phrases “no se permite,” “no se puede,” and “se prohíbe” before asking them to do the structured input activity in the book.

Patricia’s belief and classroom practices also provide a description of the mismatch between teachers’ beliefs and practices. Patricia believes that students need to know about grammar besides performing communicative activities. However, she did not talk about grammar, because she was forbidden to present grammar explanations. She finds that it is unpleasant when she cannot teach grammar. She said “the whole prohibition of grammar ... I feel like I’m limited.” In six of my observations in Patricia’s class, she did not talk about grammar rules or structures at all. She followed closely the activities in the textbook. Patricia covered target forms through the use of sample sentences and pictures, followed by the structured input activities in the textbook.

Lela’s and Patricia’s experiences reflect the difference between teachers’ beliefs and implementations. They agree that communicative activities are excellent in facilitating students’ L2 learning, but believe that a certain amount of grammar instruction is beneficial. Their beliefs, however, are not reflected in their practices because of the guidelines they received from the department. Four teachers show that their teaching beliefs are in accordance with their classroom implementations. Although the program did not allow the teachers to explain grammar explicitly, some teachers presented grammar rules, because they find it to be effective. Two teachers’ classroom practices contradict their beliefs due to restrictions by the required program.

5 Discussion and pedagogical implications

The findings in this study provide important information that can be applied to all levels of language students and teachers. There is a mixture of feelings and perceptions regarding grammar instruction in a CLT classroom. Some teachers believe that despite the advantages of teaching communicatively, having a variety of teaching methods is necessary. However, half of the teachers do not agree with the idea of including grammar explanations in a CLT classroom. On the other hand, two teachers believe explicit grammar instruction will only help them receive good grades on tests; it will not facilitate their communication with others. They also feel that focusing on communicative activities without explaining grammar is a viable way for students to learn a L2. Three participants have different perceptions and feelings about CLT. They believe that grammar teaching is necessary for students, and believe that CLT should include both speaking and writing. They support the notion of engaging students in communication, but feel that teaching grammar is necessary, because students need grammar to communicate. Even though all of the participants agree that there is a place for grammar instruction in a L2 classroom, their beliefs in the degree of effectiveness of grammar teaching vary. Some insist on explaining grammar to students, while others insist on not teaching grammar explicitly.

One possible factor for how the participants developed their perceptions of grammar instruction is their past experience as a learner and teacher. Additionally, traditional teaching methods, such as the Grammar Translation Method and the Audiolingual Method that were widely used for decades could affect their perceptions of grammar instruction in their CLT classrooms. In the language learning context, the participants approached the classroom context both in terms of instruction and learning through a perceptual lens heavily colored by their beliefs about how L2s should be taught. These perceptions in turn are developed from their experiences in teaching and as learners. Research in the field of L2 education has found evidence that instructors' teaching practices and relevant decision-making are informed by their beliefs and experiences regarding L2 teaching and learning (e.g. Borg, 2003; Burns, 1992; Golombek, 1998). Studies conducted by Brockhart and Freeman (1992) and Hutchinson and Buschner (1996) also suggest that teachers' former experiences affect their instruction far more than what they learn in the training programs. In the study, some participants reported negative L2 learning experiences because most of their learning involved studying and memorizing grammar rules. As such, they reject the notion that explicit grammar instruction is an effective way to teach a L2. On the other hand, other participants had pleasant experiences learning their L2s through studying grammar rules, and they agree that students need to know grammar. This implies that it is important for L2 educators to take into consideration the knowledge, experience, and beliefs that teachers bring into the program.

Two of the participants did not engage in direct grammar instruction despite their strong beliefs about its importance in L2 learning. These two participants perceived that consequences for violating curriculum and policy prohibitions were too serious to ignore. One of the components of task value beliefs in Feather's (1982, 1988) expectancy-value mode is the cost belief. Wigfield and Eccles (1992) define cost belief as the expected negative consequences of performing an action. When individuals choose to be engaged in a task, they cannot perform another task simultaneously. There are costs associated with a particular decision chosen by an individual (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). Although teachers' instructional judgments are derived from what they perceive to be effective (Zhao & Cziko, 2001), if the instructors believe that the cost in terms of breaking the rules is too high, they may go against their teaching belief. With Lela and Patricia, there is evidence of such a cost belief. Lela mentioned that she was willing to adhere to the rules because she wanted "to keep her job," while Patricia mentioned that she followed the curriculum closely, because she did not know what her students would be asked in the departmental exam. As such, cost beliefs have an impact on teachers' classroom practices of CLT. This suggests that administrators should offer support and encouragement instead of limiting teachers' choice in teaching methodology.

Moreover, the implication of the study for teacher education programs is significant. If teacher candidates have preconceived notions based on their L2 learning experiences, as demonstrated by the teachers in this study, how will they perceive CLT, if they have no or limited exposure to the method-

ology in their learning? Will they be enthusiastic to implement CLT in their future language classes? Will they be influenced by their observations in the field to stand by CLT or defer to the traditional methodologies used in the profession and discussed in this study? And finally, what impact, if any, does the course instructor's L2 learning experience have on the students' approach toward CLT?

Furthermore, the implication of the findings for world language methods courses is significant. If teacher candidates are asked to think about methodology and their own L2 acquisition, one can conclude from the findings in this study that their assumptions about what is effective teaching will be based on prior experience. Once teacher candidates reflect on CLT versus more traditional methodologies with which they are familiar, a positive or negative conclusion toward CLT is established. It is at this point that the course instructor, whose approach in turn has been influenced by his or her own language acquisition, can give the students resources to establish themselves as future world language teachers. In this way, teacher candidates can learn the importance of providing students opportunities for acquisition to happen by using what is known about acquisition (Lee & VanPatten, 2003).

If teacher candidates are able to reflect on their own experience, their perception of their future roles as users of CLT begins to change (Hall, 2001). Candidates can observe the foundations of language acquisition and begin to determine how they will use CLT. Examples from methods classes show that the candidates' initial hesitation to CLT changes after direct classroom observation of grammar-driven teaching, where minimal communication takes place, and observation of classes that use CLT. Ultimately, the teacher candidates express that the classes in the primary and secondary schools with structured communicative activities are more effective for language acquisition than grammar-based instruction and are enthusiastic to begin implementing CLT.

In the primary and secondary school systems, teacher candidates seem to be confronted with the same issues as the teachers in this study. Faced with classroom teachers' attitudes regarding grammar vs. CLT, teacher candidates must learn to adapt to the environment while still maintaining eagerness to integrate communicative teaching, which they seem to acquire when the methods teacher has been trained with CLT. Thus, the goal of methods instructors is that the teacher candidates will eventually come to an understanding of the appropriateness of the situation and of the strengths and weaknesses of varied perspectives on learning (Brown, 2006).

Finally, the implications of this study seem to lie in the collaboration between teacher candidates, teachers, and administrators. Collaboration supports flexibility and applicability of methodologies within a framework, supporting teacher candidates' morale and pedagogical development (Allen & Maxim, 2011). Pre-service and in-service teachers are much more apt to embrace CLT when they are in a collaborative environment that supports the discussion of diverse world language teaching.

6 Conclusion

This qualitative case study examined perceptions of grammar instruction of six college level teachers who taught Spanish as a L2, particularly in a CLT context. The study also looked into how, if at all, they incorporated grammar teaching in their CLT classrooms. The findings indicate that teachers' perceptions of grammar instruction are greatly impacted by their L2 learning experiences. The findings also demonstrate the link between implementations and teacher beliefs, perceptions, and prior experiences. These teachers' prior experiences included direct observations and interactions with students. Their instructional decisions were also influenced by their perceptions of their students' needs and interests. As such, examining L2 teachers' beliefs and preferences cannot be disregarded in any teacher education program, since these are the foundation of L2 teachers' and teacher candidates' acquisition methodology. Even though the question is posed in methods classes and texts (Hall, 2001), it is a much more influential factor in future methodology choice on the part of teacher candidates, especially for CLT, than methods instructors may believe, as proven by the findings of this study. By following through with the question of their own L2 acquisition in the context of observation, discussion, and collaboration throughout the entire course, teacher candidates can truly develop their role as communicative language teachers.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Structured Interview Questions (Interview 1)

1. Do you speak a second language? What is it? How long have you learned it?
2. Can you tell me about your experience as a language learner? (What you liked and what you didn't like)
3. Have you ever received any language teaching training? What was it like?
4. Can you tell me about your experience as a language teacher so far?
5. What methods have you used as a language teacher?
6. Do you think they were effective? Why?

Appendix B

Structured Interview Questions (Interview 2)

1. What teaching approach or techniques do you use in your teaching currently?
2. What do you think about the approach or techniques you just mentioned?
3. What do you think about the teaching guidelines provided by the program coordinators?
4. If you could have a choice, how would you teach your class differently?
5. What is CLT to you?
6. What do you think about CLT?
7. In the syllabus, it says that students will begin to be able to express, negotiate, and interpret meaning in the target language. What do you think about these goals?
8. What do you think about the textbook you are using? Why?
9. Would you change the textbook if you had a choice? Why?
10. A. Do you create your own activities besides using the ones provided by the book?
B. What are they?
C. Why do you create those activities?
11. A. When do you correct your students' mistakes?
B. Why do you correct them?
C. How do you correct them?
12. If you could create your own exams, what would they be like?
13. What do you think is an effective way to teach grammar?

Appendix C

Structured Interview Questions (Interview 3)

1. What do you think of the activities you used in your class?
2. Why did you do those activities with your students?
3. Would you have spoken more English if you had a choice?
4. Would you have spent more time on teaching grammar if you could?
5. Did you think your students understood what you were talking about? Why?
6. How would you teach differently if you had more freedom to choose how you teach?