Consciousness-Raising Tasks—A Way to Engage Average-Ability Secondary Students in Grammar Learning

While the overwhelming influences of the meaning-focused task-based approach is extensively found in the official English curriculum in Hong Kong, many teachers still perceive explicit grammar teaching as one of their most important roles (Carless, 2007). In view of this, the present action research project investigates English grammar instruction in a local classroom context, with my own experience of teaching English to junior secondary students being reflected on. In this project, I propose adopting consciousness-raising tasks to teach grammar. As is suggested in second language acquisition literature, such tasks are found to promote learners’ active engagement with the target grammar structure(s) being focused, thus resulting in more promising learning outcomes. In this project, the effects of such tasks on the secondary learners are investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively. For the former, I administered pre- and post-tests to determine whether the learners could attain a higher level of awareness of the target grammar items after performing the consciousness-raising tasks. For the latter, I conducted a questionnaire survey and a semi-structured interview to elicit my informants’ perceptions of those tasks and their engagement with the target grammar items focused. In addition, I invited four informants to produce introspective “think-aloud” protocol reports to study their pattern of cognitive engagement with the grammar items taught through consciousness-raising tasks. Preliminary data analysis of this study indicates encouraging results. The informants not only showed significant gains in understanding the target structure, but also developed positive engagement with and perceptions about learning through consciousness-raising tasks. In addition, the think-aloud data shows that such tasks promoted the informants’ engagement with the target structures in their post-task encounters with such structures.

Therefore, while not denying the value of other approaches to teaching second/foreign language grammar, I would argue that the consciousness-raising tasks should be included in language teachers’ methodological repertoire.