

**Integrating Focus on Form with Focus on FormS as a Way to Improve Grammar
Teaching in an EFL Setting**

Jhon Alejandro Florez Lagos

Submitted to the Faculty of Human Sciences in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of B.A. in the English and French program

Department of Linguistics and Languages

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Artículo 1° Acuerdo N° 324 Octubre 11 de 1966 emanado por el honorable consejo superior la Universidad de Nariño

Nota de aceptación

Firma del presidente del Jurado

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San Juan de Pasto, Diciembre de 2020

Resumen

La enseñanza de la gramática en entornos donde el inglés es una lengua extranjera ha causado una larga controversia. Mientras algunos prefieren no enseñarla, otros aún la consideran parte esencial en los currículos de lenguas extranjeras. Este trabajo ofrece una perspectiva informada de por qué y cómo dos principales enfoques a la enseñanza de la gramática, Focus on Form (FonF) y Focus on FormS (FonFS), deberían ser integrados. La gramática ya no sólo se considera como un conjunto de reglas sino como un medio que hace posible la comunicación; por esta razón, el uso de actividades comunicativas dentro de salón de clase es de primordial importancia, pero algo de enseñanza explícita también es beneficiosa para los estudiantes. En un contexto Colombiano se sugiere una combinación de enseñanza implícita y explícita, ya que la gramática es todavía percibida por profesores y estudiantes como un componente esencial y por lo tanto no ha perdido popularidad. En consecuencia, el enfoque sugerido, Isolated Form-Focused Instruction, parece ser más apropiado ya que incluye tanto FonF como FonFS pero dentro del contexto de una actividad comunicativa, de tal manera que los estudiantes puedan adquirir fluidez y precisión gramatical.

Palabras Clave: enseñanza de la gramática, Focus on Form (FonF), Focus on FormS (FonFS), enseñanza implícita y explícita.

Abstract

The teaching of grammar in EFL settings has caused a long-lasting controversy. While some prefer to avoid grammar at all, others still think of it as an essential part of foreign language curricula. This research paper offers an informed view of why and how two main approaches to teaching grammar, Focus on Form (FonF) and Focus on FormS (FonFS), should be integrated. Grammar is no longer seen as a set of rules but as a means to make communication possible; for that reason, the use of communicative tasks in the classroom is paramount, yet some explicit instruction is also beneficial to learners. A combination of implicit and explicit instruction is suggested, especially in Colombian EFL settings, where the teaching of grammar is still perceived as an essential component by both teachers and students and therefore has not lost popularity. Accordingly, the suggested approach, Isolated Form-Focused Instruction, seems to be appropriate as it includes both FonF and FonFS but within the context of a communicative task, so that students are able to develop fluency and accuracy.

Key words: grammar teaching, Focus on Form, Focus on FormS, explicit and implicit instruction.

Contents

Integrating Focus on Form with Focus on FormS as a Way to Improve Grammar Teaching in an EFL Setting	11
Justification	13
Literature Review	15
What is Grammar?	15
The Role of Grammar in Language Teaching	17
The Case for Grammar	18
Form-Focused Instruction	19
Focus on Form (FonF)	19
Focus on FormS (FonFs)	22
Integrated and Isolated Form-Focused Instruction	24
Incorporating Form-Focused Instruction into Task-Based Language Teaching	24
Classroom Studies on Grammar Instruction	27
Pedagogical Implications in Colombian EFL Settings	29
Conclusions	34
References.	36
Appendices	40

Index of table

Table 1. Main features of Focus on Form	22
--	----

Index of figure

Figure 1. A Three-Dimensional Grammar Framework	15
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Index of Appendices

Appendice A. Sample Lesson Plan	40
Appendice B. Handout 1	42
Appendice C. Handout 2	43
Appendice D. Telephone Messages	44

Integrating Focus on Form with Focus on FormS as a Way to Improve Grammar Teaching in an EFL Setting

Grammar teaching in foreign language classrooms around the world might have switched from very traditional approaches to new ones which lead language learners to decipher the structures by means of real communication. In traditional grammar teaching, the sentence was the major unit of analysis in language learning. Thus, proficiency might have been blurred since language teachers were not probably aware of the importance of real uses of the language as fluency facilitators. Nevertheless, if taken into consideration that there might be different purposes for learning English, or any other target language, it should be said that finding a good match between explicit grammar instruction and communicative activities might well be of usefulness so as to integrate both instructional approaches into foreign language curricula, thus making grammar instruction more effective and purposeful.

In Colombia, the teaching of English must meet some goals set by the Ministry of Education (MEN), which, in order to have students attain communicative competence, created the National Bilingual Program (Colombia Bilingüe, 2006). To that end, the MEN implemented the standards established by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Nonetheless, the adequate implementation of those standards could be in question due to the fact that there are crucial factors affecting how languages are taught in Colombia. Implementing standards for foreign language pedagogy does not involve just importing standards from other places where they have been successful or have shown a certain degree of efficacy as it does not guarantee success in other settings where conditions mark a great difference. Colombia Bilingüe acknowledges that there are areas that need to be strengthened, and those have to do with the management of schools, the teachers' English level and their ways to teach, the materials

available to teachers as well as the conditions in which teaching and learning take place (e.g. classrooms, laboratories, computers, etc.). Nevertheless, the unrealistic government's goals pose a paradox when it is the government that underrates the real importance of learning a second language. This could be evidenced in the small number of hours per week allocated for foreign language learning, which is not enough if the need for more exposure to the foreign language is taken into consideration. This results in students' frustration (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, as cited in Sanchez & Obando, 2008), especially in public schools where time does not suffice for teachers to implement tasks for fostering a real communicative use of the target language. In the booklet 'Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés' (2006), it is openly expressed that the Colombian government 'allegedly' has the real commitment to creating favorable conditions for Colombians to develop communicative competence in a foreign language; nonetheless, Sanchez and Obando (2008) appropriately suggest that instead of devoting much attention to the implementation of such standards, more attention should be given to the general learning conditions that are required for effective foreign language teaching and learning, and this is something that needs to be done first.

Another underlying issue is academic. Both teachers and students need to start to change the way how a foreign language is seen. The view that English is just another subject matter students have to pass after a grammar test should be dismissed, and it is time to see it as a means of communication which will permit students to succeed in their future (Ayala & Álvarez, 2005). Probably, we are still living with the idea that once learners have mastered the grammatical system of a language and memorized a certain amount of vocabulary, learning will occur. Sanchez and Obando (2008) state that not only do students need to be exposed to structural aspects of the target language, they also need to direct their attention to functional

aspects, and this is how teachers could benefit from Focus on Form in order to combine accuracy and meaning in communicative tasks instead of memorizing rules, which leads us to ask ourselves: is foreign language pedagogy being carried out in the appropriate conditions? And one more question arises, how can grammar teaching be redefined in order to get the most out of it?

The purpose of this paper is to redefine the teaching of grammar in EFL settings and to explain how advocating the use of Focus on Form and Focus on FormS could be beneficial when grammar is embedded in communicative tasks.

Justification

In our country, the government, the Ministry of Education (MEN) to be more precise, has also seen the increasingly gained significance of English as a foreign language, hence the implementation of a program called ‘Colombia Bilingüe’, now adjusted and renamed: English National Program Colombia Very Well (2015-2025), which seeks to strengthen and promote the teaching and learning of English in our schools. Despite the MEN’s requirements, many teachers in Colombia are still using traditional methods despite its implications. This could be evidenced in a study carried out by Bastidas and Muñoz (2011) in elementary public schools in Pasto, in which the teachers who were observed used more traditional approaches in their classes (e.g. Grammar Translation and Audio-lingual methods) and there was little or no opportunity for learners to use language for communicative ends.

While it is true that communicative approaches have emerged and are here to stay, the teaching of grammar has not lost popularity in most EFL classrooms either. Traditional approaches have dominated so much that grammar has become the core of language learning in most EFL classrooms where students are supposed to memorize isolated rules with no real purpose and thus neglecting the fact that a language is a means for people to perform different

functions which make communication occur. On the other hand, there is the need that arose from the government to implement a bilingualism program. This would involve teachers being up to date with the latest trends and methodologies in the area of English as a second or foreign language. The point is to include grammar, but without ignoring the development of the four skills which are essential for communication. Grammar is still perceived by both teachers and students as an essential component of language learning, and therefore, ways to teach it more purposefully need to be presented. The factors affecting teachers' choice to teach grammar may be various depending on the circumstances or conditions in which the teaching-learning process takes place. Two main approaches to teaching grammar have emerged in the last six decades, those approaches have been referred to as Focus on Form and Focus on FormS.

This research paper advocates an informed combination of both approaches given that both of them offer benefits to learners, especially in EFL contexts where students are more accustomed to the traditional models of education. The intention is not to advocate to either approach to teaching grammar, nor is it to state which approach is better. Instead, it intends to integrate both in order to suggest alternatives teachers can benefit from, therefore combining both communicative and structural aspects for a more effective English teaching and learning. By advocating focus on formS with preceding or subsequent communicative tasks, there would be the necessary balance that grammar lessons need so that they start to be engaging to learners. Integrating both approaches could shed light on the controversial issue of the teaching of grammar, and also allow teachers to design and tailor hundreds of activities and materials to fit the different needs and styles of learners. In order to better understand how these approaches work, it would be central to look at some definitions of the main construct of Grammar, which is what we will turn to in the next part.

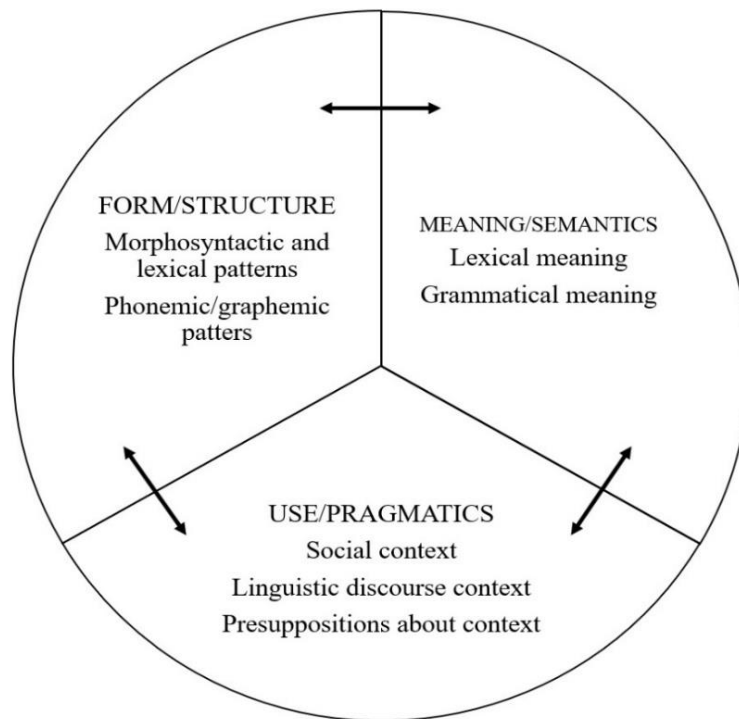
Literature Review

What is Grammar?

Certainly, there is no shortage of grammar definitions, some can be found in dictionaries or any other definitions have been provided by linguists or professionals involved in the field of foreign language pedagogy, but those definitions share a prevalent feature, which has to do with structural components of a language. To mention a few, Ur (2012) briefly states that grammar is “the way words are put together to make correct sentences” (p.76). Likewise, Richards and Schmidt (2002) refer to word combination in order to produce sentences. Nunan (2015) also defines grammar as the way how words are built, and how they are arranged to make sentences. Nevertheless, Larsen-Freeman (2001) argues that grammar is not only about form. Those forms have a purpose of expressing meaning (semantics) in a suitable context (pragmatics). Figure 1 illustrates the levels at which grammar should be considered and how they are interconnected with one another.

Figure 1

A Three-Dimensional Grammar Framework (Larsen-Freeman, 2001).



Rather than seeing grammar as a set of rules describing how a language works, a broader definition of grammar should go much further than that. Instead, it should be seen as a valuable resource for conveying messages when the need for communication arises. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) have espoused the idea that in order to define grammar, we need to consider how it works at three different levels: The *subsentential* or morphological level deals with the parts of speech (e.g. nouns, verbs, adjectives, determiners, prepositions, etc.), which in turn consists of three criteria such as semantic, structural, and functional. The *sentential* or syntactic level is connected with the word order in a sentence, hence three types of sentences: simple, compound, and complex. The *suprasentential* or discourse level has to do with how morphology and syntax act together to perform certain discourse functions. This is the essential level for communication to occur.

There are two approaches to analyzing grammar. One of them, *descriptive grammar*, is only limited to stating what happens in the language and the matter of whether something is

‘good’ or ‘bad’ grammar is of no concern so long as communication is successful (Greenbaum, 1996; Leech et al., 2006). On the other hand is the other approach, *prescriptive grammar*, which intends to ‘dictate’ how people should speak and write. This approach seeks to establish what should be adopted and avoided in a language, or in other words, to establish what ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ grammar is even though some forms which they view as incorrect are widely used by native speakers (Huddleston & Pollum, 2002).

The Role of Grammar in Language Teaching

Nothing has caused more controversy than the role of grammar in second/foreign language pedagogy. Rutherford (1987, as cited in Celce-Murcia, 1991) pointed out that for 2,500 years, teaching grammar and language teaching had been used synonymously, as well as Kumaravadivelu (2003) appropriately notes that “the primacy of grammar in language teaching has been recognized from time immemorial” (p.177). It is clear that the way how grammar was seen in the 1960s, when traditional approaches to grammar teaching were trendy, was significantly different from how we see grammar today. Richards and Renandya (2002) agree with the controversial role of grammar in language pedagogy. Grammar teaching has prevailed over other aspects of language from the very beginning of the twentieth century given the premise that knowing the grammatical system of a language would enable a person to use it for communication. During the 1970s, the teaching of grammar lost popularity after Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) sprang. Nevertheless, CLT did not rule out grammar at all; it was still part of CLT syllabi as functions (e.g. asking the way, making future plans, etc.) rather than explicit rules (Thornbury, 2002).

Several authors agree that grammar teaching involves presentation and practice of discrete grammar points (Ellis, 2006; Hedge, 2000, as cited in Ellis, 2006), in other words, learners are

presented with the grammar, followed by the corresponding practice, and feedback by the teacher. However, Ellis (2006) clarifies that teaching grammar may not necessarily consist of both presentation and practice of grammatical rules. Grammar teaching may involve only presentation with no practice, or it might consist of sole practice with no presentation of the rule. Even, grammar teaching may entail exposing learners to an input providing multiple examples in the target language. Finally, grammar teaching may include some kind of corrective feedback when learners' errors occur in attempting a communicative task.

Irrespective of whatever technique, methodology, or approach we employ; or when we decide to present learners with the grammar they need, there is something to bear in mind: Celce-Murcia (2016) aptly states that communication does not occur at the sentence level; it does occur at the discourse level. Given the importance grammar has in making discourse functions possible, the next section will present some reasons why grammar should be taught.

The Case for Grammar

Thornbury (2002) puts forward seven arguments in favor of grammar teaching. Firstly, he refers to grammar as a '*sentence-making machine*', that is, a system of features in a language which, if used accurately (or almost accurately), will enable learners to create a large number of original sentences which will only be restricted by the learner's knowledge of vocabulary and creativity. The second argument for the teaching of grammar, '*the fine-tuning argument*', suggests that it is fact that we benefit from putting together words and phrases for ease of understanding. There is a point where neglecting the use of grammar will obscure the intended message. There is a third argument known as '*the fossilization argument*'. Any learner with a certain degree of motivation can attain high levels of proficiency with no need for formal instruction. However, the study of grammar will polish their speech and writing and avoid

fossilization. Most grammar books have been designed for both classwork and self-study. *'The advance-organizer argument'*, shows that if we pay attention to certain grammar features, these items seem to stick, which in turn results in acquisition, grammar instruction therefore is believed to have a delayed effect. A further argument, *'the discrete item argument'*, states that despite being an enormous system, grammar has the advantage of making a language more amenable to learn by organizing it into discrete items, thus reducing such an enormity and facilitating its assessment as well. The sixth argument, *'the rule-of-law argument'*, suggests that grammar rules provide teachers with a structured system that may be transmitted and tested in methodological steps. *'Learners' expectations'* also build an important argument in that grammar-focused instruction may develop due to learners' frustration from previous learning experiences such as self-study or immersion courses. For that reason, teachers ought not to ignore such expectations since learners will feel frustrated and alienated.

Form-Focused Instruction

It is necessary not to create confusion between Focus on Form (FonF) and Form-focused instruction (FFI) (Long, 1998). Form-focused instruction refers to any attempt to draw learners' attention to a linguistic item either implicitly or explicitly (Spada 1997, as cited in Brown, 2000). Hence, it can be said that form-focused instruction encompasses both main approaches: Focus on Form and Focus on FormS. The existence of both approaches poses a controversial question: should grammar be taught implicitly or explicitly? Now, each approach will be looked at more deeply.

Focus on Form (FonF)

The need to implement an approach which permits the use of grammar in a communicative way has led to the emergence of such an approach in which both communicative language

teaching and an implicit focus on grammar work together in order to substantially enhance foreign language learning due to the inability of communicative language teaching to improve the levels of accuracy by itself. Unfortunately, the teaching of grammar has been wrongly directed and most institutions have adopted a model in which grammar is the core of the lessons with no aim of improving learners' oral or written production.

Some years ago, Michael Long (1988, as cited in Fotos, 1998) came up with the assumption that the teaching of isolated grammar items was outdated and not effective to develop learners' ability to use grammar communicatively, but a wholly communicative syllabus would be inadequate as well. Therefore, Long suggested a third type of syllabus combining the use of the language communicatively as well as the instruction of grammar in real-life use, this kind of syllabus was referred to as 'Focus on Form' syllabus. Long (1998) refers to Focus on Form as "drawing students' attention to linguistic elements (words, collocations, grammatical structures, pragmatic patterns, and so on), in context, as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (p.40).

However, Ellis (2001, as cited in Ellis, 2006) posited a similar definition to Long's, agreeing that Focus on Form involves paying attention to language forms occurring during meaningful communicative activities, but added to his definition that this focus can be '*planned*' (also known as '*proactive*'), where the task requires learners' attention to a pre-selected grammatical item; or it can be '*incidental*' (or '*reactive*'), where the attention to a form is not pre-selected but arises from learners' linguistic needs during the task. Ellis (2006) also adds that Focus on Form does not involve separate grammar lessons; instead, grammar is integrated into a communicative task syllabus. The concept of focus on form has also been broadened more recently. Nassaji and Fotos (2011) point out that focus on form can be implicit or explicit,

preplanned or incidental, integrated or isolated; but always adhering to the principles of communicative language teaching.

Teachers can make use of various techniques to make learners focus on form or to make forms salient so that learners can notice them when exposed to a type of input. With that being said, ‘noticing’ plays a crucial role in language learning. The concept of noticing was introduced by Schmidt (1990, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2001) and explains that once learners become aware of a target structure in the input, they will continue to notice the structure in upcoming forms of input, especially if the structure appears frequently, thus developing new hypotheses about how the structure works as well as adjusting their interlanguage. Some of the most common focus on form techniques include *input flood*, in which learners are provided with several instances of a target form in the oral or written input with the assumption that making the structure salient will direct learners’ attention to that form (Nassiji & Fotos, 2011). Another technique teachers can deploy is *input enhancement*, which consists in making input more salient so that learners can notice it. It can be used in written input by underlining, boldfacing, italicizing, capitalizing, or coloring the target form. Although there is a target form to focus on, learners should also read the text for meaning. In oral discourse, teachers can also apply this technique by intonation and phonological manipulations like stress patterns, intonation, repetitions or even gestures, body movements, or facial expressions (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). *Corrective feedback* also constitutes an option in FonF. It happens in reaction to an error made by a learner during a communicative task and can be provided as recasts (more implicit), elicitations, or metalinguistic feedback (more explicit) (Loewen, 2011). Corrective feedback appears to be more beneficial if more explicit, and it can be initiated by either the teacher or another student.

Table 1 outlines the main features of FonF described thus far. *Proactive* and *reactive* refer to whether it is planned ahead of time or if it occurs during a task respectively. It could be *targeted* when learners are required to use a particular structure for task completion, and *general* when learners are allowed to use any linguistic resource. The matter of *obtrusiveness* concerns the extent to which the focus on form interrupts the flow of communication during the task; and finally, such a focus may be triggered by either the teacher or a student.

Table 1

Main features of Focus on Form Williams (2001)

*	Proactive	↔	Reactive
*	Targeted	↔	General
*	Obtrusive	↔	Unobtrusive (interrupts processing)
*	Teacher	↔	Learner responsibility

Focus on FormS (FonFs)

In common practice, it is teachers who are tasked with analyzing and selecting the grammar to be dealt with in a classroom, or sometimes they draw on ready-made syllabi from grammar books or ESL/EFL textbooks, which has been described as synthetic approach (Wilkins, 1976 as cited in Long & Robinson, 1998), an approach in which the target language is divided into words and collocations, grammar rules, phonemes, intonation and stress patterns, structures, notions, and functions. The resulting items are presented to learners as sequenced linear models which, taking account of such criteria as frequency, valence, or difficulty level, can be arranged accordingly. Structural syllabi are the most prevalent examples of the synthetic approach.

Focus on FormS refers to the traditional approaches to teaching grammar (e.g. Grammar-Translation, Direct Method, Audiolingual Method, among others). Long (1998) pointed out that a course designed around this approach starts with the language to be taught, which is divided into different types of components (phonemes, words, collocations, sentence patterns, notions, functions, stress, and so on), and then these are presented to learners one at a time according to their frequency of use or the level of difficulty. Once these components have been taught, learners have to combine them for use in communication. Students are not only expected to master these forms, they are also expected to attain native-like levels of proficiency. Focus on FormS is thought to have some problems in Long's (1998) view. The first problem is the fact that there is neither need analysis nor analysis of learning styles, which results in teaching too much of what students do not need, and not enough of what they really need. Another major problem with FonFS is the use of simplified models of language which are artificial or unnatural and lacking in authenticity and also focusing on the usage rather than the real use of the grammar item. A third problem with FonFS is that it conceives language learning as a process of accumulating linguistic stuff, thus overlooking language learning processes and research findings. The fourth problem lies in that FonFS encourages the erroneous idea that learners learn what they are taught and when they are taught is when they learn. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), language development is not about presenting rules in a sequence but the inclusion of rules in an existing system to be readjusted and restructured until the pieces match. Finally, FonFS results in boring lessons, which causes students to lose motivation, lack attention, and even drop out.

Integrated and Isolated Form-Focused Instruction

Earlier in this paper was said that learners can benefit from focus on form in order to learn structural aspects of the language as a means of conveying meaning, in other words, learning the L2 grammar for the sake of communication. However, Spada and Lightbown (2008) go much further than the conventional definition of focus on form proposed by Long and argue that it can be '*integrated*' or '*isolated*'. Integrated FFI occurs during a communicative activity in which the teacher may intervene to provide feedback or brief explanations to help learners express their ideas more effectively and accurately. Although such a focus on a grammar item may arise incidentally as a result of a student's error, the teacher may also anticipate that students will have difficulty with a language item and plan the communicative activity around that item. In contrast, isolated FFI happens either before or after the communicative activity and may include some explicit instruction but not for grammar's sake itself; it can be in preparation for an upcoming communicative task or after a communicative activity in which learners have encountered some problems with a language feature. It is contrasted with Long's concept of Focus on FormS, which does not make use of communicative practice and is entirely grammatical as part of a structural syllabus.

Incorporating Form-Focused Instruction into Task-Based Language Teaching

Fotos (1998) asserts that many EFL settings around the world share a feature, which is the control central agencies or entities have over decision making on the curriculum as well as the course contents and even the textbooks to be used. In addition, the time devoted to English classes in schools (especially public ones) is too limited considering the demanding goals 'Colombia Very Well Program' has set. Furthermore, the widespread of traditional pedagogy is still alive in some Colombian settings, one in which learners are equipped with a grammatical

system which ‘allegedly’ will help them communicate in the target language. All these factors would seem to prevent teachers from playing their role of innovators and providing enough exposure to the foreign language so that both functional and structural aspects of the target language are taken into consideration.

Given that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is “an extension of the principles of Communicative Language Teaching” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 540), one may think that there would be no place for Form-Focused Instruction in CLT, and as Nunan (2004) suggests, strong advocates of TBLT believe that ‘tasks’ can be performed using whatever linguistics resources are at a learner’s disposal. Thus if learners are required to use a particular target structure to complete the task, there would not be such task-based approach. Nunan (2004) defines *task* as follows:

A piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end (p.4).

Nunan (2004) draws a key distinction between two types of tasks: *real world or target tasks* and *pedagogical tasks*. The former refers to the use of the language outside the classroom, that is to say, when learners actually use the language for the purposes of communication in real life. The latter has to do with the performing of tasks in the classroom but based on real world situations students would involve themselves in when using the language. Hereafter, the term ‘task’ will be used to refer to pedagogical tasks since most EFL settings occur in classrooms.

Furthermore, Nunan (2004) makes another appropriate distinction of tasks, which is based on the controversial place of focus on form in TBLT, or the controversial place of grammar in foreign language instruction. Tasks may require learners to use a particular structure for its completion (*focused tasks*), or the task can be completed by using any linguistic resource at learners' disposal (*unfocused tasks*).

Fotos (1998) recommends an approach which could suit various settings, especially those where traditional formal instruction has prevailed and are calling for change, as it seems to be the case in Colombia. Fotos suggests that formal instruction can occur before or after students perform a communicative task. A task-based approach to focus on form is quite feasible in EFL contexts where teachers do not have control over curriculum or syllabus decision making since communicative activities (pedagogical tasks) can be implemented in the classroom without deviating from the syllabus or curriculum content. Even in large classes, interactive communicative tasks carried out in pairs or groups provide opportunities to maximize the target language use by engaging learners in meaning-focused interaction where both comprehension and production of the target language are the desired goal. What is to be kept in mind is that when designing tasks, teachers should aim at increasing language awareness of how the target structure is used in context while learners are engaged in meaning-focused interaction.

The suggested pedagogical proposal could be one proposed by Nassaji (2000), in which the very first step would be to plan in advance the target form to focus in class. Once the target form has been chosen, then the teacher should design the task, which would not be difficult thanks to the wealth of resources available both in the literature and on the Internet. For that reason, teachers can use and modify ready-made communicative tasks. Of course, others may want to play with their imagination and design their own tasks. In addition, EFL/ESL textbooks offer a

wide range of activities teachers can both use and tailor to the setting where they are teaching. So, what teachers can do is to present the grammar mini lessons before the communicative task, or have students carry out the task and present the grammar mini lesson afterwards, which elsewhere in this paper was referred to as ‘Isolated Form-Focused Instruction’ (see Appendices section). This may be due to the fact that traditional models of education have prevailed and students might feel at ease with this type of instruction. Using ‘consciousness-raising tasks’ could also come in handy. These tasks involve learners solving a grammar problem in pairs or small groups. First, learners are presented with samples of the target form, and then it is learners themselves who must analyze and discover a grammar rule; in other words, what Fotos and Ellis (1991) call ‘communicating about grammar’. Consciousness-raising tasks are a valuable resource given that they promote collaborative learning and negotiation. Although the content of the task is the grammar point itself, they foster the use of the target language communicatively in class together with the formation of explicit knowledge that learners can make use of in subsequent tasks.

Classroom Studies on Grammar Instruction

Several studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of grammar instruction, most of which have attempted to provide an account of whether implicit or explicit grammar instruction works better in EFL/ESL classrooms. However, little research has been done on how integrating Focus on Form and Focus on FormS could be useful in developing both fluency and accuracy.

One of these studies, carried out by Andrews (2007), set out to demonstrate how implicit and explicit instruction had an effect on adult English learners. Here, the purpose was to obtain empirical data on the effects of explicit and implicit instruction of simple and complex grammatical points. It was concluded in the findings that instruction does make a difference in

both implicit and explicit methods. This study is relevant in that it shows that both methods work and instruction makes a difference. Therefore, the need to implement both methods in EFL settings would be valuable in teaching grammar.

Ebrahimi et al. (2015) conducted a study on teaching grammar through Focus on Form and Focus on FormS with 90 intermediate students from an institute in Iran. The whole group was divided into three sub-groups of 30 students for focus on form, 30 for focus on fomS, and 30 as control group. This study yielded results which advocate the use of FonFS in classrooms due to the fact that the students who received FonFS instruction outperformed those receiving FonF and the control group as well. It should be highlighted that both FonF and FonFS groups improved after the posttests, which leads us to think that advocating for both approaches in classrooms could be advantageous for learners.

By contrast, in a study done in a public school in Ecuador (Benitez-Correa et al., 2019), the use of an inductive approach with focus on form techniques was proven more effective when it comes to teaching grammar than the deductive approach with the traditional rule-presentation method (focus on formS). This study was interesting in that apart from measuring the effects of both methods, the rapport (good relationship between teacher and students) when teaching grammar was also measured. Thus, the results favored the use of inductive approach, and also the students showed a preference for this approach which suggests that the more dynamic the class is, the more engaged and interested students will be.

On the effects of two types of form-focused instruction, isolated and integrated, Spada et al. (2014) undertook a significant classroom-based study on the L2 grammatical development of adult ESL learners. The 109-participant group included people between the ages of 18 to 65 and with different L1 backgrounds. Four classes of 25-30 participants each were made, two classes

receiving isolated FFI and two receiving integrated FFI. The results of this study revealed positive contributions to learning in both isolated and integrated FFI as a result of their blend of form and meaning in focus. This is a significant and relevant classroom study because it combines explicit instruction with subsequent communicative practice, which is necessary in L2 learning (DeKeyser 1997, 2007, as cited in Spada et al., 2014) and this could be observed in this study with students who, despite being taught explicitly, were able to use the explicit knowledge in oral production tasks.

In Colombia, a study was conducted by Mendoza (2004) at Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga. This study aimed at measuring the effects of implicit and explicit grammar instruction on university students' grammatical performance. Sixty-six pre-intermediate EFL students aged 18 to 20 took part, all of whom were enrolled in regular English courses at the university department. By and large, the results indicated that students who received explicit instruction had significantly better scores than the implicit and control groups. Nevertheless, given that the students' performance was only measured with grammar tests, the author of this study suggests that teachers should keep the role of innovators, having an open mind and retaining an eclectic approach in order to create better conditions for learners to develop both fluency and accuracy simultaneously. To be more precise, the role of explicit instruction in EFL classrooms ought not to be deemed ineffective or obsolete but it should be redefined.

Pedagogical Implications in Colombian EFL Settings

The comings and goings of grammar in language teaching have opened doors to new proposals due to the drawbacks shown by traditional approaches and purely communicative ones alike. The challenge for teachers is how to make grammar lessons engaging, purposeful, and even fun. By integrating focus on form with focus on formS, teachers can benefit from

communicative tasks but without ruling out the benefits of explicit instruction. Therefore, teachers may want to be inclined to use *isolated form-focused instruction* since this approach allows for explicit instruction but not in the traditional fashion. Instead, it is linked to a preceding or subsequent communicative task. This approach is useful in that it gives teachers time to plan a communicative activity around a grammar point they see as problematic for learners. In addition to that, it is not easy to overlook the argument for teaching grammar that deals with learners' expectations, that is, a large number of learners want to learn the L2 grammar and it is what they expect when they enroll in English courses and usually feel discouraged or even annoyed when the teacher omits or ignores grammar. This is a very common situation in EFL classrooms, especially with teachers who may want to opt for more communicative approaches.

The very first move to make in this ongoing quest of an effective grammar instruction is to stop being narrow minded by thinking that there is a sole effective method or approach to teaching grammar (or any other skill or language component). While some teachers would prefer to sympathize with wholly communicative language teaching and avoid grammar, others would still be too purist to abandon the traditional ways. Instead, it would be wise to think that these two opposite pendulum sides lend support to each other, that is to say, grammar teaching can be incorporated into communicative language teaching just as communicative activities can be developed around a grammar-based syllabus.

Opting for isolated form-focused instruction would be more appropriate in a Colombian EFL context, mainly because if focus on form is done reactively during the communicative task, this could lead to too many interruptions and thus the communicative flow can be hindered resulting in learners' demotivation as they might think that they are not doing well during the task. It is important to recall that one of the main reasons why some students dread using the

target language in class could be the errors they make when speaking and the teachers' reaction when correcting them. One main problem with this approach in Colombian schools is large classes, which could cause other situations such as indiscipline. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to have an active role in the classroom by circulating, participating, and providing assistance as needed, especially when students work in groups and are tempted to use their L1 when carrying out the task, which is a common situation in EFL contexts with large classes.

Appendix A shows a lesson plan in which both approaches (FonF and FonFs) have been integrated. In this class, the teacher fosters interaction from the very beginning and also has planned in advanced and chosen the topic of movie quotes (see Appendix B) as students may find it interesting. To promote interaction among students, the teacher benefits from a consciousness raising task by using FonF techniques so that students 'notice' the target grammar point (see Appendix C). The teacher also uses explicit instruction to highlight common errors or to clarify learners' doubts. After that, the teacher gives the students a communicative task for further practice and consolidation (see Appendix D).

For an effective and worthwhile grammar teaching in EFL contexts, I will highlight Nunan's (2015) key principles which somewhat encompass all that was covered in this paper:

1. Integrate both inductive and deductive approaches into the teaching of grammar: It is not about which approach is more effective or which approach teachers feel more comfortable with. Learners go first. Before choosing either approach, we need to stop for a while and think that our students are not the same and that they differ in needs and styles of learning. Some will opt for a deductive approach whereas others will see no need for rule explanations and would want to manipulate the language themselves. A balance between both approaches would suit a Colombian EFL setting.

2. *Use tasks that make clear the relationship between grammatical form and communicative function:* A disadvantage of traditional grammar teaching is that learners are presented with rules and examples of it but in a decontextualized fashion. Consequently, learners know the rule but do not know what they can convey with it. The use of tasks would offer opportunities for learners to apply what they have learnt in purposeful and meaningful activities.

3. *Focus on the development of procedural rather than declarative knowledge:* The purpose of teaching grammar should not be to instill a plethora of grammatical rules in learners but how to use those rules in real communication. Declarative knowledge refers to what we know about the language (i.e. grammatical rules), and procedural knowledge is ‘knowing how’ to use grammatical forms in conversation or writing. There is no point in having our students recite grammatical structures when they fail to use them when communicating. Therefore, if a teacher is to promote declarative knowledge in his/her students, then he/she ought to provide them with opportunities for sufficient communicative practice.

4. *Encourage learners to use language creatively rather than reproductively:* The false belief some teachers have (including me up to a point) is that giving students lots of practice will enable them to master the foreign language, but what kind of practice is appropriate to help them with the ultimate goal of communication? Reproductive language exercises are those in which learners manipulate language forms, namely gap filling, sentence matching, and so on; either provided by the teacher or included in the materials with which they are working. Creative language tasks demand that students make a more authentic use of language rather than utterances provided by the teacher which may be unnatural and out of context.

To conclude and as a final recommendation, I will draw on Larsen-Freeman’s (2003) coining of the term ‘*grammaring*’ to suggest that grammar should not be treated as a separate

object. Instead, it should be conceived of as a *fifth skill*, which basically could be attained by shifting from the traditional view of grammar and starting to see it as a rich resource to exploit in meaningful communication.

Conclusions

The primary purpose of teaching grammar should not be to instill a plethora of grammar rules in learners, or to prepare them for an exam (e.g. Saber 11 or Saber Pro), which certainly does not measure the ability to use the target language for communicative ends. Rather, as it was mentioned earlier, grammar has a goal, which is facilitating communication by conveying messages more clearly. If it is true that grammar still remains at the core of language learning, it is teachers who are responsible for transforming grammar lessons into something engaging and enjoyable, so that learners start to see grammar, not as a separate object or another subject they have to pass, but as a ‘resource’ they can use when performing communicative functions.

Grammar in language teaching has been surrounded by an ongoing controversy, from the very beginning when traditional methods were booming until the arrival of communicative approaches. However, the teaching of grammar has moved from being a traditional approach in which the teacher presents rules and then learners practice in sentence-level exercises to being a valuable resource in communicative tasks. Indeed, a target grammar point could be essential for task completion. With the coming of Focus of Form, grammar ought not to be seen as a system of rules to be treated separately and out of context, but as another skill which helps learners successfully complete tasks in the classroom.

Task-Based Language Teaching would be the ideal scenario to embed grammar lessons in an existing curriculum. Teachers will be able to devise communicative tasks around grammar points that have been already established by a structural syllabus or even, if the teachers have more control on syllabus design, it is them who can preselect the most relevant grammar points for students and build a syllabus which combines both focus on fluency and accuracy alike. This could be done by designing ‘focused task’ (i.e. tasks which require a specific grammar structure

for its completion), which in Larsen-Freeman's (2015) words, are not easy to design but if successfully completed, have proven to contribute to grammar acquisition.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Sample Lesson Plan

<p>Level: Pre-intermediate</p> <p>Time: 60 minutes</p> <p>Form in focus: Reported speech (Positive & negative statements)</p> <p>Materials: Movie quotes handout, Reported quotes handout, Telephone message cards</p>
<p>Introduction (5 minutes)</p> <p>The teacher introduces the class by asking students if they enjoy watching movies. Once they answer, the teacher also asks them (some students for time's sake) what their favorite movies are.</p>
<p>Warm-up activity (Focus on Form Task) (15-20 minutes)</p> <p>After eliciting some students' answers, the teacher proceeds to explain the activity by highlighting that it has some quotes said by some characters in famous movies. Also, the teacher makes students aware that reporting somebody else's words is an important function in communication.</p> <p>Students are asked to work in pairs and each pair is given a handout with famous movie quotes, it is at this point when the teacher tells the students that today's class is about Reported Speech.</p> <p>The handout contains 12 quotes said by characters in famous movies. Students read the quotes and study them carefully for a couple of minutes. The teacher circulates and gives assistance when necessary. Once they have read and understood the movie quotes, the teacher gives them</p>

another handout in which all the famous quotes are in reported speech. To make the language in focus salient, the teacher uses input enhancement, which is a common FonF technique (see Appendix C), as follows:

-verb tense changes (boldfacing)

-pronoun/possessive adjective changes (highlighting)

First, students have to complete the sentences with an appropriate character without looking back at the original movie quotes. Then, the teacher gets students to carefully compare the original words in the movie quotes (direct speech) with those in reported speech in Handout 2. Then, students are asked to work out the rules of verb tense changes for themselves. At this point, the teacher circulates and makes sure students avoid too much use of L1. When ready, students share their answers as a class.

Feedback (Focus on FormS) (15 minutes)

Having listened to all the students' answers carefully, the teacher highlights common errors and provides explicit instruction where necessary.

Communicative practice (25 minutes)

In this task, the teacher hands out small cards, each containing a 'telephone message'. After the teacher has answered any vocabulary-related questions, each student has to report his/her message to the rest of the class as follows:

-TEACHER: Who's got a message from the dentist?

-STUDENT: (stands up) The dentist told me (that)... (See Appendix D)

Consolidation (Homework)

For further consolidation, the teacher asks to report two things that students were told either by a friend or by their parents at home. This will be the introduction for next class.

Appendix B

Handout 1

FAMOUS MOVIE QUOTES

<p>"I love you 3000." Iron Man (to his daughter) (Avengers Endgame)</p>	<p>"I'll be back." The Terminator (Terminator Genisys)</p>	<p>"I get emails for a raccoon." Natasha (Avengers Endgame)</p>
<p>"I've never done battle." The Flash (Justice League)</p>	<p>"I'm the king of the world." Jack (Titanic)</p>	<p>"I'm not a toy. I'm a spork." Forky (Toy Story 4)</p>
<p>"There is something horrible happening in my house." Carolyn (The Conjuring)</p>	<p>"I saw a really hairy guy." Anger (Inside Out)</p>	<p>"Nothing is more important than family" Miguel (Coco)</p>
<p>"I'm telling you the truth." Jack (A Star Is Born)</p>	<p>"You can't escape your destiny." Zazu (to Simba) (The Lion King)</p>	<p>"Dad built us a tree house." Dylan (Daddy's Home)</p>

Appendix C

Handout 2

Complete the sentences with an appropriate movie character.

1. _____ said (that) **he would** be back.
2. _____ said (that) nothing **was** more important than family.
3. _____ said (that) **he had never done** a battle.
4. _____ said (that) **he had seen** a really hairy guy.
5. _____ told his daughter (that) **he loved her** 3,000.
6. _____ said (that) **he wasn't** a toy and **he was** a spork.
7. _____ said (that) **she got** emails from a raccoon.
8. _____ said (that) **he was telling** the truth.
9. _____ told Simba (that) **he couldn't** escape **his** destiny.
10. _____ said (that) dad **had built them** a tree house.
11. _____ said (that) **he was** the king of the world.
12. _____ said (that) there **was** something horrible happening in **her** house.

Appendix D

Telephone Messages

Telephone message cards

From: The bank Message: Your loan has been approved.	From: Travel Agency Message: We managed to get a cheap flight.	From: Phone Company Message: Your new phone line will be installed shortly
From: Boss Message: You have been promoted to senior manager. You must come and sign your new contract tomorrow.	From: Car mechanic Message: Your car needs a new engine. You can pick it up in three days.	From: Landlord Message: The rent is overdue. You have to pay your rent tomorrow.
From: Plumber Message: The drain is blocked. You can't go into the bathroom.	From: Brother Message: I'm having a barbecue next Saturday.	From: School Message: The classes were cancelled because the teacher is ill.
From: Girlfriend Message: I'm going shopping with Suzie. I love you.	From: Repair Shop Message: Your TV has been repaired. You owe \$45.	From: Jim Message: I will see you tomorrow for lunch. Don't be late.
From: Dad Message: I won't pick you up from school. My car has broken down	From: Doctor Message: Your health check is overdue.	From: Mom Message: The dog got out of the house and I can't find it.
From: Sister Message: We need to buy a present for mom.	From: Roommate Message: I left my keys in the apartment and I can't get in.	From: Secretary Message: I didn't type the report.
From: Marcus Message: There is a party at Jenny's. I'll pick you up at 8.	From: Christina Message: I need help with my English homework.	From: Language School Message: Your exam results are available on the webpage.