Some SLA research findings of relevance for the ESOL classroom

Michael H. Long

University of Maryland

Before we begin: The level of analysis

The role of people like me (an experienced classroom EFL and ESL teacher, but for a long time now, predominantly a SLA researcher) is to conduct studies, synthesize research findings in the field, and identify implications, applications, and options for LT at the level of **Methodological Principles (MPs)** – options, not recipes.

Methodological Principles (MPs)

MPs are putative language teaching universals. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) currently features ten MPs, each supported by theory, research and practice in SLA, LT, and the philosophy of education.

Methodological Principles (MPs) for TBLT

MP1: Use task, not text, as the unit of analysis
MP2: Promote learning by doing
MP3: Elaborate input
MP4: Provide rich input
MP5: Encourage inductive “chunk” learning
MP6: Focus on form
MP7: Provide negative feedback
MP8: Respect learner syllabi and developmental processes
MP9: Promote cooperative collaborative learning
MP10: Individualize instruction

Pedagogic Procedures (PPs)

PPs are not universal, but particular to the classroom situation. PPs are the wide range of context-sensitive mechanisms through which MPs are realized at the local classroom level

Trained and experienced teachers are the experts on local conditions, not SLA researchers, language teaching gurus or textbook writers, none of whom have ever met our students, and some of whom have very little teaching experience

Teachers have to choose appropriate PPs, often on a moment-by-moment basis. They have, and should have, complete control over how **MPs** are realized in the classroom by **Pedagogic Procedures (PPs)**

Pedagogic Procedures (PPs)

There are no universal, no “best”, no “correct” PPs. Choices should vary systematically according to such factors as lesson focus, linguistic target (salient or non-salient, marked or unmarked, etc.), and such ID variables as learners’ age, literacy, IQ, and language aptitudes

An example: Some PPs for MP7: Provide negative feedback

Implicit ←---------- → **Explicit negative feedback**

recasts	rules of thumb
clarification	prompts
requests	elicits

Salient ←----------→ **Non-salient linguistic targets**

word order	intra-sentential clitics
adverb placement	inflectional morphology
(*He like **very much** Barcelona)	(*He **like** very much Barcelona)

Overview of today's presentation

1. **Language development is largely under learner control: some evidence**

2. **Three (of many) areas where LT can have positive effects:**

    2.1. **The type of input to which learners are exposed**
    2.2. **The kinds of interaction in which learners participate**
    2.3. **The learning processes and outcomes that lessons encourage**

3. **Grammar-based and task-based LT: a brief comparison**

(A note about references)

Language development is largely under learner control

Some evidence

1.1. Morpheme accuracy orders

Well attested *accuracy orders* across differences in learner age, L1, and (naturalistic, instructed, and mixed) acquisition context, for a number of English grammatical morphemes (Krashen, 1977; Pica, 1983), the order explicable largely as a function of input frequency and perceptual salience (Goldschneider & DeKeyser, 2001)

1.2. Developmental sequences

There are fixed series of stages in the evolution of grammatical systems and sub-systems (Johnston, 1985, 1997; Ortega, 2009), e.g.,

four-stage sequence for negation in ESL -- *No V*, *don't V*, *aux-neg*, and *analyzed don't* -- (Schumann, 1979)

six-stage sequence for German SL word order (Meisel, Clahsen, & Pienemann, 1981)

sequences for relative clauses (Doughty, 1991; Gass, 1982; Eckman, Bell, & Nelson, 1988; Hu & Liu, 2007; Hyltenstam, 1984)

sequences for past time reference (Meisel, 1987; Sato, 1986, 1990; von Stutterheim & Klein, 1987)

1.3. Transitional IL structures not attested in the L1 or the L2 input

Created by the learners themselves, some appear to be universal.

For instance, an initial pre-verbal (*Neg V*) negation stage appears in the ILs of L1 speakers of languages, such as Japanese or Turkish, that have post-verbal negation, even when the target language, Swedish, also has post-verbal negation (Hyltenstam, 1987; Stauble, 1981)

Transitional IL structures -- L1 effects

But L1 effects on the sequences can still be observed. For example, speakers of L1s, such as Spanish, which have pre-verbal negation tend to spend longer in the *No V* stage in ESL longer than speakers of L1s that do not (Zobl, 1982).

But L1 influences do not lead to omission of a stage or to alteration of the order of stages

1.4. Common errors and error types

Many of the same errors and error types occur in the ILs of learners of different ages and L1 backgrounds, and across formal, informal and “mixed” learning contexts – more reflections of an internal ‘learner syllabus’ (Corder, 1967)

Pica (1983)

Naturalistic, classroom-only, and “mixed” L1 Spanish ESL learners all made the same four types of errors

Pica (1983)

(i) overgeneralization errors, where regularized irregular morphemes are supplied in obligatory contexts, e.g., ‘She eat*ed* the apple,’

(i) overuse errors, where morphemes are supplied in non-obligatory contexts, e.g., ‘Mary lik*ing* movies,’ or ‘The boy*s* like soccer,’ when the referent is a single boy

Pica (1983)

(iii) **omission errors** in obligatory contexts, e.g., ‘He *go* shopping yesterday’

(iv) **substitution errors** in obligatory contexts, e.g., ‘He go*es* shopping last week’

1.5. Autonomous grammar

Neither L1 transfer nor habit formation can explain some errors, e.g., resumptive pronouns observed in the relative clauses of Italian learners of English (Hyltenstam, 1984; Pavesi, 1986), e.g., *That is the man who* ***he*** *stole the car*, or *She is the woman who he loves* ***her***. (Neither English nor Italian has resumptive pronouns.)

SLA is clearly not simply a process of forming new habits to override the effects of L1 transfer; powerful creative processes are at work.

1.6. The inability of instruction to alter developmental sequences

The order in which students learn grammatical items does not reflect the order in which those items occur in a grammatical syllabus

Developmental sequences are robust. Instruction cannot make learners skip stages (e.g., Ellis, 1989; Lightbown, 1983; Pienemann, 1984, 1989)

1.7. Non-categorical acquisition

Even when presented with, and drilled in, exclusively target-language forms and structures, and even when errors are routinely “corrected,” instructed learners’ acquisition of the “structure of the day” is rarely either sudden, categorical, or complete (e.g., Hilles, 1986), as is tacitly assumed by most synthetic materials and methodology

Non-categorical acquisition

Acquisition of structures and sub-systems like negation or relative clause formation is typically gradual and incremental, sometimes taking months or even years to accomplish

1.8. Non-linear acquisition

Development typically exhibits plateaus, occasional movement away from, not towards, the L2, and ‘backsliding,’ resulting in U-shaped or zigzag trajectories rather than smooth, linear contours (Huebner, 1983; Kellerman, 1985; Selinker, 1972)

Non-linear acquisition

ILs often stabilize far short of the target variety, with learners persistently using non-targetlike forms and structures for communication that they were never taught, and target-like forms and structures with non-target-like functions (Sato, 1990)

Learners rule, OK?

We cannot alter language learning **processes** or **routes**

But instruction can improve **rate** and **ultimate attainment**. Students can achieve **higher levels** of ESL ability, and **faster**, with our help

Not with *any* kind of instruction, however. Let us consider three (of many) positive interventions supported by SLA theory and research findings

2.1. Optimizing the input

For input in grammar-based/PPP materials, the traditional choice has long been between **genuine** (so-called “authentic”) or **linguistically simplified** dialogs and reading passages

Both have problems, and research shows there are better, SLA-supported, alternatives: **elaborated** and **modified elaborated** input

Optimizing the input

Consider how the following short text would appear in each format:

Because he had to work at night to provide for his family, Paco often fell asleep in class.

The Paco sentences: Genuine and Simplified

1. ***Genuine*** ("authentic") version

Because he had to work at night to provide for his family, Paco often fell asleep in class.

[18 words, 1 sentence, **18 words per sentence**, 4 s-nodes, **4 s-nodes per sentence**]

2. ***Simplified*** version

Paco had to make money for his family. Paco worked at night. He often went to sleep in class.

[19 words, 3 sentences, **6.33 words per sentence**, 4 s-nodes, **1.33 s-nodes per sentence**]

Elaborated and Modified elaborated

3. ***Elaborated*** version

Paco had to work at night to earn money to provide for his family, so he often fell asleep in class next day during his teacher's lesson.

[27 words, 1 sentence, **27 words per sentence**, 5 s-nodes, **5 s-nodes per sentence**]

4. ***Modified elaborated*** version

Paco had to work at night to earn money to provide for his family. As a result, he often fell asleep in class next day.

[29 words, 2 sentences, **14.5 words per sentence**, 5 s-nodes, **2.5 s-nodes per sentence**]

Nativelike usage: Lexis and collocations

Because he had to work at night to **provide for** his family, Paco often **fell asleep** in class.

Paco had to **make money for** his family. Paco worked at night. He often **went to sleep** in class.

Paco had to work at night to **earn money to provide for** his family, so he often **fell asleep** in class next day during his teacher's lesson.

Paco had to work at night to **earn money to provide for** his family. As a result, he often **fell asleep** in class next day.

Comprehensibility and meaning retention

Comprehensibility

About 20 studies to date (e.g., Oh, 2001; Yano, Long, & Ross, 1994) comparing genuine, simplified and elaborated spoken and written texts For review, see Long, 2015, pp. 250-259). The general finding:

Elaborated = simplified > genuine

Information retention

Very little research to date (Long & Ross, 1993; Al-Thowaini, 2018)

Elaborated = genuine > simplified

Implications

There is empirical support (here and elsewhere) for three MPs:

- MP3: Elaborate input
- MP4: Provide rich input
- MP5: Encourage inductive “chunk” learning

Implications

Modified elaborated input is the best option (except very advanced proficiency levels, when genuine texts are usable)

It can be scripted, but need not be. It occurs naturally in NS-NNS conversation and in T-S interaction in the classroom, **provided the focus is on communication**, e.g., in exchanges involving referential (not display) questions and during work on problem-solving tasks

2.2. Improving classroom interaction

Most coursebooks deliver a grammatical syllabus using Present-Practice-Produce (PPP) methodology.

PPP is reflected in lots of teacher – student interaction in Initiation (I) – Response (R) - Feedback (F) exchanges, with a **focus on formS --** the *structure du jour (*comparatives and superlatives on Monday, simple past on Tuesday, etc.)

Teachers try to impose an external linguistic syllabus dictated by a textbook writer who never met their students, regardless of their needs or whether they are psycholinguistically ready.

Typical teacher-student interaction in grammar-based PPP: Initiation - Response - (Feedback)

T: Where does Mary work? (I)

S: She work in a bank. (R)

T: She works in a bank. Works. (F)
She works in a bank. (I)

S. She works in a bank. (R)

T: Good. (F) Does Peter work in a bank? (I)

S: No. He works in a department store. (R)

T: Right. He works in a department store. (F)
Does Mary work in a department store? (I)

S: No. She works in a bank. (R)

T: Good. (F)

IRF and focus on forms

The focus in PPP is on individual linguistic items -- ***focus on forms***. The forms constitute syllabus content.

Teachers mostly ask **display questions** (questions to which the questioner already knows the answer). No information is changing hands.

The exchanges are not communicative.

Four major problems with IRF and Fonfs

1. The problem with input and output quality

2. The problem with learnability

3. The problem with quantity of practice

4. The problem with purely intentional learning

2.2.1. The problem with input and output quality

In grammar-based PPP, input and output are both impoverished: limited, repetitive, mostly the result of asking and answering display questions. I-R-F exchanges are designed to manipulate examples of the structure of the day

SLA research has shown this is NOT how languages are learned:

“. . . language learning evolves out of learning how to carry on conversations. . . One learns how to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally, and out of this interaction syntactic structures are developed” (Hatch 1978, p. 404)

PPP: Input and output quality

T: Where does Mary work? (I)

S: She work in a bank (R)

T: She works in a bank.

Works (F) She works

in a bank (I)

S. She works in a bank (R)

CLT/TBLT: Input and output quality

S: Ugh yes woman drinking (bottle) wine uh bottle and man drinking (a) beer

NS: Yes and she's drinking a glass or a bottle of wine? (RECAST)

S: No uh *she*? She's drinking in (no) glass (UPTAKE)

2.2.2. The problem with learnability

A fixed series of stages in the development of L2 German word order was identified by the ZIZA group (Clahsen, Meisel, & Pienemann, 1983; Meisel, 2012; Meisel, Clahsen, & Pienemann, 1981).

The work came with an *explanation* for the developmental sequence (Clahsen, 1987). Because it was in terms of universal processing constraints, it could predict sequences in other areas of morphology and syntax in GSL grammar, and in other L2s, as well.

The problem with learnability

Processability Theory

Out of the ZIZA work grew Processability Theory (PT) (e.g., Johnston, 1985, 1995, 1997; Lenzing, 2015; Pienemann, 1998, 2012, 2014; Pienemann & Kessler, 2011, 2012).

PT has motivated numerous studies (continuing to this day) of developmental sequences in a variety of typologically unrelated languages (English, German, Swedish, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, etc.). The findings have been broadly consistent with PT predictions.

The problem with learnability

PT-motivated studies of ISLA

Can instruction alter the sequences? No.

Developmental sequences are robust and unchanged by textbook sequences or classroom instruction. Passage through stages can be sped up, but stages cannot be skipped

(Bettoni & Di Biase, 2015; Bonilla, 2015; R. Ellis, 1989; Håkansson & Norrby, 2010; Jansen, 2008; Mackey, 1999; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Pienemann, 1984, 1989)

The problem with learnability

PT and PT-motivated ISLA research findings present a fundamental challenge to synthetic linguistic syllabi of all kinds, which wrongly assume that:

Teachers can teach what they want (*the structure du jour*), when they want (timing set by the textbook writer), to whomever they want (all students, psycholinguistically ready or not on the day)

The reality

The *Processability*, *Learnability* and *Teachability* hypotheses (Pienemann, 1984):

What learners can process determines what they can learn. What they can learn determines what teachers can teach

The problem with learnability

Despite the robust research findings, the dominant approach to LT worldwide remains the same: the linguistic *dish of the day* delivered via PPP, seasoned with grammar rules to taste (focus on forms)

The fact that the *status quo* has not changed much reflects (1) the immense power of commercial textbook publishing, an industry worth billions of dollars each year (billions with a ‘b’) and (2) washback from commercial language testing, another industry worth billions of dollars each year

The problem with learnability

In addition to revealing the limitations of synthetic syllabi and PPP, the ISLA research findings constitute one of several justifications for the analytic syllabus, for strong forms of CLT, for genuine TBLT (task-*based*, not task-*supported, LT*), and for some content-based alternatives

2.2.3. The problem with quantity of practice

The “one-third rule”

T: Good. (F) Does Peter work in a bank? (I)

S: No. He works in a department store (R)

T: Right. He works in a department store (F) Does Mary work in a department store? (I)

S: No. She works in a bank. (R)

T: Good. (F)

The problem with quantity of practice

[in rounded numbers]

A typical lesson lasts 50-60 minutes

Deduct 50% for reading, writing, classroom management, and testing

That leaves 30 minutes for aural-oral work

50% of that (at least) is lockstep, so 15 minutes remain for individual production

Divide by 20 children in a class = 70 seconds per student

X 5 lessons per week = 4 minutes per child

X 30 weeks in a school year = 120 minutes per child for (mostly tightly controlled) oral production per school year

How well could you learn a language in two hours a year?

2.2.4. The problem with purely intentional learning

Intentional learning is too slow, an L2 too big, and time too short. Nation (2009) estimates learners need 9,000 word families to read a newspaper or novel, and 6,000 to watch a video

Intentional learning results in explicit knowledge

Students mostly need implicit knowledge

Students need more opportunities for incidental than intentional learning

Implications

Change the IRF exchange structure in classroom discourse

Reduce reliance on PPP/Fonfs and IRF exchanges

Provide plenty of opportunities for real communication

If both the teacher's and students' focus is on meaning and communication, lots of opportunities for incidental learning will follow automatically, developing students' implicit knowledge of the L2

Some options for improving the quantity and quality of T-S interaction

Ask **referential questions**, e.g., about students' home countries, cultures, customs, jobs, interests, fields of study, and opinions

Have students ask you and each other about the same things

Do lockstep, pairwork and small group work on communicative tasks

More options

Have students conduct mini-research projects -- from simple surveys of classmates' food preferences to investigations of "hidden gems" in your area

Audio- or video-record them reporting their findings to the class, before they write up their studies

Archive the reports in student portfolios, to show them their improvement over time

3. Learning processes and outcomes

Some cognitive processes in language learning:

Intentional learning	**Incidental learning**
Explicit knowledge	**Implicit knowledge**

3.1. Intentional learning

Intentional learning = deliberate, goal-directed learning

Learning language with an **attentional focus on language as object**

Intentional learning results in **explicit knowledge** (knowledge you have and know you have)

3.2. Incidental learning

Incidental learning = learning without intention

Learning language while **focused on meaning and communication**, e.g., in an immersion classroom or a CLIL lesson, or while doing a task

Incidental learning results in **implicit knowledge** -- knowledge you have but are unaware of (unless students shift to intentional learning mid-stream)

3.3. Implicit and explicit knowledge

- **Implicit L2 knowledge** = knowledge you have but are unaware you have (like most of native speakers' knowledge of their L1)

- **Explicit L2 knowledge** = knowledge you have and are aware you have

Implicit and explicit knowledge

* Incidental learning of which learners remain unaware results in **implicit knowledge** (knowledge you don’t know you have)
* Implicit knowledge of which learners subsequently become aware is **explicit knowledge** (knowledge you have and know you have)

Processes and possible outcomes

Incidental learning → **Intentional learning**

↓ ↓

Implicit knowledge → **Explicit knowledge**

Implicit knowledge is the priority

- For **functional** ESL abilities, instruction must provide opportunities for **incidental learning** resulting in **implicit L2 knowledge**
- **Implicit learning** is more basic and *more important* than explicit learning, and *superior*. **Implicit knowledge** is automatic and fast. It is what underlies listening comprehension, spontaneous speech and fluency. It is the result of deeper processing, so more durable, and obviates the need for explicit knowledge, freeing up attentional resources for a speaker to focus on message content

Whong, Gil, & Marsden (2014)

Four problems with grammar-based teaching and PPP

1. Explicit grammar teaching and pure intentional learning require more time than most instructed adult learners have

2. PPP has limited scope:

> “Skill Acquisition Theory [SAT] is most easily applicable to what happens in (a) high-aptitude adult learners engaged in (b) the learning of simple structures at (c) fairly early stages of learning in (d) instructional contexts" (DeKeyser, 2015, p. 101)

Four problems

3. SAT and PPP are inconsistent with well-established facts showing interlanguage development is largely under learner control: common errors and error-types, developmental sequences impervious to instruction, incremental and zigzag, not categorical, development, backsliding, U-shaped behavior, autonomous syntax, processability constraints on teachability, etc.

4. The end-product is **explicit L2 knowledge**

Students need *implicit knowledge*

A ***functional*** command of English (or another L2) is more important than knowing *about* English grammar

For most academic and social survival tasks -- listening to academic lectures, answering a teacher's question, participating in a classroom discussion, opening a bank account, following street directions, buying a train ticket -- students depend primarily on their ***implicit knowledge*** of English

Implicit learning (IL) remains a viable option across the life-span

Adults can (still) learn incidentally and implicitly

- Evidence from laboratory studies of implicit learning (IL) of rules in artificial language grammars and in SLA (see, e.g., Aslin & Newport, 2012; Rebuschat, 2015)
- Evidence from field studies of age effects and maturational constraints on SLA (e.g., Granena & Long, 2013; Ioup et al, 1994; van Boxtel et al, 2005)

Purely implicit learning has problems, too

Pure implicit learning (IL) requires large amounts of input and (like explicit learning) more time than is available to most instructed school-age and adult learners and their teachers, so some form of enhancement will be required

Comparing intentional and enhanced incidental learning, noticing and detection: Lexis and collocations

How to deal with the daunting L2 vocabulary and collocation-learning task? Four options:

1. Traditional explicit approaches and intentional learning (Cobb, 2007, 2008, 2016; Laufer, 2003)

2. Incidental learning through pleasure reading (McQuillan, 2016; McQuillan & Krashen, 2008).

3. A hybrid approach: cleverly designed simplified readers + ‘deliberate vocabulary learning’ (Nation, 2014, p. 14)

4. None of the above

The learning task is too large for explicit or implicit learning alone

Too many items (9,000 word families, and 100,000 (?) collocations), too little time, and too little input to learn them all *implicitly*.

A partial solution: **enhanced incidental learning**

How? Unobtrusive input enhancements targeting (unconscious) **detection**, not (conscious) **noticing** (Long, 2017)

Sample study: Malone (2018 SSLA)

- A controlled laboratory study
- Incidental vocabulary learning potential of two types of unobtrusive input enhancements, separately and in combination, while reading short paragraphs:
- bi-modal (simultaneous oral and written) presentation (AE)
- increased frequency of rare, semantically opaque, target words (TWs) (names of rare birds and plants, etc.)

Design

80 intermediate-level ESL learners were randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups in a 2 x 2 factorial design:

TW = target words AE = aural enhancement

4 reading passages, each with 8 very low frequency target words

2 TW exposures, without AE

2 TW exposures with AE

4 TW exposures, without AE

4 TW exposures with AE.

The good man (excerpt)

There was once a city, ruled by a good King. His city went from the mountains in the East to the great river in the West. The fields in between were full of beautiful freesia and other flowers, and there was peace in the land.

The king loved animals, and had many animal friends. He loved to watch his dogs play, his sorrels work, and his birds sing. Some of his birds could fly to other lands to gather news, and he would send his kestrels and petrels to take news to other cities.

Comprehension questions (to focus learners on meaning, not forms) (k = 8 per passage)

- What did the King love?
  - The trees
  - Animals
- Where were the dark woods?
  - To the South
  - To the North
- What would the good man’s animal friend do?
  - Play with the other animals
  - Sleep next to him at night

Target words (3 of 8)

There was once a city, ruled by a good King. His city went from the mountains in the East to the great river in the West. The fields in between were full of beautiful freesia and other flowers, and there was peace in the land.

The king loved animals, and had many animal friends. He loved to watch his dogs play, his **sorrels** work, and his birds sing. Some of his birds could fly to other lands to gather news, and he would send his kestrels and **petrels** to take news to other cities.

Form recognition test (k = 64, 32 in/32 not in)

Directions: Circle the words you saw in the stories. Do your best NOT to guess!

fossa	petrel	morel	
bootleg	melange	lemming	
folktale	sinew	sumac	
riptide	spoonbill	heathen	
sorrel	heifer	freesia	
melange	nadir	atoll	etc.

Form-meaning connection test (k = 32)

Directions: Circle the correct meaning for each word from the stories

(18) A **sorrel** is…

a. a kind of table b. an animal c. a shape

(23) A **petrel** is…

a. a hat b. a store c. a bird

Measures

Working memory (WM). Two measures, one linguistic, the Non-word Span, and one non-linguistic, the Operation Span task. (O-Span participants are presented with a short math equation to solve and told to remember individual letters shown after each equation. Letter recall is prompted following a variable number of trials, with WM measured as the number of letters recalled in the correct order.)

Two outcome measures:

(1) form-recognition -- distinguish 32 target words from 32 distractors in a list of 64 (k=32)

(2) multiple-choice form-meaning classification task (a **sorrel** is a kind of table/animal/shape; a **yokel** is a bottle/a kind of food/a person) (k=32)

Results

2 exposures, with no AE > chance on both outcome measures

4 exposures > 2 exposures, with or without AE

4 exposures, and 2 and 4 exposures with AE, did even better

Input frequency and aural enhancement both contributed, separately and in combination, on both outcome measures

Results

- The advantage for aural enhancement in establishing form–meaning connections in both the two- and four-exposure conditions suggests a facilitating effect even in the very early stages, and deeper processing of new word meanings when listening while reading
- Simultaneous listening while reading places a heavier burden on WM than reading alone, and a positive effect for WM was found on both outcome measures, especially the form recognition scores, in the bimodal condition

Implications

Increasing **input frequency** is a reliable way of improving learning, but it is labor-intensive. It entails writing new materials. AE is a viable alternative

Aural enhancement (bi-modal presentation) has a major practical advantage: Audiobooks require no extra preparation on the teacher's or materials writer's part

Even if new 'foreigner talk' versions are recorded (an example of ***enhanced incidental learning***), they are quick and easy to produce, and do not involve producing new written texts

Suggestions for new studies: bi-modal presentation with foreigner talk enhancements

- Simultaneous spoken and written versions of texts modified in ways NSS have been found to alter their speech when addressing NNSS (Chaudron, 1982; Long, 1982, 1983)
- Slow pace, with salience added to specific vocabulary items and/or collocations, e.g., through stress and one-beat pauses before and/or after key information-bearing items, plus corresponding changes to the written version (italics, bolding, capitalization, colour, etc.)
- **Ilaria Borro** (Ph.D. dissertation in progress) is testing these ideas with the learning of Italian collocations by Chinese university students

Grammar-based or task-based LT?

- The main focus of grammar-based LT and PPP is the **L2 as the object of instruction**, **intentional learning**, and **explicit knowledge**

- The main focus of TBLT is the **L2 as the medium of instruction**, **enhanced incidental learning**, and **implicit knowledge**

Grammar-based and task-based approaches

Grammar-based LT	**TBLT**
Language as object	Language as communication
Structure as unit of analysis	Pedagogic task as unit of analysis
Language for (future) use	Language through use
No needs analysis	Needs analysis
Language for nebulous purposes	Language for specific purposes
Intentional learning	Enhanced incidental learning
Noticing	Noticing or detection
Explicit knowledge	**Implicit knowledge**

Grammar-based and task-based approaches

Grammar-based LT	**TBLT**
Generic materials	Needs-driven materials
Restricted input	Rich input
PPP	10 MPs and numerous PPs
Lessons often boring	Lessons usually stimulating
Textbook in control	Teacher in control
Norm-referenced assessment	Criterion-referenced assessment
No program evaluations	Some program evaluations
Vanishingly little research support	Considerable research support

Long, M. H. (2015). *Second language acquisition and Task-Based Language Teaching*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Long, M. H. (2017). Interaction in the L2 classroom. In Leontas, J. (ed.), *TESOL Encyclopedia of English language teaching*. Oxford/Washington, D.C.: Wiley/TESOL International.

Thank you! Any questions or comments?

PPP vs. TBLT: Empirical studies

There have been few direct studies to date. Significant ones include those by Shintani (2011, 2013) of English for Japanese-speaking children, and Borro (2017a, b) of Italian for Chinese-speaking adults.

General findings:

1. TBLT = PPP on forms-focused outcome measures
2. TBLT > PPP on communicative outcome measures

Shintani (2011)

Method

Quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest-delayed posttest design

36 Japanese children, aged 6-8, in six intact classes, in a 12-week EFL course

24 concrete nouns (8 animals, 8 household objects, 8 fruit and vegetables)

2 classes in each of 3 conditions:

1. PPP/focus on forms via five drill-like games, the children told at the start that the goal was for them to learn the 24 new words (intentional learning)

2. TBLT/focus on form via 3 game-like, “listen-and-do” input-based tasks

3. Control given lessons using TPR, English songs, and practice writing the alphabet, with no exposure to the target words

Shintani (2011)

Results -- 1. Process

- PPP lessons: 200 IRF sequences and no negotiation for meaning
- TBLT lessons: 25 IRF sequences, and 25 negotiation sequences in one, none in the other
- Exposure to the target words roughly the same in PPP and TBLT
- Target-word production: 444 in PPP, 144 in TBLT (3 : 1)
- Teacher-initiated and student-initiated tokens dominant in the PPP and TBLT lessons, respectively

Shintani (2011)

Results -- 2. Product

2 listening and 2 speaking measures, one of each discrete-point, one of each communicative/task-based

- TBLT and PPP > control on all four measures
- TBLT = PPP on discrete-point listening and speaking* measures
- TBLT > PPP on task-based listening
- TBLT = PPP on (the very limited) task-based speaking* measure

*despite fewer production opportunities in the input-based TBLT lessons

Shintani (2013)

Method

- 45 six-year-old Japanese child beginners, randomly assigned to 3 classes of 15: TBLT/focus on form, PPP/focus on forms, and control
- 9 lessons over five weeks, 24 nouns and 12 adjectives
- Discrete-point and task-based/communicative production measures

Shintani (2013)

Results

- Same process findings: only TBLT/focus on form featured contextualized input, student initiation, and negotiation for meaning
- TBLT/focus on form = PPP/focus on forms for nouns on both discrete-point and task-based/communicative production tests
- TBLT/focus on form > PPP/focus on forms for adjectives on both tests
- Children in the TBLT/focus on form condition learned plural -*s* incidentally (Shintani & Ellis (2010)

Borro (2017b)

Participants

- Two intact classes of Chinese students of Italian: TBLT (n=11) and PPP (n=10)
- Needs analysis to identify target tasks for the Chinese learners
- two featured in the study: opening a bank account, and changing a mobile phone contract in a shop

Borro (2017b)

Measures

Four versions of the same unspeeded grammaticality judgment test (UGJT) and a moving-window self-paced reading test (SPRT) were administered as pre- and post-tests, targeting explicit and implicit knowledge, respectively, of a high frequency structure in the input for both tasks: 3rd person clitic pronouns (both direct and indirect object)

Borro (2017b)

- SPRT: 12 sentences containing the target structure, and 24 fillers. Pilot testing showed that ungrammaticality alone, as in (1), was not enough to cause slower processing; ***semantic inconsistency*** was necessary, as in (2):

(1) *Le fragole costano poco, allora la compro.
**Strawberries are cheap, so I buy it.*

(2) *La nonna cucina ottimi biscotti: la mangio sempre.
**Granny bakes good cookies: I always eat her.*

Borro (2017b)

Each item occurred in a grammatical (semantically consistent), ungrammatical (semantically inconsistent), masculine and feminine version

Il treno di Diana è in ritardo, le telefono.

Diana's train is late, I call her.

*Il treno di Diana è in ritardo, gli telefono.

**Diana's train is late, I call it.*

La macchina di Carlo è rotta, gli telefono.

Carlo's car is broken, I call him.

*La macchina di Carlo è rotta, le telefono.

**Carlo's car is broken, I call it.*

Borro (2017b)

Treatment

- Six hours of instruction (two three-hour lessons) based on authentic speech recorded during performance of the two target tasks: opening a bank account, and changing a mobile phone contract in a shop

Borro (2017b)

Lesson content

- **PPP**: Focus on vocabulary before reading the simplified version of the input, comprehension questions, explicit grammar instruction, fill-in-the-blank grammar exercises, and a final role-play or text-writing, more output. The PPP group saw 20 pronouns in the bank text and 10 in the mobile text. Then they had 2 grammar fill-in-the-blank exercises per lesson, 4 in total, with about 12 items each -- a total of 78 tokens.

Borro (2017b)

Lesson content

- **TBLT**: No decontextualized vocabulary before exposure to genuine and elaborated oral and written versions of the input and written transcriptions of dialogs containing the target structures enhanced (in bold), no explicit grammar instruction unless in reaction to student questions, work on pedagogic tasks, e.g., matching dialogs with correct fliers among 5 or 6 describing special offers, spotting differences between different kinds of bank accounts, and a final role-play, more input. The TBLT group encountered 18 instances of the pronouns in the spoken dialogues, 22 pronouns in the bank task, and 17 in the mobile task -- a total of 57 tokens.

Borro (2017b)

Results

- TBLT and PPP group scores both improved statistically significantly pre- to post on the unspeeded GJT, but did not differ significantly from one another
- Reaction times (RTs) to grammatical semantically congruent sentences in the TBLT group decreased statistically significantly from pre- to post. RTs to grammatical semantically incongruent sentences decreased slightly, but not significantly
- RTs in the PPP group barely decreased from pre- to post on any sentence types
- RTs in the TBLT group were significantly shorter than those in the PPP group when reading grammatical semantically congruent sentences

Some other findings favoring TBLT over grammar-based/PPP instruction

De Ridder, Vangehuchten, & Sesena (2007 *ALx*)

De la Fuente (2006 *LTR*)

Gonzalez-Lloret & Nielson (2015 *LTR*)

Lai, Zhao, & Wang (2011 *MLJ*)

For a review of these and other studies comparing grammar-based/PPP and TBLT, see Long (2015, pp. 350-366).

For a statistical meta-analysis of the findings from 52 field implementations of TBLT around the world, see Bryfonski & McKay (2017 LTR). B & M found (i) a strong positive overall effect (d = 0.93) for TBLT implementation, compared with grammar-based PPP, on a variety of learning outcomes, and (ii) positive stakeholder perceptions of the TBLT programs

Six stages in TBLT course design

1. Needs and means analyses
2. Syllabus design (target tasks –> target task-types –> pedagogic tasks, with PTs sequenced by task, not linguistic, complexity)
3. Task-based materials (elaborated, not simplified, input)
4. MPs and PPs
5. Task-based assessment
6. Program evaluation

Sample pedagogic tasks

For eight detailed examples, see Long (2015, pp. 259-298):

- Geometric figures tasks (matching shapes) (Beginning)
- Spot-the-difference tasks (Beginning)
- Obtaining and following street directions (Low)
- Decoding drug labels (Low)
- Negotiating a police traffic stop (Intermediate)
- Delivering a sales report (Intermediate)
- Researching a complex political issue (Advanced)
- Attending an academic lecture (Advanced)

Attending an academic lecture

- Lexis and collocations > grammar at advanced levels
- Most are discipline-specific and do not occur in “general purpose” coursebooks, so recordings of authentic lectures are the starting-point

Attending an academic lecture: PTs

PT1: The real thing: Students watch a five-minute excerpt from the video of an authentic lecture in their field delivered by and for NSs

PT2: Schema-building: Roughly 20 minutes of in-class discussion of a text, elaborated as needed, on the topic of the lecture. (This does NOT involve pre-teaching the vocabulary or collocations)

- **PT3 - PT7: Lecturettes** Short lecturettes or parts of lecturettes (typically 3 or 4 PTs, depending on student proficiency level, utilizing one or more ***task*-simplifying devices**: input elaboration, dividing target discourse into segments, 2+ hearings, support from a written L2 outline in note form and/or transcription, and such enhancements as slower paced delivery, increased input frequency, repetition, bi-modal presentation, and added salience to target items)

Attending an academic lecture: PTs

PT8: Exit task A task-based, criterion-referenced, performance test (every module ends with an exit task)

PTs in the module become increasingly complex as the task-simplifying “crutches” are gradually removed. Throughout, and in the exit test, the focus is on students’ ability to extract the information in the lecture identified as relevant by the domain expert (typically the lecturer), not the language teacher. The lexis and collocations are acquired incidentally, while students’ attention is focused on the subject matter.

Thank you!

Questions or comments?

Long, M. H. (2015). *Second language acquisition and Task-Based Language Teaching*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.