USING FOCUS ON FORM TASKS TO CREATE A GRAMMAR RESOURCE BOOK

FOR ELL TEACHERS

by

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Introduction

Throughout my time as an EL teacher (as well as my time as a classroom teacher working with EL teachers), I have come to understand that there is no consensus on teaching grammar.   I personally arrived at the conclusion that it wasn't necessary to teach it, and there were three reasons for this. The first is that I was told repeatedly that it wasn't actually helpful. That the investment in time was not worth the return. The second reason is that I was told many of my EL students had more immediate, pressing concerns, and the limited time I had with them each day could be better spent focusing on these. This notion of more 'immediate concerns' was further bolstered by the fact that EL instruction is moving towards a more contextualized model, where teachers use the 'Gen Ed' curriculum to guide their language teaching. As EL teachers we are expected to teach them both content as well as language, leaving very little time left over for something like grammar. Finally, the literature itself on the various methods of teaching grammar can be a bit confusing, often leaving a teacher wondering how to actually put it into practice.

It was this final point that lead me to develop this resource book. I decided that I was going to comb through the available research and try to decipher what, if any, was the majority opinion on teaching grammar within the classroom.   Furthermore, I was going to attempt to find tasks and activities that were amenable to the flexible and responsive approach to teaching language that is required of EL teacher now. The

ultimate goal of this endeavor was to create brief and contextualized lessons that are readily available to EL teachers.

<div align="center">Focus on Form</div>

The role of grammar instruction in the classroom has been the cause of much debate over the years. Primarily, the debate has focused on whether grammar should be text 'explicitly' or 'implicitly'. In other words should a teacher set aside specific class time for teaching grammatical structures or should teachers disregard it assuming that students will 'absorb' the grammatical structures as their fluency and comprehension increases. Various methods of 'explicit' and 'implicit' grammar teaching have been implemented over the years, with mixed results. Recently, scholars have arrived at a new approach to teaching grammar, a method which combines features of both 'explicit' and the 'implicit' approaches. This new method, created by Mike Long, is known as the Focus on Form.

Focus on Form recognizes that language is a social phenomenon whose ultimate goal is communication. If this is the case, teaching grammatical structures in isolation does little to support a learner's ability to effectively interact with others. On the other hand completely ignoring grammatical structures hinders a learner's ability to understand the foundational underpinnings of a language, something that is especially useful in written communication. Focus on Form addresses these issues by incorporating both 'explicit' and 'implicit' practices. In its simplest sense Focus on Form believes that grammar should only be taught 'incidentally' and 'spontaneously' as the need arises. Grammar instruction should take place in the context of other learning. For example,

while students are learning about the cultures and traditions of Spain, the teacher can set aside a moment to discuss subject/verb agreement. This places the grammar instruction within the contextual bounds of the more 'salient' content.

Standards

Minnesota is a currently a member of the WIDA consortium. Consequently, the EL programs in MN public schools use the WIDA standards to guide their curricular planning. According to the Understanding By Design guide, (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) these standards should form the basis for any EL curriculum. In Figure A, the WIDA Language standards demonstrate the necessity for contextualization when selecting language structures for instruction. Therefore, the Focus on Form method aligns well with these standards since the grammar foci are pulled directly from the literacy standards taught in the ELL students' general education curriculum.

The manner in which this resource book is structured is that you are to use a text from the General Education curriculum (i.e. science, social studies, math, etc.) when pulling grammar points you wish to focus on.   The speaking and writing rubric also demonstrates that grammar is one of the most critical components when assessing a student's language proficiency.

As an EL teacher you are required to not only teach language, but content as well. With regards to content, the Focus on Form method pulls structures directly from the General Education curriculum, thus the very nature of using this book implies that the content will be learned simultaneously with the language. The content standards utilized will therefore be the Minnesota College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for K-5.

<u>Explanation of Tasks</u>

The tasks that I have incorporated into this resource book were derived from journal articles and various textbooks. All four of these tasks reflect the Focus on Form methodology with a few modifications.

Consciousness-Raising

This task involves presenting learners text with a specific grammatical structure and then having them attempt to decipher it by themselves. The goal is to help learners to 'notice' the structure thus raising their 'consciousness' of it.

Dictogloss

In a dictogloss task learners are read a short story and then asked to retell it in their own words. After several students have shared their stories they then compare and contrast the various grammatical structures they incorporated in their retells. The goal of dictogloss is to have students reflect on the differences between grammar in their native language and their target language.

Grammar Interpretation.

The third Focus on Form task is grammar interpretation. This involves the learner comparing and contrasting similar grammatical structures between their native and target languages. This can be done through a matching activity or a cloze.

Grammaring

The fourth task is grammaring. A grammaring task focuses more on actual grammatical features of a language. In a grammaring task, a structure is presented and students are then asked to use the structure in order to generate some sort of 'output' such as a story.

When and How To Use the Tasks

This resource book has been designed without any specific sequence to help reflect the responsive needs of EL teachers today. I compiled a list of grammar items in which ELLs have frequent errors.   You may then pull and utilize the grammar focus in any sequence you see fit. I've made the format digital so that it can be easily accessed.

Under each grammar focus I listed the adaptations for each specific task. Each task requires the use of a text or picture. To keep the activity as contextualized as possible, it is recommended to use the genre or text level that the student is currently practicing. To help illustrate the complexity of each grammar point, I've supplied examples for each task. I've sourced my examples exclusively from journal articles and textbooks. In the instances there weren't examples for that grammar focus, an authentic text should be found.

Verb tense

Consciousness-Raising (Shak and Gardner, 2008)

1. Display two texts that are told in different tenses.
2. Target the tenses in which the errors are being made.
3. Ask students to compare and contrast the texts
4. Guide towards noticing verb
5. Encourage discussion between groups and partners.

Dictogloss

1. Read a text written in a specific tense.
2. Students take notes while you dictate.
3. Students then reconstruct the text in partners or groups.
4. Redo this activity with another text written in a different tense.

Grammar Interpretation Task (Skah and Gardner, 2008)

1. Display pictures that correlate with a specific sentence.
2. Have students match the picture with the correct verb tense.
3. Encourage discussion amongst partners or groups.

Grammaring (Shabani, 2010)

1. Display a series of pictures and key verbs .
2. In partners or groups, have students create a story.
3. Encourage a discussion on the correct use of the verb tense.

Past tense

Consciousness-Raising (Widodo, 2006)

1. Display a text written in the past tense in the genre/level the student is currently studying.
2. Now ask students to list all the verbs.
3. Ask them to discuss and notice patterns about the verb form.
4. Now make two columns. One with the present tense the other with the past tense.
5. Ask students to notice the the change in form (point out there are regular and irregular forms)
6. Have student articulate in their own words what the rule is in changing the form.
7. Post this rule on the board with categories (irregular/irregular)

Dictogloss

1. Read aloud a text with the past tense (containing regular or irregular depending on focus).
2. Review pertinent vocabulary
3. Have students take notes.
4. Students then reconstruct the text in writing with a partner or group.

Grammaring

1. Display a series of pictures and key verbs.
2. Instruct the students that this story occurred the day before and direct them to narrate the story in the past tense.
3. Encourage discussion as they work in partners and groups.

Prepositions

Consciousness raising (Hendricks, 2010)

1. In a large font, print out 8-10 sentences that have prepositional errors. An example would be "My friend went in the bus".
2. Have the students identify and circle the prepositions.
3. In a separate envelope print and cut-out common prepositions.
4. Finally, have the students, using some form of adhesive, place the correct preposition from the envelope over the incorrect preposition on the sentence.

Dictogloss (Chase, 2012)

1. Choose a picture book that focuses on prepositions such as "Around the House the Fox Chased the Mouse" or "Under Over by the Clover".
2. Read portions of the text multiple times and have the students attempt to reconstruct the text you just read.
3. Explain any relevant vocabulary.

Grammar Interpretation Task

1. Take a text that is at their level and remove the prepositions.
2. With a partner, have the students determine the correct preposition. In this task, it is important the student has the opportunity to negotiate meaning of the grammar rule.
3. Encourage a discussion of their answer choices.

Grammaring (Jones and Lock, 2001)

1. Display a series of pictures or text that tell a story.
2. The text or pictures used should elicit time and place prepositions. For example, they need to narrate a trip where the person is arriving at certain times and going into and out of different buildings and locations.
3. Students should then construct a story in partners or groups.

Articles

Consciousness-Raising

1. Use a text at the student's level that contains both indefinite and definite articles. Ideally, the text is in the genre that the student is currently studying. You may enhance the text by bolding the articles.
2. Have the student highlight the use of definite article and indefinite article in different colors.
3. The student will then compare the contexts of each instance of use and formulate a pattern.

Dictogloss

1. Use a text at the student's level that contains both indefinite and definite articles. Ideally, the text is in the genre that the student is currently studying.
2. Read aloud the text.
3. Review any pertinent vocabulary.
4. Have the students reconstruct the text from memory.

Grammar Interpretation Tasks (Jones and Lock, 2011)

1. Read the following text aloud

1. A car stopped in front of a shop. A man got out of the car and ran into the shop. He pulled out a gun and pointed it at the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper gave him all the money in the till and the man ran out of the shop. But when he got back to his car he couldn't open it. He had locked it with the keys inside.

2. A man stopped an armoured car, knocked out the driver and grabbed some bags of money. They were full of coins. As he was trying to run away with the heavy bags, he fell over, and the coins spilled out. He was still trying to pick them up when the police arrived.

Distribute this worksheet and have them determine whether to use the pronoun, definite or indefinite article.

Locked Out

A car stopped in front of a shop. A man got out of 🚗 and 🧍 ran into 🏠

He pulled out a gun and pointed 🔫 at the shopkeeper. 🧍 gave him all the

money in the till and 🧍 ran out of the shop. But when 🧍 got back to

🚗, 🧍 couldn't open 🚗. 🧍 had locked 🚗 with the keys inside.

🚗	🧍	🏠	🔫	🧍
car	man	shop	gun	shopkeeper

Too Heavy

A man stopped an armoured car, knocked out the driver and grabbed some bags of

money. 💰 were full of coins. As 🧍 was trying to run away with [heavy] 💰

🧍 fell over, and 🪙 spilled out. 🧍 was still trying to pick 🪙 up when the

police arrived.

🧍	💰	🪙
man	bags of money	coins

Grammaring

1. Display a series of pictures that tell a story. An example could be a story that involves a man who buys a lottery ticket and wins the lottery, then later loses his lottery ticket and wallet when he is out celebrating with his friends. This would require the student to communicate using the definite and indefinite article (a man vs the man).

2. Have students then construct a story in groups or partners.

3. Encourage a discussion on article use.

Word order

Consciousness-Raising (Nassaji and Fotos, 2011)

1. Display a short text in the genre or level the student is working on.
2. Then display another text in the student's' native language.
3. Have a group of students mark the subject and verb in each text.
4. Encourage a discussion and have students formulate patterns.

Dictogloss

1. Dictate a short text with examples of the target issue (SVO, positions of adverbs, etc…).
2. Review relevant vocabulary.
3. Students will take notes during the dictation.
4. Have pairs or groups work together to reconstruct the text in written form.
5. Encourage a discussion as they negotiate meaning.

Grammar Interpretation Task

1. Display pairs of sentences with the correct and incorrect version of the word order.
2. Have students work together to discuss why one is correct over the other.

Grammaring

1. Give students a series of pictures or terms. Ideally within the context of the unit you are teaching.
2. Have student form sentences for each picture in groups or partners.
3. Encourage a discussion of the correct word order.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

	Standard	Abbreviation
English Language Proficiency Standard 1	English language learners **communicate** for **Social** and **Instructional** purposes within the school setting	Social and Instructional **language**
English Language Proficiency Standard 2	English language learners **communicate** information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of **Language Arts**	The **language** of Language Arts
English Language Proficiency Standard 3	English language learners **communicate** information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of **Mathematics**	The **language** of Mathematics
English Language Proficiency Standard 4	English language learners **communicate** information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of **Science**	The **language** of Science
English Language Proficiency Standard 5	English language learners **communicate** information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of **Social Studies**	The **language** of Social Studies

Appendix B.

WIDA Writing Interpretive Rubric Grades 1-12			
	Discourse Level	**Sentence Level**	**Word/Phrase Level**
	Linguistic Complexity	**Language Forms and Conventions**	**Vocabulary Usage**
Level 6 Reaching	Text is fully comprehensible and appropriate to purpose, situation, and audience; comparable to the writing of English proficient students meeting college- and career-readiness standards; and includes: • extended connected text (single or multiple paragraphs) that is organized and shows tight cohesion in the precise expression of ideas • clear evidence of consistency in conveying an appropriate perspective, register, and genre	• a full range of sentence patterns and grammatical structures matched to content area topics • consistent use of appropriate conventions to convey meaning, including for effect	• consistent usage of just the right word or expression in just the right context related to content area topics • facility with precise vocabulary usage in general, specific, or technical language
Level 5 Bridging	Text is comprehensible and related to purpose; generally comparable to the writing of English proficient peers; and includes: • extended connected text (single or multiple paragraphs) that is organized and shows a cohesive and coherent expression of ideas • clear evidence of conveying an appropriate perspective, register, and genre	• a broad range of sentence patterns and grammatical structures matched to the content area topic • nearly consistent use of appropriate conventions to convey meaning, including for effect	• usage of technical and abstract content-area words and expressions as appropriate • usage of words and expressions with precise meaning related to content area topics as appropriate • vocabulary usage that fulfills the writing purpose
Level 4 Expanding	Text is generally comprehensible at all times; approaches comparability to the writing of English proficient peers; and includes: • connected text (sentences or paragraphs) that shows an organized expression of ideas with emerging cohesion • some evidence of conveying an appropriate perspective, register, and genre	• a range of sentence patterns and grammatical structures characteristic of the content area • generally consistent use of appropriate conventions to convey meaning	• usage of specific and some technical content-area words and expressions as appropriate • usage of words and expressions with multiple meanings or common collocations and idioms across content areas as appropriate • vocabulary usage that generally fulfills the writing purpose
Level 3 Developing	Original text is generally comprehensible (though comprehensibility may from time to time be compromised in more complex original text) and includes: • text that shows developing organization in the expression of an expanded idea or multiple related ideas • evidence of a developing sense of perspective, register, and genre	• a developing range of sentence patterns and grammatical structures common to content areas • developing use of conventions to convey meaning	• usage of some specific content words and expressions as appropriate • usage of common cognates, words, or expressions related to content areas as appropriate • vocabulary usage that attempts to fulfill the writing purpose
Level 2 Emerging	Some original text and text adapted from model or source text is generally comprehensible (though comprehensibility may often be compromised in attempts at more complex original text) and includes: • text that shows emerging expression of an idea or ideas and may demonstrate some attempt at organization • some amount of text that may be copied or adapted	• repetitive sentence and phrasal patterns and formulaic grammatical structures used in social and instructional situations or across content areas • variable use of conventions	• usage of general content words and expressions • usage of social and instructional words and expressions across content areas • possible usage of general vocabulary where more specific language is needed
Level 1 Entering	Text that is copied or adapted from model or source text is generally comprehensible (though comprehensibility may be significantly compromised in original text) and includes: • language that represents an idea or ideas • varying amounts of text that may be copied • adapted text that may contain some original language	• words, chunks of language, or simple phrasal patterns associated with common social and instructional situations • possible use of some conventions	• usage of highest frequency general content-related words • usage of everyday social and instructional words and expressions

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