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EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT KNOWLEDGE AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The role of classroom instruction in the second language development has been under debate and discussion for a long time. It considers that classroom instruction does make a difference to second language acquisition. For both teacher and learner, it is necessary to reconsider the role of the classroom instruction and come up with an appropriate and effective treatment of explicit and implicit knowledge. This paper will be solely concerned with the distinction of explicit and implicit knowledge and the implication of the two types of knowledge in classroom instruction.

**Key words:** second language acquisition; explicit knowledge; implicit knowledge; classroom instruction

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I. Introduction

Learners possess two kinds of knowledge, explicit and implicit. This claim is widely accepted. Many studies concerned with the two have sought to examine learners' implicit and explicit knowledge such as Seliger (1979), Tucker, Lambert and Rigault (1977), Hulstijn and Hulstijn (1984), Sorace (1985) and Green and Hecht (1992). This paper will be solely concerned with the distinction of explicit and implicit knowledge and the implication of the two types of knowledge in classroom instruction. Before we are able to understand the application and implication of explicit and implicit knowledge in classroom instruction, we need to take a close look at the distinction of the two forms of knowledge.

II. Distinction of explicit and implicit knowledge

Explicit knowledge has been defined in different ways, but in second language acquisition research it is generally used to refer to knowledge that is available to the learner as a conscious representation or knowledge of rules or items that exist in an analyzed form so that learner are able to report what they know. It is closely linked to 'metalingual knowledge' (knowledge of the special terminology for labeling linguistic concepts) but not the same, although it is often developed hand in hand with such knowledge. It contrasts with implicit second language knowledge. Learners may make their knowledge explicit either in everyday language or with the help of specially learned 'technical' language. While implicit knowledge of a language is knowledge that is intuitive and tacit or the intuitive information upon which the language learner operates in order to produce responses (comprehension or production) in the target language. It can be sometimes called knowledge in action or action-inherent knowledge. Study of linguistics competence is the study of a speaker-

hearer's implicit knowledge. Such knowledge is intuitive and, therefore, largely hidden; learners are not conscious of what they know. It becomes manifest only in actual performance.

Bialystok (1979) applies the main distinction that occurs in the knowledge level to judgments of grammaticality either on the basis of knowledge of rules or on the basis of intuition; thus, the task of judging grammaticality is one that does not necessarily bias towards implicit or explicit knowledge. To express this, two complimentary conditions that make a distinction between the two forms of knowledge are proposed.

*Explicit knowledge condition:* analyzed language knowledge, may be consciously available to the speaker who is able to state a rule or explain the reason for a decision to use a certain form. Explicit knowledge is generally gained through formal teaching. It is sometimes referred to as 'knowledge about the language', rather than 'knowledge of language' or as 'declarative knowledge', that is, knowledge that can be talked about.

*Implicit knowledge condition:* language knowledge, analyzed and so available for recombination, may be intuitive and so not be consciously to the learner. In this case, the speaker can produce correct forms and recognize incorrect ones, but has no easy way of talking abstractly about the reason why a form is correct or not.

The distinction between these two types of knowledge underlies Stephen Krashen's Monitor Theory, which is the first and, in many ways, the most central of his five hypotheses. Krashen (1981; 1982) claims that learners possess an 'acquired system' and a 'learned system' which are totally separate. The former is developed by means of acquisition, a subconscious process which arises when learners are using language for communication. The latter is the result of learning, the process of paying conscious attention to language in an effort to understand and memorize rules. In other words, Krashen's 'acquired' second language knowledge (i.e. implicit knowledge of the language) is developed subconsciously through comprehending input while communicating, while 'learned' second language knowledge (i.e. explicit knowledge about the language) is developed consciously through deliberate study the second language. It is clear that the acquisition/learning mirrors the implicit/explicit distinction, a point that Krashen himself acknowledges (1982:10).

To flesh out this distinction, Bialystok's (1978) theory of second language learning has been carried out. According to this theory, implicit knowledge is developed through exposure to communicative language use and is facilitated by the strategy of 'functional practising' (attempts by the learner to maximize exposure to language through communication). Explicit knowledge arises when learners focus on the language code, and is facilitated by 'formal practising', which involves either conscious study of the second language or attempts to automatize already learnt explicit knowledge. In these respects, Bialystok's theory is the same as Krashen's. It differs, however, in allowing for an interaction between the two types of knowledge. Formal practising enables explicit knowledge to become implicit, while inferencing allows explicit knowledge to be derived from implicit. Not all second language acquisition researchers have been happy with the implicit/explicit distinction. McLaughlin (1987:21) has argued that Krashen's acquired/learned distinction is not tenable because it cannot be falsified, but as Bialystok (1981a) has noted, the existence of the two types of knowledge is widely recognized in cognitive psychology. The distinction is not especially problematic at the level of product, therefore.

### **III. Relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge**

What then is the nature of relationship, if any, between learners' explicit and implicit knowledge? Does explicit knowledge convert into implicit knowledge through practice, as claimed by Bialystok and argued Sharwood Smith (1981), or does it, in the main, only facilitate the acquisition of implicit knowledge, as suggested by Terrell (1991) and Ellis 1993a?

Such new questions as these begin to arise. The relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge, then, continues to be a key issue. Increasingly, explicit knowledge is being viewed as a facilitator of implicit knowledge, by enabling learners to notice features in the input which they would otherwise miss and compare them with their own interlanguage representations (Schmidt 1990). In a sense, then, explicit knowledge may contribute to 'intake enhancement', but it will be only one of several factors that does this. In other words, when we considered the role of consciousness in second language learning, learners who have explicit knowledge of target-language features may be more likely to notice these features in natural input. Also, the process of cognitively comparing what is present in the input with what is the current interlanguage rule is

facilitated if learners have explicit knowledge. In these ways explicit knowledge may have an indirect effect on the development of implicit knowledge.

#### **IV. Implication of the two in classroom instruction**

Now what does this have to do with second language acquisition and how does this affect the classroom instruction? According to the interface hypothesis---the claim that by practicing specific structures learners can 'control' them (i.e. that explicit knowledge gradually becomes implicit)--- instruction facilitates acquisition by (1) supplying the learner with conscious rules, and (2) providing practice to enable them to covert this conscious, 'controlled' knowledge into 'automatic' knowledge. Sharwood Smith (1981) claims that 'it is quite clear and uncontroversial to say that most spontaneous performance is attained by dint of practice' (1981:166). Stevick's (1980) also allows for 'learnt' knowledge to become 'acquired'. He suggests that 'acquired' knowledge is developed through communicating and is stored in tertiary memory. 'Learnt' knowledge relates to secondary or medium-term memory. In certain cases learners can make use of 'learnt' knowledge while they are communicating and, thereby, 'acquire' it.

The other facilitative position, the selective attention hypothesis, is that formal instruction acts as an aid to acquisition, not by actually bringing about the internalization of new linguistic features, but rather by providing the learner with 'hooks, points of access' (Lightbown 1985a). In other words, classroom instruction does not enable learners to fully acquire what is taught when it is taught, but prepares the way for its subsequent acquisition. As Gass puts it, instruction 'triggers the initial stages in what eventually result in grammar restructuring' (1991:137). Instruction works by helping learners to pay selective attention to form and form-meaning connections in the input. It provides learners with tools that help them to recognize those features in their interlanguages which are in need of modification. We have seen that instruction appears to result in faster learning and higher levels of proficiency (Long1983c). Teaching learners structures they are ready for, however, can result in 'full' acquisition and can cause learners to use the structures in a wide range of linguistic context, but there are practical problems in achieving this. Facilitating selective attention by devising instructional activities that equip learners with conscious rules, or that help them interpret the meaning of specific forms in the input, is both psycholinguistically feasible and possible in practical terms. Finally, formal instruction may prove most facilitative when it matches the learners' own preferred learning style.

In consequence, knowledge becomes something that must be acted with or upon, as it is no longer a static concept. Here are some implications derived from the distinction of the two forms of knowledge in classroom construction:

1. Reconceptualize second language knowledge  
In the early model this was represented as a dichotomy---knowledge was either implicit or explicit---but in subsequent formulations it is represented in terms of two intersecting continua reflecting the extent to which rules and items are 'controlled' or 'analyzed'.
2. Reexamine the multiple nature of language teaching activity  
Language teaching activity is a process not only of delivery and mastery the explicit knowledge but also of apperception and attainment the necessary implicit knowledge for learner.
3. Reconsider the connotation of commanding knowledge  
A good command of knowledge includes the explicit knowledge, moreover, the more curial one, the implicit knowledge. There, on the one hand, is implicit knowledge behind the explicit knowledge and developing the capability to performance cannot be simply rely on the explicit knowledge on the other. Implicit knowledge enjoys the priority over explicit knowledge.
4. Reconfirm the value of practice-oriented classroom instruction  
Language teaching-learning activity, even the kind of illuminating one, cannot replace implicit knowledge, anyhow. Comprehensive changes in traditional classroom instruction (i.e. teacher-centered and textbook-centered and classroom-centered) seem an inevitable part of the total restructuring package.
5. Reflect the proficiency of teaching methods

In order to activate the implicit knowledge of the learner and also verify it, teaching methods such as activities of conversation and discussion etc. should be promoted. It is in such activities without constraint that learner's implicit knowledge is made explicit accompanying his statements are reported.

#### **V. Conclusion**

The distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge is an important one when considering classroom instruction because it is possible that instruction may determine both the degree of proficiency of second language acquisition for the learner and the corresponding application of language pedagogy for the teacher.

Rather than to conclude on an entirely positive note, a strong caution needs to be exercised here. In the future, more attention should be paid for one thing to the development of implicit knowledge as it is much more fundamental than explicit knowledge in modern classrooms and for another to explicit knowledge that teacher delivered, learning what goes on within apprenticeships coaching, repeated practice is far less enough for effective classroom instruction.

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