Why Do L2 Teachers Need to 'Know About Language'? Teacher Metalinguistic Awareness and Input for Learning

Stephen Andrews
Department of Curriculum Studies, University of Hong Kong

This paper sets out to examine the importance in the instructed-learning setting of the L2 teacher's 'knowledge about language' (her *metalinguistic awareness*, or TMA). Three questions are examined in relation to TMA: (1) Do L2 teachers need to 'know about language?' (2) If so, why, and in what ways? and (3) What impact does the level/nature of a teacher's metalinguistic awareness have on the input which is made available for learning? The paper first of all adopts a theoretical stance in relation to these three questions. A model of TMA is proposed where it is seen as performing a crucial role in the language teaching/language learning process because of its potential impact upon input for learning. The paper then examines empirical evidence relating to the three questions and to the validity of the TMA construct by reporting on data gathered from classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with three L2 teachers working in secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Introduction

The arguments in support of the assertion that L2 teachers need a sound 'knowledge about language' ('teacher metalinguistic awareness', or TMA, in the terminology used in this paper) may seem self-evident, since for hundreds of years grammar, and a focus on form, have been at the heart of language teaching, first of classical languages and then of modern languages. Throughout these centuries, as Howatt (1984) records, there has been the occasional dissident to challenge the grammar-based orthodoxy. But until the 1960s the majority of the differences of opinion with regard to grammar centred upon *how* it should be taught rather than *whether* it should be taught.

More recently, however, grammar has passed through a period in which it has had to share, indeed cede, its position as the central focus of L2 instruction. This has been partly caused by the advent of communicative language teaching (CLT), and the 'switch of attention from teaching the language system to teaching the language as communication' (Howatt, 1984: 277). As Tonkyn (1994: 4) points out, CLT '… tended to play down the value of grammar teaching. Communicative success, it was suggested, did not necessarily require grammar'.

At the same time, more direct challenges to the importance of form-focused instruction have been made, starting with Newmark's influential 1966 paper 'How not to interfere with language learning', and continuing more recently with the ideas of, for example, Krashen (1981, 1982, 1985) and Prabhu (1987). At the heart of these challenges, and central to the ensuing debate, is the nature of the relationship between explicit knowledge of grammar and implicit knowledge of grammar. The interface between these two types of knowledge has not only preoccupied applied linguists and L2 acquisition researchers: in cognitive

psychology the parallel distinction between declarative and procedural knowledge has been the subject of much recent debate about general theories of human learning (as discussed, for example, by Johnson, 1996, and Robinson, 1997).

Krashen distinguishes between 'learning' (explicit knowledge, which is the result of conscious study) and 'acquisition' (a subconscious process occurring only when the learner's attention is focused on conveying meaning and resulting in implicit knowledge), and he asserts that it is 'acquired' (implicit) knowledge which is required for communication. Krashen claims that formal instruction cannot promote this implicit knowledge, and that there is no interface between the two types of knowledge, i.e. learning cannot become acquisition. As a result, the only value of formal instruction is in helping to develop explicit knowledge, which is seen by Krashen as having very limited use, for the purposes of monitoring, and then only when the learner has time to monitor her output. Prabhu's views are a little different: it is not so much that formal instruction cannot promote the learning of grammar, but rather that grammar is learnt more effectively through communication. Though Krashen's position has been challenged by many writers, among them McLaughlin (1987) and Gregg (1984), his ideas and those of Prabhu have nevertheless had a profound influence on language teaching and helped to destabilise perceptions of the role of form-focused instruction.

In the past ten years, for a variety of reasons, the pendulum has started to swing back, with grammar and form-focused instruction enjoying something of a return to favour. In part this was caused by the reaction against Krashen's views, with his assumption that there is no interface between explicit and implicit knowledge being dismissed as simplistic (Sharwood Smith, 1981: 166), and with many of his critics arguing, as Mitchell (1994: 90) describes, that '…learning can become acquisition'. During this period, the nature of the role played by the learner's conscious mental processes in L2 acquisition has been widely discussed in the literature (see, for example, the studies cited in Schmidt, 1993: 207). One of the suggestions which has come to the fore in these more recent reassessments of the role of explicit knowledge of grammar in L2 learning is that 'consciousness-raising' (Rutherford, 1987) or 'input enhancement' (Sharwood Smith, 1991) — i.e. focusing the learner's attention on highlighted aspects of input — has a valuable role to play in the language learning process. Other factors have also contributed to a renewed interest in the role of explicit knowledge of grammar, in the teaching of L1 as well as L2. In the UK, for instance, the Language Awareness movement (with its origins in the work of Hawkins, 1981, 1984) has been highly influential.

In spite of this revived support for the value of focusing on form, there is still uncertainty, for many teachers, about the role of grammar and how it is most efficiently taught and learnt. Among teachers who are themselves products of an education system in which the formal teaching of grammar was anathema, this uncertainty is often accompanied by considerable worry and doubt about their own KAL (or metalinguistic awareness), and about the impact it might have in the teaching/learning process. It is this knowledge (TMA) which forms the focus of the rest of the paper.

The paper sets out to address three questions in relation to TMA:

(1)   Do L2 teachers need to 'know about language'?
(2)   If so, why? and in what ways?
(3)   What impact does the level/nature of a teacher's metalinguistic awareness have on the input which is made available for learning?

The discussion is in two main parts. In the first, a theoretical stance is adopted in relation to these three questions, and a model of TMA is proposed where it is seen as performing a crucial role in the language teaching/language learning process because of its potential impact upon input for learning. The second part of the paper examines empirical evidence relating to the three questions and to the validity of the TMA construct by reporting on data gathered from classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with L2 teachers.

What is 'Teacher Metalinguistic Awareness' (TMA)?

Before proceeding further, we should discuss what is meant by TMA — is it any different from the explicit (declarative) knowledge of language referred to earlier in relation to learners? As a starting point it might be helpful to consider Thornbury's (1997: x) definition of teachers' language awareness as '… the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying systems of the language that enables them to teach effectively'. If we explore the nature of that knowledge a little further, its relationship with explicit language knowledge and the reasons for using the term TMA may become clearer.

The term 'metalinguistic' as used in this paper is meant to reflect the qualitative differences between the language knowledge/awareness of the educated user of a language and that required by the teacher of that language. In order to be an effective communicator in the language, in both the spoken and written media, the former needs to draw on both implicit and explicit language knowledge. In the same way, the teacher of that language also needs to be able to draw on such knowledge. The extent to which she is able to do so determines how well she is able to act as a model for her students. However, effective L2 teaching requires of the teacher more than just the possession of such knowledge and the ability to draw upon it for communicative purposes. The L2 teacher also needs to reflect upon that knowledge and ability, and upon her knowledge of the underlying systems of the language, in order to ensure that her students receive maximally useful input for learning. These reflections bring an extra cognitive dimension to the teacher's language knowledge/awareness, which informs the tasks of planning and teaching. It is in acknowledgement of the importance of this cognitive dimension that the term 'metalinguistic' is employed in the present paper.

At the same time, the term 'awareness' is used in preference to 'knowledge' in order to emphasise the important difference between the possession of knowledge and the use made of such knowledge — the declarative and procedural dimensions. As part of her explicit language knowledge, a teacher might, for example, have a highly developed knowledge of metalanguage. However, whether such knowledge was used appropriately would be determined by that teacher's metalinguistic awareness. Depending on the context, the metalinguistically aware teacher might well make minimal use of metalanguage in the classroom, however extensive her own knowledge might be.

In principle, TMA is applicable to the full range of a teacher's language knowledge and awareness. The focus of the present paper, however, is limited to grammar. Explicit knowledge of grammar is seen as forming the core of any L2 teacher's metalinguistic awareness.

How Might TMA Ideally Reveal Itself When the Focus is on Form?

Having now defined TMA, and noted that the present paper is focusing specifically upon grammar, it is appropriate to consider how TMA might ideally manifest itself in teacher behaviour where the pedagogical approach incorporates a focus on form. This is discussed both by Andrews (1994), and also by Leech (1994) in his analysis of the 'mature communicative knowledge' of grammar required by the teacher.

According to Leech, the 'model' teacher of languages should be able to put across '… a sense of how grammar interacts with the lexicon as a communicative system …' and '… be able to analyse the grammatical problems that learners encounter'. At the same time, such a teacher should '… have the ability and confidence to evaluate the use of grammar, especially by learners, against criteria of accuracy, appropriateness and expressiveness', and '… be aware of the contrastive relations between native language and foreign language'. Lastly, the 'model' teacher should '… understand and implement the processes of simplification by which overt knowledge of grammar can best be presented to learners at different stages of learning' (Leech, 1994: 18)

As with any such list, one might wish to suggest certain modifications. For instance, one might want to add another aspect of simplification to those mentioned by Leech, to suggest that the 'model' (i.e. metalinguistically aware) teacher should control her own use of language to a level appropriate to her students. Whatever minor adjustments one might feel inclined to make, such a list nevertheless provides a useful inventory of facets of teacher behaviour when observing samples of TMA in action.

Is TMA Important Only in L2 Classrooms Where the Focus is on Form?

Before moving on, it is important to consider the extent to which postulating a construct 'teacher metalinguistic awareness' with explicit knowledge of grammar at its core presupposes a form-focused[1] approach to language teaching. This question is of particular importance given the challenges to form-focused instruction referred to earlier, and the fact that the force of these challenges still reverberates within the profession.

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that TMA can potentially play a crucial role in determining the success of any form-focused approach designed to develop learners' explicit knowledge. For instance, within a traditional 'P-P-P' (Presentation-Practice-Production) teaching sequence, TMA is a significant factor at each stage from lesson preparation through to the provision of corrective feedback.

Less obviously perhaps, the adoption of an approach which is primarily meaning-focused[2] may in fact pose no less of a challenge to a teacher's metalinguistic awareness, and TMA may be no less crucial to the success of such

an approach. For example, the selection of suitable learning tasks in a meaning-focused approach may involve considering such factors as the potential linguistic demands of the task and the linguistic capacity of the learners to cope with those demands. Also, learners following a course which adopts a meaning-focused approach may in fact attend to form, and therefore demand from the teacher explanations of formal features, and feedback on the form of their attempts at producing English. In addition, approaches to teaching which claim to be meaning-focused may in any case be covertly form-focused or may have a form-focused strand.

Even within those approaches which are the least sympathetic to form-focused instruction (such as those inspired by Krashen), one could argue that TMA plays a significant part in the effectiveness or otherwise of what takes place in the classroom. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1981, 1985), for example, proposes that 'comprehensible input' is a major causative factor in L2 acquisition. If a teacher wanted her classroom to be a major source of comprehensible input and therefore an 'acquisition-rich' environment, then she would presumably need to make decisions about the current stage of development of her students' 'acquired systems', and:

- select texts providing comprehensible input;
- devise tasks entailing an appropriate level of linguistic challenge; and
- control her own language to a level a little beyond the students' current level of competence.

All of these tasks would pose considerable challenges to the teacher's metalinguistic awareness.

The Role of TMA in Structuring Input for Learners

There may continue to be disagreements about the precise nature of the part which input plays in language learning (compare, for instance, the views expressed in Long, 1981 and White, 1987). There is, however, no doubt that learners need to be exposed to L2 input as a precondition for learning to take place.

In the context of any L2 classroom, the three main sources of input for learners are materials, other learners, and the teacher herself. The model below is intended to show how a teacher's metalinguistic awareness can interact with the language produced by all three sources, operating as a kind of 'filter' affecting the way in which each source of input is made available to the learner. The language in teaching materials, for example, may be filtered as a result of having been specifically selected by the teacher or mediated through teacher presentation. On the other hand, it may be available to students in 'unfiltered' form, as when a textbook is studied at home independently of the teacher. The language produced by learners may also be 'filtered' through the teacher's metalinguistic awareness, as a result, for instance, of teacher correction, or it may be available to other learners in unfiltered form, as in unmonitored group discussion. Even the language produced by the teacher herself may not necessarily be filtered by the teacher's metalinguistic awareness. In any language lesson the teacher may produce language where she is fully aware of the potential of that language as input for learning and therefore structures it accordingly. In the same lesson,
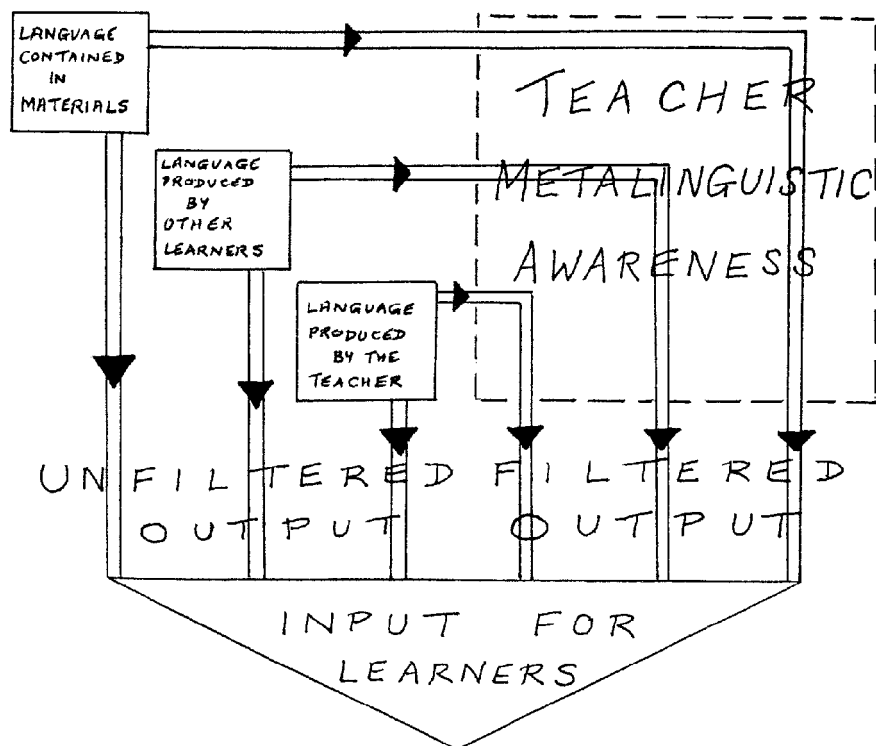
Figure 1

however, there will almost certainly be many teacher utterances which are less consciously monitored, and which are not intended by the teacher to lead to learning, but which are nevertheless potentially available to the learner as input (see Figure 1).

There are a number of factors which affect the extent to which TMA interacts with each of these three sources of input. Time constraints, for instance, have a major impact: limits on the time available for preparation have a significant influence upon the teacher's ability to filter the input from materials, while the 'real time' constraints and distractions of the classroom inevitably restrict the teacher's scope for filtering potential input which occurs spontaneously during the lesson. The quality of all three sources of 'filtered' input will also be critically influenced by the extent of the teacher's explicit knowledge, her confidence in her own knowledge, and her awareness in making use of her knowledge.

The Impact of TMA upon Input for Learning — Some Preliminary Findings

The remainder of the paper attempts to shed light on the potential impact of TMA upon the input which is made available for learning. Drawing upon data gathered as part of an in-depth study of the TMA of 17 Hong Kong secondary school teachers of English, the paper examines preliminary evidence from a sample of three of these teachers. These three teachers were selected as being representative of different levels of metalinguistic awareness. As part of the

in-depth study all 17 teachers were observed on two occasions when they were giving a grammar-based lesson as part of their normal teaching sequence. The first of the two lessons was videotaped, while the second was audiotaped. Each teacher was also interviewed twice, using a semi-structured format. The interviews were audiotaped for subsequent analysis. In the following discussion, which draws upon the interview and classroom data, a neutral stance is taken towards the teachers' approach to the teaching of grammar, since evaluative comment on methodology is beyond the scope of the present paper. Instead, the focus is on what was revealed about each teacher's metalinguistic awareness, and its effect upon the quality of the input made available to the students for learning.

The teachers described in the paper are all Hong Kong Chinese, with at least three years' full-time teaching experience in secondary schools. All are graduates, in subjects related to English, but with no professional training. At the time the data were gathered, all the teachers were taking a two-year part-time post-graduate certificate in education (PCEd) course at the University of Hong Kong.[3] The first interview and the first observed lesson took place at the beginning of their course.

Rose

Rose's education was spent entirely in Hong Kong, but she is the product of a secondary school education which was wholly English-medium except for the subjects of Chinese and Chinese History. She has a well-developed implicit knowledge of grammar, which is reflected in her fluency and confidence as a communicator both orally and in writing. She is far less confident about her explicit knowledge, however — something she attributes to her experience at school, which, according to her, involved little or no explicit teaching of grammar:

> Our teachers don't teach us any grammar at all. We just take out our textbook and do the exercises in reading comprehension or in writing … instead of teaching us the grammar item …

> Actually I am very afraid of grammar. I think it was influenced by the secondary school. So I am afraid to teach grammar to my students too …

Possibly as a response to her learning experience (which she describes as 'self learning') and her own resulting fear of grammar, Rose makes statements suggesting that she is a firm believer in what she labels a 'traditional' approach to learning grammar:

> I think to learn a language we have to know the basic rules. I think we have to learn grammar in a more traditional way. That means taking notes and then remembering … and then recite the rules. I think we have to memorise it instead of making use of the communicative method to … learn grammar.

She feels that such an approach makes a valuable contribution to students' developing ability to speak grammatically correct English:

> … I still think that they're really absent-minded students. Because … we teach the same grammar item in form 1 to form 7, but they still don't under-

stand. So if we do not teach the grammar items in our way they don't know what is grammar actually. So we have to teach them grammar, and then by teaching them this grammar here they can at least have some control over their … grammar items.

In her implementation of this approach, Rose is heavily reliant on the textbook and on 'standardised exercises for the whole form prepared by the teachers … [where] … you have to explain the sentence first and then ask them to fill in the blanks' In exploiting these materials, Rose follows a deductive, form-focused approach, which she describes as follows in relation to the teaching of reported speech:

I'll give them a sheet of paper with tables. The tables tell them the rules of the changes … from direct speech to indirect speech. The first one will be the changes of tenses and then the changes of the time and place, in the next one it will be the modal verbs. And then I'll write down some of the sentences on the blackboard and ask them to change it for me into reported speech. And then I will tell them the different types in reported speech … that means statement questions and then commands, and then we'll do it together for the whole class in the blackboard. And then I'll give them exercises … the purpose consolidation, to check whether they understand it or not.

Shortly after this interview Rose was observed giving a lesson on reported speech which followed exactly the sequence described above. One feature of the input throughout the lesson was that the 'standardised exercises' encouraged a very formulaic application of all the 'rules', with the result that students were being asked to produce extremely unnatural sentences when transforming direct speech into indirect speech, for example:

The farmer told his wife 'Go and feed the ducks now'
    The farmer told his wife to go and feed the ducks then

The inadequacies of such input could, of course, be seen as a product of the materials rather than any direct contribution from the teacher. Certainly, there was little evidence that Rose's TMA was actively engaged in filtering the content of the worksheets. Whether this was due to a lack of time, a lack of confidence, or a lack of metalinguistic awareness is hard to judge. However, Rose appeared not to perceive any weakness in the exercises, even when prompted to do so in post-lesson discussion, a fact which could in itself be taken as an indication of the limitations of her TMA.

These limitations became apparent in the lesson, on the few occasions when Rose either embellished or departed from the worksheet 'script', producing statements which were potentially sources of great confusion for the students. In the middle of the lesson, for instance, she attempted to give guidelines for 'changes in modal verbs':

OK now we'll take a look at changes in modal verbs. Sometimes the word *must* will remain unchanged. However, sometimes we have to change it into *had to*. Do you know under what situations we will have to change the word *must* into *had to* in reported speech? When the word *must* in the direct

speech refers to something that happens in the future. So you have to change it into *had to* in the reported speech, OK?'

This statement, which went beyond anything on the worksheet, directly contradicts the 'rules' given in many reference grammars. For example, according to Swan's *Practical English Usage: Second Edition*: 'The modals *would, should, could, might, ought* and *must* are usually unchanged after past reporting verbs in indirect speech' (Swan, 1995: 505). Rose also did nothing to clarify her prescriptive statement. Instead, appearing to accept the lack of response to her 'OK?' as an indication that the students had understood, she moved on to the next item on the worksheet without further comment.

A second example of the potential confusion caused by the limitations of Rose's TMA came in the very last moments of the lesson, when the students were given the following sentence to transform: *Did you sleep well last night? he asked her.* The nominated student produced the transformation *He asked her if she had slept well the night before.* Rose accepted the answer, rephrased the reported question, replacing (without explanation) *the night before* with *the previous night*, and then asked the class 'Past perfect or past tense?' After an inaudible response to her question, she said: 'That means you can either write *had slept* or *slept*. Either one is correct. The past tense can remain unchanged in reported speech or change it into past perfect, OK?' Again no explanation, exemplification or clarification was offered, very possibly because Rose was unable to offer any. For those students whose attention was engaged, however, the input on this point must have been highly confusing. On the one hand, Rose's statement seemed to confirm the impression given by the table in the '*standardised exercises*' that tense selection in this case was totally arbitrary. On the other hand, the statement was in direct contradiction to both the examples encountered earlier in the lesson when the past tense in direct speech had been changed without question to past perfect in reported speech.

When interviewed, Rose was very frank about the limitations of her TMA, and offered a vivid example of its impact on input for learning as she described the difficulties she had experienced in a recent lesson teaching passive voice, and her inability to assist the efforts of one student to relate form to meaning:

> It's easy if you ask them to rewrite the sentences, because they find it easy to follow. However, when you give them a context in paragraph, they cannot fill in the correct verb. They just don't know when are we supposed to use passive voice and when we are supposed to use active voice. And one of the students even asked me 'Miss Wong, why do we have to use passive voice in our daily life?' and I find this question difficult to answer, ha, and I 'Oh I'll tell you next time' … and then I asked my colleagues 'why do use and teach passive voice?' and no one can give me the correct answer. And then I go home and think about it. But even now I really don't know how to answer that student's questions. I finish the worksheets with them and they know how to rewrite the sentences. But I don't know how to explain to them.

Benjamin

Benjamin is not such a fluent communicator as Rose, despite an experience of

'immersion' in an English-speaking environment for his tertiary studies, which has left him with a strong North American accent. In contrast with Rose, Benjamin claims to like grammar. He says that he enjoys teaching grammar, because, in his words: 'I'm just a grammar person I think'. However, like Rose, Benjamin also feels that he did not learn much grammar from his own teachers: 'When I learn more about grammar, I read books myself, because when I was in secondary schools I didn't learn much from the teachers'.

Benjamin's experience as a teacher has led him to conclude that students lack interest in grammar because they have so few opportunities to use English: 'My past impression is that they're not quite interested in learning grammar, because they don't have chance to use it. Especially they have little chance to speak in English'. As a result, Benjamin adopts an exam-oriented approach, which he likens to 'instant noodles':

> So my approach is realistically … target for tests and examinations I would say. So it's just like instant noodles … feed them, and they have to try to have it, eat it yeh … learn something they need mechanically to fit in the examinations and tests.

In following this exam-oriented approach to teaching Benjamin uses: '… basically the textbook. If I have more time, I'll prepare some worksheets for them. It is better tailored … I think it is tailored, so it is easier for them to digest'.

In both the observed lessons (possibly because the lessons were being observed) Benjamin attempted to go beyond the textbook to provide something 'better tailored' to the needs of his students. An analysis of the first of those lessons will show the extent to which this made the 'instant noodles' easier to digest, and the impact which Benjamin's TMA had upon the input made available for learning.

In the interview, which happened to precede the observed lesson, Benjamin identified his aim as:

> I am going to teach future continuous tense today. I will relate it to their … existing knowledge, and this is the present continuous tense.

In the actual lesson, Benjamin did indeed begin with recall of the present continuous, a strategy which might have been useful if it had helped students towards an appreciation of the common semantic features of progressive aspect when used in combination with various verb forms. Benjamin, however, made no such connections. Instead, having emphasised the link between present continuous and *now*, his presentation of the future continuous merely pointed out that the time referred to was future not present.

First, he introduced his topic: 'Today I'd like to introduce you to a new one, future continuous tense. What's it all about, future continuous tense?' Having received no answer to his question, he gave an example:

> *Tom will be washing his car tomorrow morning*. The time here is tomorrow morning. It is not now. It is tomorrow morning.

He then drew a time-line in an attempt to clarify the time referred to:

> I'm talking at this point of time [pointing to TODAY on time-line] … I'm

saying *Tom will be washing his car tomorrow morning*. This period OK? [pointing to tomorrow morning on time-line] … I'm talking about this time and it hasn't existed yet OK? The time still doesn't happen yet, right? When we are talking the situation like this, we use future continuous tense'

Having established the link between the future continuous and reference to future time, Benjamin spent much of the remainder of the lesson focusing on adverbial markers of future time reference, rather than any distinctive meaning associated with the future continuous. As a result, when the class were doing a mechanical practice exercise from the textbook, putting verbs into the future continuous,

e.g. *Thomas (complete)* .... *his university degree next year*

Benjamin made a point of getting the students to underline all the 'words of time' as soon as they had produced the required verb form. This association of the future continuous with certain time adverbials was a recurrent theme, possibly because it was seen as being potentially helpful in the examination context:

You can see the *later* here, *later* right? When we are using future continuous tense, we use these words of time, OK? *later*, *later*.

I want to introduce you to some words of time that we always use to tell the future continuous tense OK? *later*, *in three weeks' time*, *tomorrow morning*.

Benjamin showed no sign of recognising that a major learning difficulty for the students might be in understanding the specific meaning/use of the future continuous in relation to other ways of talking about the future. His self-produced worksheet containing a multiple-choice task involving time-lines did not make the meaning/use much clearer, since three of his four example sentences could be expressed using a variety of other future forms, see Figure 2:
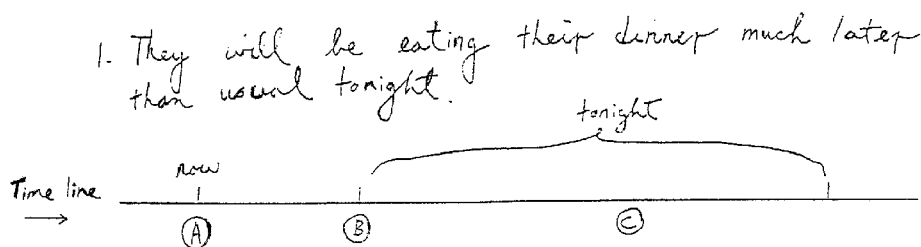

Figure 2

In one of his four examples Benjamin did use future continuous in a distinctive way, in combination with the adverb *still* to convey continuity from present to future time:

In the example of number 4 *I will still be sitting in the same place when you return …* the future continuous tense is used from now on to later right? I'm sitting here now, and I will be sitting here when you return. It is now 1.30 pm and then you will be back at 3 pm right? Understand?

This use was not emphasised, however, and no attempt was made to contrast the future continuous with other ways of talking about future time. Instead, Benjamin's paraphrased explanations of sentences in the practice exercises were potential sources of great confusion because of the use of a range of verb forms, apparently interchangeably, to refer to future time:

They will be eating their dinner much later than usual tonight. Tonight they are going to have dinner right? But it will be late, it will be later.

He will not be saving the money he's going to earn in the summer. This summer he's going to earn some money. But he's not going to save it. He will not be saving the money. He will use up all the money. He don't save any money …

Although there were some differences between this lesson and Rose's, in that Benjamin had sufficient confidence in his own TMA that he was not wholly reliant on materials created by others, the examples above suggest that the impact of Benjamin's TMA upon the input made available for learning was potentially equally negative. No clear distinctions were made between the future continuous and other, previously taught, ways of talking about the future, and students were given the misleading impression that there was a close, if not unique, association between certain future time adverbials and the future continuous.

Alex

The final example is a more positive one, in that it demonstrates clearly how TMA can have a constructive influence in shaping the input made available for learning.

Alex is a rather more experienced teacher than either Benjamin or Rose: he has been a teacher for 10 years, all spent in the same school. Alex received the whole of his education in Hong Kong, but his secondary schooling, like Rose's, was English-medium in all subjects except Chinese and Chinese History. He is a very confident, proficient communicator in English, possessing a relaxed ease with the language which carries over into his classroom teaching.

Alex's own experience of learning English was very traditional and grammar-focused:

I think the only thing I learned in school … every day when I went to my English class I sat there and did a lot of grammar exercises, filling in blanks, answering questions, writing sentences mechanically. Every day was like that in my days.

He acknowledges that it was a boring way to learn but he believes that it worked well for him:

I learned English through this old-fashioned boring way and I feel I'm quite successful. I don't know if I am or not, but I feel I'm quite successful.

As a teacher, however, he does not employ the same approach, not because he no longer believes in its efficacy, but because he thinks that Hong Kong students have changed:

> Students are not patient as we were in the past. If we kept using that old method, certainly they will be very bored and they won't bother to do your work at all. You have to handle the discipline problem a lot if you keep using that method … I think [grammar] is important but you have to change the way to do it.

Alex addresses the boredom problem, not by reducing the attention he pays to grammar, but by attempting to deal with grammar in a more interesting manner:

> I think whether it's boring or not depends on how you deal with it. What I can do is to make the activities more interesting, make the communication between me and the class more fun and closer and so on. In that way I make it less boring.

For Alex, grammar is at the centre of what he does as a teacher:

> I still think [grammar] forms the core of everything. Without the correct grammar we can hardly communicate actually, or it's very difficult to communicate. So I think it's a core actually.

As a result, he spends a significant amount of time on grammar, in order to try and help his students improve their performance in, for example, writing:

> I spend quite a lot of time on [grammar] actually. Because if they keep producing compositions with a lot of mistakes and so on, it's quite discouraging to them. I try to provide basic knowledge. Some of them may feel bored because the things I cover may seem very easy to them but to the general class maybe it's appropriate, so I spend a lot of time covering basic things actually with them.

In both the observed lessons Alex demonstrated a commitment to teaching grammar in a way which engaged his students' interest and attention. At the same time, it was clear that he possessed a level of TMA which contributed very positively to the quality of the input made available for learning.

Alex's confidence is shown in the way he regularly makes direct use of learner output as a major source of input into his grammar teaching. The learner output is 'filtered' through Alex's TMA, and shaped to fit with his conception of what he wants to make available as input for learning. As Alex describes it, he frequently gives his students a context or a theme: '… just to give them ideas. I'll simply pick up a few which are exactly what I want and some close to what I want. I will start with those not exactly what I want, and try to see if there would be any relationship between the two, and then from there go on to what I want to talk about'.

The first observed lesson showed this process in action. Alex wanted to focus on modals expressing obligation. Having got the students to draft a set of rules for a swimming pool, he asked them to produce at least four rules relating to the conduct of the English lesson. The students were then put in pairs and asked to discuss each other's rules. Each pair had to decide whether their partner's proposed rules were reasonable or unreasonable, and to select their two most

important rules. Alex then elicited some of the suggested rules, and listed five of them on the board.

Noting that all five examples were expressed negatively, using the negative form of the modal *can*, Alex invited the class to think about how they would re-express the ideas positively. He then elicited possible ways of expressing rules positively. In doing so, he gave a clear demonstration of his highly developed TMA with his skilful deflection of the inappropriate suggestion *may*, where he illustrated its meaning and clarified its unsuitability for expressing rules without using any metalanguage:

> … Rewrite them in a positive way. Besides the word *can*, what can we use? What other words like the word *can*? … [Ss '*Must*'] … For rules we can use *must*. What else? … [Ss '*May*'] … erm *may* uhuh Is it a good one? For rules? If I say *You may speak in English*, if you don't want to, then you don't do it, right? So will it be OK? No. If you use the word *may*, it means that if you do it, very good … if you don't do it, OK, fine. So for rules maybe not a good one.

The second observed lesson shed light on Alex's TMA in a rather different way, this time in the skill with which he 'filtered' and dealt with the deficiencies of the input provided by the textbook (Sampson, 1994). The grammar point in this particular case was the use of the present participle to join two sentences with the same subject. According to the students' version of the textbook:

> We can use the present participle, *-ing*, to join together two sentences with the same subject.

> *Example*:

> Mr Lee heard a noise. He got up and looked outside.

> *Hearing* a noise, Mr Lee got up and looked outside.

Alex began by focusing briefly on the example given in the book. He then introduced examples of his own to illustrate the process of combining sentences with the same subject, before asking the students to work sentence by sentence through the practice exercise in the textbook.

The rubric for the exercise established the context of a policeman going to the scene of a robbery, and then gave the students the following instructions:

> Rewrite the sentences using the correct *-ing* participle. Follow the example:

> (1) Peter received a call on his radio. He went straight to the scene of the robbery.
>   *Receiving a call on his radio, Peter went straight to the scene of the robbery.*

The first three items in the exercise were as follows:

> (2) He saw a man lying on the floor. He went over to help him.
> (3) He saw that the man was badly injured, so Peter called an ambulance.
> (4) The ambulance arrived a few minutes later. The man was taken to hospital.

If the learner obeys the instruction to follow the example, and understands the

mechanics of the process, there are no major problems with numbers (2) and (3). Number (4), however, is a different matter, because the two sentences do not have the same subject. In fairness to the textbook, one might imagine this to be a deliberate trap, planted to oblige students to think carefully about the task rather than just completing it mechanically. However, there is no indication in the Teacher's Book that there is any such intention. Given the rubric 'Follow the example', it would seem that conforming to the pattern was the desired learner behaviour rather than anything involving more active thought. Number 4 there-fore presents a challenge to any teacher's metalinguistic awareness, and a trap for any teacher whose TMA is not fully engaged.

In the post-lesson discussion, Alex revealed that he had noticed the potential difficulty himself when looking at the material before the lesson. When the class reached number 4, he therefore first of all asked his students if there was any problem in combining the two sentences. Having elicited the fact that the subjects of the two sentences were different, Alex then asked the students how they could overcome the difficulty. When someone eventually suggested modi-fying the two original sentences so that the subjects were the same, Alex guided the students to make a change to the second sentence:

> The ambulance took the man to hospital

so that they could then join the sentences in accordance with the desired pattern:

> Arriving a few minutes later, the ambulance took the man to hospital.

The whole procedure was accomplished as if number 4 presented an interesting learning challenge rather than an unintended slip in the textbook.

Conclusion

It was argued in the first part of the paper that TMA plays a crucial role in structuring input so that it is potentially of maximum usefulness to learners. The short profiles above, with their snapshots of the TMA of three teachers, appear to lend support to this argument. At the same time, they illustrate some of the ways in which TMA can affect the input made available for learning, both negatively and positively.

It was suggested earlier that there are three main sources of input for class-room FL learners, and that TMA can interact significantly with all three sources. This is exemplified in the profiles above. All the profiles, for instance, show the teacher's metalinguistic awareness interacting with input prepared by others: either the textbook or, in Rose's case, the school's 'standardised exercises'. In making such input available to learners, teachers may respond in various ways, with the nature of their response being at least in part dictated by their TMA. The three profiles give some indication of the range of possible responses: from the unaware, uncritical, diffident acceptance of all that the materials say, as revealed in Rose's lesson, to the rather more aware and self-confident modification of perceived textbook inadequacies as shown in the second of Alex's lessons.

The three profiles also provide examples of each teacher's own output, in instances when this output is clearly intended as input for learning. In each case, TMA and the limitations of an individual teacher's metalinguistic awareness can

be seen to have a strong influence on the potential usefulness of this source as input for learning.

In the typical teacher-centred Hong Kong classroom, where students' few public utterances are often inaudible to anyone but the teacher, learner output is generally the least commonly available of the three potential sources of input for learning. It is nevertheless an important potential source of input, and this is seen in the profiles, which illustrate contrasting teacher responses to learner output, both constructive (as in Alex's case) and somewhat less so (for example, Rose). As with the two other sources, TMA is likely to have a significant effect upon the nature of the teacher's interaction with learner output and the extent to which any teacher is able to exploit such output positively.

It should be clear from the three profiles that in teacher performance TMA interacts with a whole range of more generic aspects of pedagogical competence, as well as with characteristics of teacher personality and psychological make-up. Nevertheless, given the closeness of its relationship with a teacher's implicit and explicit language knowledge, and its distinct additional dimension of cognitions and reflection about language, there does seem to be a strong justification for recognising it as a specifically language-related facet of L2 teacher competence. There appears to be an equally powerful argument for acknowledging the extent of the importance of TMA in any approach to L2 education which attempts to structure input for learning. The precise role of TMA in this process is an area to which increased research attention could usefully be paid.

Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Dr Stephen Andrews, Department of Curriculum Studies, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong (sandrews@hkucc.hku.hk).

Notes

1. 'Form-focused' is used to refer to a 'focus on forms' (Long, 1991) or 'forms-focused' in the terminology used by Doughty and Williams (1998: 4).
2. I.e. with a 'focus on form' in Long's (1991) terminology.
3. It is important to note that it is a matter of considerable official concern in Hong Kong that so many teachers of English lack proper training. In 1995 the Hong Kong Education Commission expressed the view that one of the main reasons for weaknesses in language in education was '… the fact that a large number of language teachers are not fully trained' (ECR6: vii). A 1991 government survey suggested that only 21% of Hong Kong's graduate secondary school teachers of English had both subject-training and professional training.

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