

1. Impact case study title: Bringing the benefits of grammar knowledge closer to practitioners

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3. Research cluster: Emerging Methods and Research in Language Sciences

4. College : CAS

5. Department: English

6. Background:

This research focuses on the second language acquisition (SLA) of tense and aspect, which are persistently problematic areas of grammar for language students to master. It has led to the development and delivery of workshops for language teachers which deliver three impacts:

- an enhanced knowledge of the linguistic properties of tense and aspect;
- an understanding of the reasons underlying learners' difficulties;
- the consideration of effective pedagogical techniques in grammar teaching.

The teachers' improved confidence and skills lead to greater motivation and engagement by their students, delivering the main impacts which are improvements in education and the learning of second languages.

7. Outputs:

Benati, A., Lee, J. (2008). From Processing Instruction on the acquisition of English Past Tense to secondary transfer of teaching effects on English Third person singular present tense (pp.88-120). In A. Benati & J. Lee (Eds.) *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary And Cumulative Effects*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Benati, A., & Mavrantoni, M. (2013). The effects of Processing Instruction and Traditional Instruction on two different School-age learners: the case of English Present Simple Tense. In J. Lee & A. Benati (Eds.), *Individual Differences and Processing Instruction*. London: Equinox.

Angelovska, T. and Benati, A. (2013). Third Person Singular (in press, 2013). In J. Lee & A. Benati (Eds.), *Individual Differences and Processing Instruction*. London: Equinox.

Learning a second language is one of the key ways individuals access other cultures and improve their chances in the employment market. Higher linguistic attainment is in direct relation to more opportunities of social integration and economic prosperity. However, many adults have problems learning grammatical features.

This research focuses on the second language acquisition of tense and aspect, areas of grammar which practitioners find particularly difficult to teach and learners find persistently problematic to acquire. The findings, which explain where the problems lie and provide solutions to overcome them, have led the research team to develop and deliver **professional development workshops** for language teachers.

The workshops have three impacts for participants:

1. an enhanced knowledge of the linguistic properties of tense and aspect;
2. an understanding of the reasons underlying learners' difficulties;
3. the consideration of effective pedagogical techniques in grammar teaching.

The workshops are offered with the aim of equipping teachers with practical and theoretical knowledge to

boost their self-confidence, and transform tense and aspect instruction into a more meaningful and rewarding experience. In turn this motivates and engages language students to develop their language skills in this area.

Two types of feedback are gathered. The first is a questionnaire completed by participants immediately after the workshop. The second is feedback requested from line managers after two weeks. An example comment is: "They (the teachers) got a lot out of it in terms of their professional development as teachers, in deepening their understanding of L2 acquisition, their individual learners and the concept of fossilized errors." The feedback offered the following evidence of the three impacts:

1. **Expanding teacher knowledge of tense and aspect**

The first impact of our research has been that teachers have become more confident and knowledgeable practitioners, by giving them a deeper understanding of the properties underlying tense and aspect forms. Of the thirteen participants, twelve claims to have found it very useful to have increased their knowledge of the underlying properties of tense and aspect.

2. **Understanding students' persistent difficulties with tense and aspect**

The second impact has been that twelve out of the thirteen teachers found it extremely helpful to explore why L2 learners find tense and aspect so difficult to acquire. One teacher commented that "teachers tend to ignore the reasons why students find it so difficult to acquire tense and aspect *due to a lack of insight*". They now understand that there will be different rates of progress amongst learners from different L1 backgrounds within a class, as well as different levels of attainment, and they can act upon this accordingly in the classroom.

3. **Learning effective pedagogy**

The third impact has been to enhance participants' understanding of effective pedagogical techniques in grammar instruction. Nine out of ten participants found it very useful. They particularly welcomed the practical applications and examples, as exemplified by "much to test in the classroom, with some practical advice on task development".

9. Sources to corroborate impact:

Participants reported that they had incorporated the newly learnt knowledge and strategies into their lesson plans and teaching practice, providing a long-term effect of the impact of the activity. Finally, according to the feedback, seventeen out of eighteen participants would definitely recommend the workshop, with one teacher commenting "It was extremely useful. The workshop raised valid points; therefore all teachers should attend one." Both Directors of Studies have also asked the team to facilitate further workshops.

The learning and teaching principles apply to other areas of grammar, e.g. gender concord and determiners, so new workshops covering these aspects are being developed as well as rolling out the tense and aspect workshop.