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Merging a Metalinguistic Grammar Approach with L2 Academic Process Writing: ELLs in Community College

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Abstract

This action research study evaluates a classroom approach incorporating a reflective, metacognitive component within a second language process-oriented writing environment. Inspired by the literature and developed by the first author, this approach seeks to provide English language learners (ELLs) with a command of metalinguistic principles through a process of analysis and discovery, helping them develop greater control and accuracy in the syntactic and rhetorical structure of their writing.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected over three years from 1,016 ELLs at an urban community college, comparing outcomes from the experimental L2 writing classes to those using other approaches. The experimental approach was more successful for ELLs, who passed the institutional writing test at a modest rate (approximately 50%), but one substantially higher than that of students in other classes (20%-28%). Survey and interview data demonstrated student satisfaction with the approach but frustration with class time limitations.

Introduction

Non-native English learners who enter college face a unique set of challenges. They are expected to master rhetorical and grammatical academic writing skills while acquiring their second language. Traditional second language writing methodology typically incorporated ad hoc rules applied to decontextualized sentences and/or teacher-corrected pieces of students' writing (Eisenstein Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997).

The process-writing approach seemed to be a better alternative, as it gave learners a student-centered meaning-driven environment in which to improve their writing. Many positive outcomes of process writing have been noted, particularly in areas of fluency and comprehensibility. Learners were given personal attention in writing conferences and encouraged to develop a unique voice (Houk, 2005). Attention to language form was less emphasized than communication through writing, and written drafts were revised a series of times through a recursive process of peer and teacher feedback (Raimes, 1991; Zamel, 1989, 1992; Ziv, 1982). Academic non-native English learners, while benefiting from a process-oriented experience, nevertheless, often fail to reach a level of grammatical accuracy and rhetorical clarity in their English writing sufficient to enable them to function effectively in academic and professional environments (Ferris, 2002; Hyland, 2003). Furthermore, they are often unable to pass high stakes writing examinations needed for entry into mainstream classes.

This action research study (Parsons & Brown, 2002) reports an experimental classroom approach used in an urban community college, incorporating a specific and substantial reflective, metacognitive component within a process-oriented writing environment. Developed by Camhi (1999, 2000, 2001, 2004), the experimental approach, referred to here as the GAINS approach (Grammar Awareness through Isolation, Integration, and Scaffolding), aims to preserve the benefits of process writing while providing learners with an opportunity to develop an explicit command of metalinguistic constructs, leading to greater control and accuracy in Standard American Academic English (SAAE). The researchers gathered data over a period of 3 years, comparing test results among advanced-level English language learners (ELLs) who attended classes that utilized different pedagogical approaches to second language composition. Passing the Writing Assessment Test (WAT) which was given to ELLs at semester's end, was required for entry into most credit-bearing content classes at the college. [1]

This study evaluated whether advanced ELLs in an urban community college who had taken a class based on the GAINS approach (GA) passed the English WAT at a significantly higher rate than students from the same population who had taken other writing classes and addressed students' perceptions and experiences. (See Lederman (1980) for a complete description of the WAT, its development and use.)

Background

The history of language teaching has recorded many swings of the pendulum regarding developing grammatical accuracy for second language (L2) learners, ranging from approaches in which learning conscious grammar is central to methods consisting primarily of language use. Kelly (1969) reviewed these conflicting opinions on grammar teaching from Comenius onward. More recent texts (Doughty, 2003; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Matsuda, Cox, Jordan & Ortmeier-Hooper, 2006; Reid, 1994; Sharwood Smith, 1993; Trampe, 1994) continue to reflect a lack of consensus on this issue. Thornbury (1998, 1999)

has noted the persistence of conscious attention to grammar in second-language teaching despite the pedagogical fashion of the moment.

Krashen (1985, 1994, 1996) takes the strong position that information meaningful to the learner and sufficiently contextualized to be understandable (comprehensible input) at an appropriate developmental level (i+1) in the presence of a low-stress learning environment and positive learner mentality (low affective filter) is sufficient to promote L2 acquisition; conscious attention to form is thought to have limited use, primarily for self-correction when time is available (Krashen, 1993). In a similar vein, Schulz (1991) takes the conservative view that conscious grammar analysis can improve performance on discrete point tests but has little influence on spontaneous language use.

Rutherford (1988) argues for attention to form in language teaching but notes that consciousness-raising embraces a continuum of awareness; Eisenstein (1983, 1987) also advocates incorporating conscious grammar in adult second language pedagogy. Sokolik (1990) stresses that adults have superior cognitive abilities to extract principles from data. Over time, children can acquire native-like L2 competence while few adults can (Ioup, 2005). How can we exploit adults' advanced cognitive abilities to enhance their second language acquisition?

Ellis (1994, 2001) and Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1988) suggest that explicit attention to structural regularities of the language that the learner is seeking to acquire can affect the growth of subconscious L2 grammatical knowledge. More recently the importance of focus on form has been re-introduced into L2 pedagogy (Doughty, 2003; Williams, 2005). In a series of influential articles, Schmidt (1990, 1996, 2001) makes the claim that "noticing" aspects of L2 grammar is a crucial element in adult interlanguage development. It is therefore an important role of the teacher to help students notice formal aspects of the language as a crucial first step to learning how to control them in their own performance.

Eisenstein Ebsworth and Schweers (1997) find that many college ESL teachers in the U.S.A. and Puerto Rico support a role for conscious L2 grammar instruction in L2 classes. Goldstein (2005) also reports that many teachers believe students require some form of feedback on their writing and need explicit input from experts or mentors. Harley (1993) questions whether particular grammatical forms can be successfully taught while Pica (1994) reports that the acquisition of some grammar rules will be accelerated through explicit instruction. Doff (1988) advocates contextualization and isolation of grammar elements but cautions that the level of complexity in a grammar explanation may exceed the learner's developmental level and L2 processing ability. However, Schoonen et al. (2003) report that second language writers may utilize metacognitive knowledge despite limited L2 linguistic and processing proficiency.

There has also been significant debate regarding the role of error correction in second language writing, as there has been in first language writing. Truscott (1996) argues against grammar correction while Ferris (2004) delineates a role for feedback that raises the

learner's awareness of errors (negative feedback). Such controversies have encouraged researchers to continue exploring the role of explicit grammar instruction in language learning.

An inclusive view integrating metalinguistic and communicative activities in language teaching is also widely supported in the literature (Eisenstein Ebsworth, 1998; Ellis, Basturkman & Loewen, 2001; Fotos, 1994; Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Montgomery & Eisenstein, 1986; Savignon, 1991, 2002; Van Patten & Cadierno, 1993). Pennington (1995) views students as active participants engaged in matching grammar options to contextualized meaning and emphasizes the importance of raising learners' consciousness of grammatical form.

While we have shown that a substantial body of literature recommends a grammar component in ELL classes, to date there is no clear description or consensus on what such a component might entail. There is a tendency to cluster the many possible varieties of grammar-specific pedagogies under a single umbrella term without distinguishing among them in a principled way (Williams, 2005). This lack of a shared operational definition for what constitutes grammar instruction may be in part responsible for the controversial nature of the grammar question (Camhi, 2000). It is hoped that the research presented here will contribute to the more specific evaluation of how conscious grammar teaching may be used to support L2 writing development.

The complexity of producing academic writing is underscored by Lesaux and Geva's recent research synthesis (2006). They note that writing "is an integrated text-level process" (p. 58) that incorporates many components such as linguistic awareness, attention, and higher order skills including metacognitive functions, strategy use, and self regulation (Berninger & Richards, 2002).

In addition to addressing sentence-level grammar in learners' second language writing, conscious attention to second language discourse patterns is crucial (Celce-Murcia, 1991; Hinkel, 2003; Johns, 2002; Leow, 2000). Students must structure their college-level texts to conform to the rhetorical principles of SAAE (Belcher & Braine, 1995; Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002; Connor, 1996; Leki & Carson, 1997). In addition, Larsen-Freeman (2003) observes that even sentence-level aspects of grammar are often tied to a broader level of discourse, constituting "a grammar of discourse" (p. 68) that includes cohesion, coherence, and texture. These aspects of discourse grammar have been extensively studied and related to writing by Halliday and others (see, for example, Christie, 1999b; Halliday, 1996; Martin, 1992).

Tardy (2005) addresses the component of rhetorical knowledge associated with advanced academic literacy. Relevant to this issue, Celce-Murcia (2002) stresses the intersection of grammar and discourse competence in academic writing, highlighting such features as voice, (active, passive, ergative), existential *there* constructions and logical connectors. The need for awareness of appropriate grammatical and lexical choices in curricula for teachers and

researchers to support the academic literacy of learners who must match meaning in writing to the register expected in school settings is underscored by Schleppegrell (2001).

Recent studies confirm Kaplan's (1966, 1987) observation that discourse structures are associated with particular linguistic communities and texts and that particular genres diverge from each other in complex ways. Christie (1999a) notes that "Genres. . . form a potential basis for reflecting and critiquing the ways in which knowledge and information are organized and constructed in the English language." (p. 762). Simpson (2000) demonstrated a difference in coherence patterns in English vs. Spanish academic writing. (See also the seminal work of Bhatia, 1993; Johns, 1997; and Swales, 1990.)

Hyon (1996) detailed three traditions of theory and research in genre analysis, namely ESP (English for Specific Purposes), North American New Rhetoric, and Australian systemic functional linguistics (p. 694). She connected each perspective to both general and explicit suggestions for how to support learners' reading and writing in particular genres. Indeed, GA can be subsumed within the framework of grammar-based pedagogy as detailed by Hyon (pp. 697-698). The GA approach used in our study echoes many of the elements discussed in Hyon's review, particularly those referent to the ESP and Australian models for teaching academic writing. For example, included are the identification of global organization patterns in written genres and sentence level grammatical features as suggested by Swales (1990) and insights on global text structure and sentence level features as suggested by Christie (1992).

The challenges of accommodating L2 academic rhetorical patterns in learners' writing continue to be reported in the literature (Fishman and McCarthy, 2001; Freedman, 1987, 1993; Gentil, 2005; Kang, 2005; Leki, 2003; Swales & Feak, 2004). Mu and Carrington (2007) state that, unlike other aspects of L1 writing, rhetorical strategies may not positively transfer to the L2. While Freedman (1993) contended that teaching of genre had limited value, Hammond (1987) and Hagan et al. (1993) stressed the importance for learners of making textual structures and features explicit.

Within language, alternative genres also reflect contrasting discourse structures (Connor, 1996; Johns, 2002). Thornbury (1999) stresses the importance of considering the genre in which students are writing. Hanauer (1998) found that using prototypical texts as models supported ELLs' development of genre knowledge in English poetry. Johns (2005) specifically addressed the need for college students to focus on these rhetorical aspects of SAAE in their reading and writing.

Action research to investigate issues such as focus on form in language classrooms has been highly recommended by some researchers (Nunan, 1990; Williams, 1995). In a study of ESL course-based field trips, Montgomery and Eisenstein (1986) showed that the combination of metalinguistic language learning from a traditional grammar class and a real-world communicative environment for natural input provided by a field-based class enhanced grammatical accuracy. The current study uses an action-research approach in a community

college setting to provide additional evidence of how a particular instance of form-focused instruction can influence writing in a second language.

The GAINS Writing Approach

Camhi has evolved the GAINS approach (Grammar Awareness through Isolation, Integration, and Scaffolding) a classroom paradigm to support non-native college ELLs' writing development through the addition of a metacognitive component in a process-writing classroom (Camhi, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004). The GAINS Approach (GA) addresses two essential components of writing through both experiential and metalinguistic means: principles of sentence structure and guidelines for rhetorical structure. First, let us consider the sentence level component.

The GA grammar paradigm is, in part, drawn from the perspective of those theoretical linguists (Chomsky, 1965, 1986) and computer scientists/linguists (Hovey, 1993; Scott, 1993) who view syntax as the simplest of the grammar components in that it requires the least number of rules to determine its structure. This component serves as the fulcrum through which the interrelationships among the other more complex components—such as the semantic and rhetorical—can be explicated (Camhi, 2000). While the GA approach leads to an integration of grammar elements in academic writing, the initial isolation of the syntactic component is a crucial step in the process.

Our current view of communicative language teaching puts our pedagogical focus on meaningful exchanges (Ellis, 1994); grammar is typically introduced and practiced in context and is acquired through interaction and feedback (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). However, many syntactic principles can be articulated without reference to meaning. Despite the traditional bromide that a sentence is a complete thought, the criteria for well-formed sentences are syntactic rather than semantic (Johnson, 2006). Consider the sentence:

> **I might to speak about that*. (An asterisk indicates an incorrect sentence.)

This utterance violates a purely syntactic principle, even though it is comprehensible. Mastery over how to correctly form this sentence (*I might speak about that*) can be achieved in a consistent syntactic manner (modal plus base form of verb). The ability to achieve syntactic accuracy in generating this structure does not mean the learner can use it with semantic and rhetorical appropriateness. The various meanings of modals such as *might* are complex and may take many years to acquire.

In addition, some syntactic structures such as article use are influenced by the interaction of variables that draw upon syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical properties. The GA acknowledges the complexity of such structures and alerts learners that they will be acquired over time through continued language use and analysis. In the GA paradigm, students acquire syntactic principles that subsume a larger set of individual rules (see Camhi (2000) for fuller discussion). These principles help learners judge the syntactic accuracy of their

output during editing. Additional components of grammar evolve over time through production, feedback, and revision.

Syntactic principles are derived through a process of analysis and discovery. At each step, students are presented with a controlled corpus (body of English utterances) reflecting the particular principle being considered. With the assistance of the teacher (and/or the text) students induce from the corpus the principle that underlies the pattern being investigated. To balance this inductive procedure and address those who benefit from explicit formulations, a deductive summary of each process and principle is provided. Each step builds on previous ones. Through scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1986), students practice and evaluate increasingly complex structures as they acquire principles of syntactic well-formedness (see Appendix A for an exemplar of the GA syntactic component).

Students write multiple drafts of their evolving texts. The bulk of grammar skills development occurs as students edit their writings—usually their penultimate and final drafts—for grammatical correctness. Through their own editing as well as through teacher and peer feedback, students identify their grammatical challenges. They use error correction symbols and grammar logs to identify and classify their errors according to type. In *Personalized Grammar Books*, developed and kept by each student, separate pages are reserved for each error type. Students write the sentence in which the error occurs, along with its correction and explanatory notes. Over time, learners observe the pattern of their errors and negotiate systematic means of correcting them. It is here that additional components of grammar that arise in their writing are incorporated: "As their metacognitive awareness of syntactic structures increases, they become freer to focus on the more complex interplay of the semantic and rhetorical aspects of syntactic structure" (Camhi, 2000, p. 130).

The GA also addresses the discourse level of writing. Parallel to the grammar component, students begin with exemplars illustrating the structure of texts following SAAE rhetorical conventions. Initially, students have the opportunity to analyze these models, isolating aspects of organization pertaining to main and limiting ideas and supporting details, the building blocks for the architecture of the essay. To lead students to an understanding of the principles of rhetorical organization, the GA draws heavily on the work of Troyka and Nudelman (2003) and other standard texts (Casanave, 2004), by giving students the opportunity to analyze the discourse structure of sample paragraphs and texts as well as their own developing writing. The GA also includes the stages of lesson development in the Teaching and Learning Cycle in genre instruction described by Callaghan and Rothery (1988, cited in Hyon, 1996) which identifies the stages of modeling, joint negotiation of text and independent construction of text.

Students begin their analysis with the introductory paragraph whose organization is a microcosm for the essay. A single paragraph with distinct points can be elaborated so that each point becomes a separate paragraph in itself. These organizing principles can be extended into a longer text such as a scholarly paper or book.

Each aspect under consideration is inspected, analyzed, and practiced to identify and conceptualize the existence of consistent patterns. Parallel to the grammar component, this inductive discovery procedure is followed by a deductive explanation. Principles governing rhetorical structure within SAAE are broken down into manageable chunks of information. Through scaffolding, each piece of information builds on what was developed previously (see Appendix B). Having identified a schema for rhetorical structure, students use readings and their own writings as data to examine and practice the generation and analysis of texts.

Learners adjust their successive drafts to reflect the conventions of SAAE that they are acquiring. As the course evolves, other aspects of meta-discourse are developed such as principles of cohesion and coherence, intentionality, situationality, inter-textuality, and informativity (Cheng & Steffenson, 1996). Also included is the comparison of rhetorical conventions used in academic communities in other parts of the world, in other languages, and in English varieties (Kachru, 2005; see Appendix B for an exemplar). As students gain control over SAAE conventions, they also can potentially gain greater awareness of alternative discourse patterns and become freer to develop their own personal voices.

Research Questions

1. What was the effect of the GA on the development of English writing proficiency as measured by a holistic writing assessment test (WAT) for advanced ESL classes at an urban community college?
2. How did outcomes for the GA sections compare to those of comparable classes from the same student population using alternative approaches?

Research Method

The current study used a mixed research design as recommended by Goldenberg, Rueda, and August (2006) and took place over a period of three years. We compared the outcomes as measured by the WAT for these three categories of classes:

1. The GAINS Approach
2. Writing process and portfolio
3. Other approaches

Writing classes using the GA were taught either by Camhi (50%) or other faculty members trained in the use of this approach (50%). The end-of-semester WAT scores for all ESL writing students in each advanced class were gathered along with questionnaire and interview data from a subset of the population.

Participants

Participants in this intact sample included 1,016 learners in advanced ESL writing classes at Metropolitan Community College (MCC, a pseudonym), an urban multicultural institution

in the northeastern U.S.A. The average age of students in ESL classes was 22.5 (range 16-60). The most common first languages of the participants were Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, French Creole, Arabic, Russian, Korean, and Japanese. Small numbers of students spoke Polish, Farsi, Hindi, and other Indian languages. Students varied in their academic preparation and socioeconomic backgrounds; the majority were working class and not highly literate in English or their mother tongue.

Writing Assessment

All non-native students in the college were placed in ESL writing classes based on their scores on the WAT, given as an English writing pre-test. The WAT is a 50-minute argumentative writing sample written in response to one of two prompts. Criteria for assessment included ". . . ability to address the question chosen, to develop and organize ideas, and to use correct English sentence structure, punctuation and grammar . . . ". The use of dictionaries was not permitted (CUNY Educational Testing website, retrieved July 24, 2008). Each composition was holistically rated and received a score of 2 to 12, based on the combined assessments of two trained raters. A third rater intervened in the event of a discrepancy of 2 or more points, or if the essay received a score of 7. **A score of 7 was not allowed by the institution.** A passing score allowing learners to move on from ESL writing to other classes was 8 or higher. Students at the end of the advanced-level course, which met for a total of 90 hours, were given the WAT once again as a post-measure. Lederman (1980) discusses at length how this test was developed and implemented including the training of rater/evaluators, norming procedures, and the reasons that the test was independently rated at each individual institution in the system, based on a common rubric. [2]

Questionnaire Data

In order to provide more information on the GA classes from the students' perspectives, questionnaire data were gathered on a subset of 65 randomly selected students. On a 4-point scale, in which: 1=very helpful, 2=somewhat helpful, 3=a little helpful, 4=not at all helpful, the students rated nine aspects of the class.

Interview Data

To further explore students' perceptions and experiences, 15 participants from varied language backgrounds selected at random from GA classes participated in open-ended interviews with an independent researcher, a graduate student in TESOL at a local university. (Students from non-GA classes were not available for interviews.)

Limitations

The non-Camhi ESL classes actually represented a range of teaching approaches and styles though most used process writing to some degree. Furthermore, some of category 3 classes (other approaches) incorporated an *ad hoc* metalinguistic component. We intend to study

more carefully the teaching approaches used in other classes in the future. For now, a comparison of results will allow us to evaluate the relative success of GA.

Results

Writing Assessment Test

Of the 1,016 participants, 923 completed their classes and took the WAT. Of these, 188 students had taken GA classes, 510 had taken classes characterized as primarily writing process classes using a portfolio approach, and 225 had taken classes which did not fall into either of these categories. The latter represented a variety of approaches, none of which had sufficient numbers to warrant a category of its own.

Table 1. Learners' Scores on WAT by Group*

Writing Score** Total	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	missing
Class type								
GAINS	-	6	16	73	87	6	-	16
Portfolio	2	34	84	285	94	10	1	50
Other	-	6	29	127	61	1	1	27
TOTAL	2	46	129	485	242	17	2	93

*N = 1016

**As noted above, 7 was not a permissible WAT score.

Out of 188 GA students who took the final WAT, 93 scored 8 or more, comprising 49.5% of students for whom scores were available. This was a much larger proportion than those who had taken other classes. One hundred and five out (105) of 510 portfolio students passed, 20.6% of those tested. For the mixed group, 63 out of 225 students passed, 28% of those tested.

To investigate whether there were statistically significant differences among these three student groups a Chi Square test was used. [2]

Table 2: Pass/Fail by Group of final WAT data

	Pass	Fail	N
GAINS	93 (49.5%)	95 (50.5%)	188
Portfolio	105 (20.6%)	405 (79.4%)	510
Other	63 (28%)	162 (72%)	225

The Chi square was 56.5, df=2, which was a highly significant difference, $p < .001$.

Questionnaire Data

A subset of 65 students filled out a questionnaire to elicit their judgments regarding various aspects of the GA course. With 1=most helpful and 4= least helpful, 9 aspects of the GA class were rated as follows.

Table 3: Questionnaire Data

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Presentation of grammar information	1.17	0.44
Grammar tests	1.21	0.41
Work on essay organization	1.20	0.56
Personal grammar logs	1.34	0.57
Group work	1.39	0.77
Readings	1.32	0.52
Writings	1.12	0.33
Teacher-led activities	1.25	0.54
Student/group-led activities	1.34	0.66

Students assessed the GA classes very positively on all parameters, with "writings" and "presentation of grammar" most positively viewed and "group work" least positively assessed but still considered beneficial.

Interview Data

The 15 students interviewed were all enthusiastic about their overall learning experiences in the GA classes. However, some felt the time allotted for the class was insufficient. Listed briefly are some of the major themes that emerged and were mentioned by three or more students.

- Theme 1: Many students acknowledged that they came to the class with poor writing skills in English. "My grammar is my big problem. . . . Every time when the essay is returned to me, it's all red in the papers."
- Theme 2: Writing in previous classes sometimes didn't help. ". . . Just we had to get into the class and start write write write, but I couldn't develop my writing."
- Theme 3: Before taking this class, many students didn't know what their mistakes were: "The other class. . .like they really wouldn't explain to me what my mistake is."
- Theme 4: Some students were initially resistant to GA, but saw its value as the class developed. "At first, what he did was not clear, and I didn't know why. But later, it helped and I appreciate it."
- Theme 5: Students like the focused components of the GA. "Actually I like the way how we introduce this class. We started with the grammar, and then our writing and developing our writing."
- Theme 6: The GA made grammar easy to understand. "I think it was really simple way to teach a complete sentence. He break it down and give you a lot of examples."
- Theme 7: Students can edit in a principled fashion. "I understand. I can find the mistake. Now I have an idea when I read my paper; that's why I think I did better."
- Theme 8: Students like the Correction Log. "It is very helpful. I can find what problems I have most. Now I know that is what I have to do."
- Theme 9: Working on organization of ideas was helpful. "My English writing, I had a problem before, and I think I start to solve it . . . . The organization . . . I talk about a lot of different things in one paragraph that makes the reader confused, but now I'm trying to focus on one point only . . . . It's going good."
- Theme 10: There was not enough time for everything. "He has a lot to do with the class, and sometimes he keeps the class. It's difficult because it's very short; I need more time."

Discussion and Conclusion

A significantly higher number of students taking the GA writing classes were able to pass the WAT. Questionnaire and interview data indicated a high level of satisfaction with nearly all aspects of the GA course. It is important to note that all classes incorporated a process-writing approach to some degree, including multiple drafts based on teacher and peer feedback. Why were GA students more successful compared with peers in other classes?

As noted above, the GA added a unique principle-driven metalinguistic component, including conscious attention to sentence-level grammar as well as to cohesion and coherence in academic writing. The approach addressed the needs of inductive learners by providing exemplars through which relationships could be analyzed and discovered while deductive learners benefited from the application of consciously stated principles and relationships (Eisenstein, 1983).

An essential GA component involved the isolation of structural aspects of SAAE on two levels. On the sentence level, GA first isolates elements of purely grammatical structure from semantic and lexical considerations. On the discourse level, GA isolates rhetorical relationships from specific topic-related content. What is initially learned through isolation in the GA is then referred to and used continuously in communicative output, monitoring, feedback, and interaction. As recommended by Thornbury (1999), students receive both positive and negative feedback. Through a cumulative process, by breaking down the challenge of SAAE writing into manageable units, students are able to produce and evaluate increasingly complex grammatical and rhetorical structures.

In keeping with the spirit of the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994, 1996), increasing access to metacognitive principles allows students to gain independence from the teacher. Having established a shared basis for analysis, peer feedback is facilitated, as students identify the particular grammatical and rhetorical areas that require correction or development. By responding to individual student's writings, GA diversifies instruction, thereby attempting to accommodate students with different educational backgrounds and varying degrees of L1 and L2 literacy. Like students described by Cope and Kalantzis (1993), many of the students in our study had limited exposure to academic texts. Students work at their own rate only on those issues they need to address.

By establishing a protocol and developing a set of conceptual tools to analyze language data, students can sustain the writing process independently after they leave the classroom. Furthermore, by engaging in analysis and abstraction, learners practice and develop critical thinking skills they will be called upon to use in academic and professional settings.

Despite the success of many students, a substantial number did not pass the WAT after taking the GA classes; indeed, the pass rate was about 50%, though it is notable that this passing rate is much higher for GA students than for the other classes, which had a combined failure rate of over 75%. This suggests the need for further qualitative and longitudinal inquiry into the development of particular learners, including individuals who experience different degrees of success based on the nature of their learning styles (Freedman, 1993), participation, and individual paths of learning (Lesaux & Geva, 2006). As noted, many of our learners lacked the literacy experiences often assumed for students at the college level. For such students, a one-semester writing class is not sufficient and a substantial and sustained academic experience is necessary in order for them to pass gatekeeping measures such as the WAT. We also take note that several learners in their interviews expressed frustration regarding the time limitations imposed by class meetings. It is possible that building in additional time or classes for learners who may require more practice and processing could have resulted in higher pass rates.

Culture-based student and teacher expectations of how writing will be taught could also be of relevance. Schulz (2001) maintains that discrepancies in student and teacher belief systems regarding the nature of grammar teaching and corrective feedback could be "detrimental to learning" (p. 244). Additional variables to consider in future research

include: degree of student motivation, age, literacy, language input, and experiences outside the classroom (August & Ericson, 2006; Klinger & Vaughn, 2000). Finally, preliminary work shows that the GA also has potential to support writing improvement for basic writers and Generation 1.5 learners, that is, those who come from immigrant families but have received substantial education in the U.S.A. This population should be investigated, and learners in classes using other approaches should also be surveyed and interviewed in the future.

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Notes

[1] Recently an alternative writing test was substituted for the WAT in the institution where the study was conducted. Pass rates of all groups are now somewhat higher.

[2] It was inappropriate to use parametric statistics because rather than representing a scale, each score represents a proficiency category tied to descriptors of students' writing (for example, a score of 8 is not necessarily twice as good as a score of 4, although it does represent a higher level of writing proficiency).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Syntax Exemplar

Many ELLs have difficulty with optional relative pronoun deletion. The following outline gives a sense of how a particular lesson addressing this issue might evolve. Students have an opportunity to consider isolated examples and use metalinguistic constructs to assess the well-formedness of the sample sentences or corpus. The information assumed to already be known has been acquired by the students through a process similar to the one described below. Prior to the presentation of the initial corpus for this lesson, the students in this class have already acquired the following elements of English pedagogical grammar:

Every sentence or clause must contain:

> (1) a Time Verb (TV) and (2) the subject of the TV (exception: imperatives).
>
> The students have also learned that:
>
> 1. TV's tell time or have tense.
> 2. -ing words, past participles and infinitives are not TV's. (*They speaking, *They spoken, *They to speak are not well-formed sentences.)
> 3. Modals +base form can substitute for TV's. (They can speak is well-formed.)

We start with the presentation of several isolated examples, both correct and incorrect. These examples constitute the initial corpus.

Teacher to learners: Look at these sentences. Which are possible in English and which are not?

> 1a. The man (whom we saw) is my cousin.
> 1b. The man (we saw) is my cousin.
> 2a. The man (who came here) is my cousin.
> 2b. *The man (came here) is my cousin.

The teacher elicits from the students that 1a, 1b, and 2a are well-formed English sentences but 2b is not. If none of the students can supply this information, the teacher will do so. We analyze the sentences in the corpus one at a time, applying the basic principles, stated above, against the data. We go through the following line of argumentation. For the relative clause in 1a, saw is the TV; we is the subject of the TV. If whom is deleted, the TV will still have a subject; whom can be thus deleted. Therefore, 1b is permissible. For the relative clause in 2a, came is the TV; who is the subject of the TV. If who (in 2b) is eliminated, the TV loses its subject, which is a violation of the basic principle. Therefore, 2b is not permissible.

Once students can control this phenomenon in isolated sentences, they are presented with student-generated texts that include errors of this nature. They must identify the errors and correct them. They use a three-column sheet, specifically dedicated to this error type to list their own errors as they come up in their writing. The sentence or phrase containing error itself is writtten in the first column. The second column is reserved the correction of the error, and the third column is used for additional notes, usually including the constructs and principles learned in class. They can refer to this and all principles learned as they go along and use this metalinguistic knowledge to assess and edit their texts individually, through peer group reflection, and in teacher conferences. By going through this process, students observe the predictive powers of the GA. Students using the GA don't need to learn an ad hoc relative pronoun deletion rule.

Appendix B: Discourse Exemplar

The discourse aspect of the class follows the same order as the sentence level grammar section, beginning with a controlled corpus for analysis and discovering the principles governing particular rhetorical relationships under consideration. For example, students develop the following principles regarding topic sentences in paragraphs. The topic sentence:

1. tells the reader what the paragraph is going to be about (main idea).
2. limits or controls what the paragraph is going to be about (limiting idea).
3. is often, but not always, the first sentence of the paragraph.

Note: At a later stage, learners will discover that not every paragraph has an explicit topic sentence; in many cases of advanced writing, it is inferred by the reader.

Example

A paragraph begins with this sentence: *Supermarkets offer a wide variety of food products, designed primarily for the consumers' convenience*. (from Azar, year, page)

Teacher: "What is this paragraph going to be about? Post offices? School buildings? Grocery stores? Supermarkets? How do we know?"

Students discuss these alternatives and the following is re-stated:

> "The topic sentence tells the reader what the paragraph is going to be about. This is the main idea."
>
> T: Is it going to tell us about the location of supermarkets in your neighborhood? (No). What you can buy in supermarkets? (Yes).

T: What can you buy in a supermarket?
Students: eggs, milk, soap, fruit, magazines, dishes, ice cream, meat, vegetables . . . .
T: What did you have for breakfast? Are you sure you didn't have a sandwich of magazine pages and soap? Could you write about magazines and soap in this paragraph?
S's: No, because the topic sentence tells you it's about FOOD products; in other words, the paragraph is LIMITED to food products you can buy at a supermarket.

Then students explore the aspect of "convenience" as the second limiting idea of the topic sentence.

Once students understand the constraints of what is rhetorically permissible in a paragraph as defined by the main and limiting ideas, they observe the actual paragraph associated with the topic sentence. They consider how the supporting details in that paragraph reflect the rhetorical constraints of paragraph organization. This process is repeated with multiple exemplars.

Becoming More Active

Students' understanding is developed through controlled practice with additional examples that contain information gaps, either in the main idea, limiting idea(s) and/or supporting detail(s). Practice involves various classroom configurations. Students begin as a whole class. As they develop greater command over the principles and their applications, they practice, working in groups, pairs, and as individuals.

For example, given a new topic sentence, the class develops different supporting ideas. All of these supporting details must be referent to the main and limiting ideas stated in the topic sentence.

Paragraph development is further elaborated by expanding each of the supporting details through a variety of techniques, such as examples, quotations, direct questions, anecdotes, comparison, or contrast.. This process follows a consistent procedure including: modeling, analysis, controlled practice, and individual composition.