

How to plan an Italian grammar lesson through an eclectic approach

Come pianificare una lezione di grammatica italiana attraverso un approccio eclettico

Peter Peltekov

University of Calgary, Dept. of Linguistics & Languages, Calgary (Canada)

OPEN  ACCESS

Double blind peer review

Citation: Peltekov, P., (2020). How to plan an Italian grammar lesson through an eclectic approach. *Italian Journal of Educational Research*, 25, 9-21.

Corresponding Author: Peter Peltekov
pnpeltekov@ucalgary.ca

Copyright: © 2020 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Pensa Multimedia and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. IJEDuR is the official journal of Italian Society of Educational Research (www.sird.it).

Received: 11 June 2020

Accepted: 02 October 2020

Published: 11 december 2020

Pensa MultiMedia / ISSN 2038-9744
[https://DOI10.7346/SIRD-022020-P9](https://doi.org/10.7346/SIRD-022020-P9)

Abstract

The present article describes the process of planning a grammar lesson in Italian using an eclectic approach. The lesson plan follows important grammar teaching principles and it is based on current research findings. Instead of following a specific method, it demonstrates how instructors can draw upon various approaches and theories to adapt the instruction to the learners' needs and goals. Although the sample lesson plan is for teachers of L2 Italian, its classroom implications extend to the teaching of other languages. The main purpose of this article is to introduce novice language teachers to the activity of lesson planning and to encourage them to use research in education and applied linguistics to inform their teaching practices according to their teaching context.

Keywords: Lesson planning; Italian grammar; Focus on form; Focus on forms; Eclectic approach.

Riassunto

Il presente articolo descrive il processo di pianificazione di una lezione di grammatica italiana usando un approccio eclettico. Il piano di lezione segue alcuni importanti principi di insegnamento della grammatica e si basa sui risultati della ricerca corrente. Invece di seguire un metodo specifico, il piano della lezione dimostra come gli insegnanti possono attingere a vari approcci e teorie per adattare l'istruzione ai bisogni e agli obiettivi degli studenti. Sebbene il piano di lezione sia per insegnanti di italiano L2, le sue implicazioni didattiche si estendono all'insegnamento di altre lingue. Lo scopo principale di questo articolo è quello di introdurre i nuovi insegnanti di lingue nell'attività di pianificazione delle lezioni e di incoraggiarli a utilizzare la ricerca in educazione e linguistica applicata per informare le loro pratiche pedagogiche a seconda del contesto di insegnamento.

Parole chiave: Piano di lezione; Grammatica italiana; Focus on form; Focus on forms; Approccio eclettico.

1. Introduction

It is no secret that effective language teaching requires a significant degree of planning. Both novice and experienced language teachers need clear lesson plans in order to deliver high quality instruction. In the planning process, they have to consider the potential effects of different teaching methods. Historically, we have witnessed a shift from more grammar-centered to more meaning-oriented methods. Today, it is not uncommon to find language textbooks in which explicit grammar explanations are very reduced, if not absent. Less experienced language teachers may be inclined to base their teaching on a specific textbook, simply because the authors claim to be using the best language teaching method. This is dangerous, as there is no single method that can be equally effective in all learning situations. Instead of adopting one specific method, novice language teachers should be encouraged to use an eclectic approach of planning their teaching by reflecting on the potential benefits each method can have in different contexts and stages of the teaching/learning process. Next, they should find ways to combine the positive aspects of different methodologies into a coherent didactic unit. The present article will demonstrate how an eclectic approach can be effectively used in the planning of a grammar lesson in Italian. The hypothetical situation in which the lesson will be delivered is defined by the following classroom specifications:

- Language: Italian
- Level: Beginner II (e.g., A2.1 of the CEFR)
- Students' Age: Adult (approx. 18-25)
- Estimated Number of Students: 16-20
- Learning Objective: Ability to talk about past events
- Primary Grammar Topic: *Imperfetto* (an imperfective past tense)
- Secondary Grammar Topic: *Passato Prossimo* (a perfective past tense)

2. Literature Background

There are two major questions that need to be answered in the planning of a lesson: *what* should be taught, and *how* it should be taught. Regarding the first question, Ellis (2006) advises that “[t]eachers should endeavour to focus on those grammatical structures that are known to be problematic to learners” (p. 102). One way to determine the potential problematic areas is to identify structures that are different from learners’ first language (Ellis, 2006). Although it is important to keep in mind that modern classrooms are often multilingual (i.e., not all students share the same L1), a very large part of the students enrolling in Italian courses at Western Canadian universities speak English as L1. Therefore, it would be reasonable to dedicate an adequate amount of time to grammar structures that are known to be problematic for anglophone students. Although there is scarce evidence about Italian, research with anglophone learners of L2 French suggests that they experience significant difficulties in distinguishing between perfective and imperfective past tenses (Harley, 1989; Lyster, 2007). The reason is that English does not make this distinction, and when a single form in the first language (e.g., *simple past* in English) can be expressed in two or more ways in the target language (e.g., *passé composé* and *imparfait* in French), depending on the meaning implied, learners often struggle with establishing form-meaning mappings of the language structures (Lyster, 2007). Since *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto* in Italian are functionally equivalent to *passé composé* and *imparfait* in French, we can expect that learners of L2 Italian would encounter the same problems in the acquisition of the two tenses. Therefore, particular attention should be devoted to these two tenses in Italian grammar lessons. Moreover, they need to be presented in relation to each other. This does not mean that the two tenses should be introduced at once, but, ideally, when the second tense is introduced, this should be done by comparing and contrasting it to the first one.

As regards the second major question (How?), Long (2015) presents teachers with three different options: 1) a *focus on meaning* approach, 2) a *focus on forms* approach, and 3) a *focus on form* approach. Although the first approach (i.e., *focus on meaning*) provides learners with richer input and more authentic language models, it can be criticized for several reasons. First of all, this approach of teaching presupposes learners’ ability to acquire the language implicitly from meaningful exchanges. However, learners’ capacity to learn implicitly decreases with age, and adults learn largely explicitly (DeKeyser, 2000; 2003). Moreover,

implicit learning takes more time, whereas formal language instruction needs to be time-efficient, and explicit instruction can speed up the learning process (Long, 2015). Norris and Ortega's (2000) widely cited meta-analysis of studies comparing the effectiveness of implicit and explicit grammar instruction demonstrated that explicit grammar teaching methods are more effective than implicit methods. Another meta-analysis including more recent research confirmed the same findings (Spada & Tomita, 2010). Therefore, an explicit focus on grammar seems to be warranted. Moreover, when the focus is on the distinction between perfective and imperfective past tenses, intensive instruction¹ appears to be particularly advantageous (Harley, 1989). Thus, the *focus on meaning* approach seems to be incompatible with these requirements and it will not be used in the current grammar lesson.

While Long (2015) admits that the next language teaching approach (i.e., *focus on forms*) is the most widely used one, he also criticizes this traditional approach for presenting the target structures in isolation, one at a time. Instead, Long proposes a third option, a *focus on form* approach, where learners' attention is drawn to linguistic problems in context, as they appear during communication. According to him, this approach is more effective because it reflects the idea that "students do not – in fact, cannot – learn (as opposed to learn about) target forms and structures on demand, when and how a teacher or a textbook decree that they should, but only when they are developmentally ready to do so" (p. 24). On the other hand, we can also argue that students need some structured and systematic study of grammar. It is true that the effectiveness of instruction largely depends on students' readiness to acquire a certain structure, but with sufficient practice, they can succeed in automatizing the target structures (Ellis, 2006). Nevertheless, Long (2015) is firmly convinced that that *focus on forms* does not lead to implicit knowledge: "In the most successful (rather rare) cases, automatized procedural knowledge can be accessed so rapidly as to 'pass' for implicit knowledge, although it [is] no such thing" (p. 21).

DeKeyser (1998), who applies a skill acquisition theory to second language grammar learning from a cognitive psychology perspective, explains that in the final stage of skill acquisition (i.e., automatized procedural knowledge), learners can apply rules without thinking about them, and very often they have lost their capacity to explain the nature of the rules. At this point, explicit knowledge can be considered as "procedural knowledge that is functionally equivalent to implicitly acquired knowledge" (DeKeyser, 2003, p. 329). According to this *interface hypothesis*, explicit knowledge can aid the formation of implicit knowledge (DeKeyser, 1998). Therefore, the present grammar lesson will employ an eclectic approach following DeKeyser's (1998) suggestion to include an initial *focus on forms* followed by a *focus on form* approach. Since this theoretical approach is aimed at efficiency for academically oriented adult learners (DeKeyser, 1998), it is particularly well suited for the present teaching and learning context.

2.1 Empirical evidence about the effectiveness of implicit and explicit methods

When examining the effectiveness of teaching methods, it is imperative to look at the empirical evidence beyond the theoretical and logical considerations. The two meta-analyses mentioned earlier (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010) included studies before 2010 and suggested that explicit types of instruction might be more beneficial than implicit types. Table 1 below provides a summary of more recent studies conducted after 2010. A study by Whittle and Lyster (2016) confirmed that L2 learners of Italian can indeed improve their grammatical accuracy as a result of form-focused instruction. However, another large-scale study with learners of different L2s demonstrated that explicit instruction is not more effective than implicit grammar instruction (Tammenga-Helmantel, Arends, & Canrinus, 2014). There is evidence supporting both explicit *focus on forms* as well as more implicit, task-based teaching methods (Markina, 2019). It is important to note that the optimal grammar teaching approach may also depend on learners' individual characteristics such as their proficiency level (Johansen, 2019) and cultural background (Pawlak, 2011). Therefore, using an eclectic approach combining different methods would account for the variety of learning styles and preferences that can be observed among L2 learners.

1 Intensive grammar teaching has been defined as "instruction over a sustained of time (which could be a lesson or a series of lessons covering weeks) concerning a single grammatical structure or, perhaps, a pair of contrasted structures (e.g., English past continuous vs. past simple)" (Ellis, 2006, p. 93).

Author (Year)	Participants	Goal of the Study	Key Findings
Johansen (2019)	Norwegian ESL learners (n = 30) Age = 16-17 years old Level: Higher and lower proficiency groups ESL Teachers (n = 4)	To investigate the beliefs on grammar instruction among students and teachers	Teachers and higher proficiency learners preferred more implicit, meaning-focused methods, but lower proficiency learners appreciated a more explicit focus on form.
Markina (2019)	L2 learners of Russian (n = 54) Age: Adult (undergraduate students) Level: Beginner	To investigate the effectiveness of focus on forms and task-based language teaching (TBLT) methods	The two types of instruction did not have significantly different effects on learners' accuracy and fluency.
Pawlak (2011)	Polish (n = 106) and Italian (n = 106) learners of English Age: Adult (undergraduate students) Level: Advanced	To explore learners' views and beliefs about the role of explicit grammar instruction in second language learning	While both groups of learners acknowledged the importance of grammar, Polish learners tended to perceive grammar instruction as more central to their L2 learning success.
Tammenga-Helmantel et al. (2014)	Dutch learners of German (n = 294), English (n = 425), or Spanish (n = 199) Age: 12-15 years old Level: Beginner	To investigate the effectiveness of implicit and explicit instruction in relation to the complexity of the target structures (i.e., comparative and superlative forms)	Overall, there was no significant difference in the effects of implicit and explicit grammar teaching methods regardless of the complexity of the target structures.
Whittle, A. & Lyster (2016)	Chinese learners of Italian (n = 14) Age: 7-8 years old Level: Beginner	To examine the effects of targeted, form-focused instruction on young second language learners' grammatical accuracy	Form-focused instruction is beneficial even for young L2 learners, as it can raise their awareness of L2 morphology.

Table 1: Empirical studies on grammar teaching methods

2.2 Other considerations

Another important decision to be made is whether to use inductive or deductive approaches of grammar teaching. As suggested by Ellis (2006), the effectiveness of the two approaches depends on a number of factors including learners' aptitude for grammatical analysis. This is perhaps the reason for the rather inconclusive and somewhat contradicting results emerging from previous research, with some studies indicating a superior role of inductive instruction (e.g., Alzu'bi, 2015; Tammenga-Helmantel et al., 2016) and others claiming the superior effectiveness of deductive instruction (e.g., Erlam, 2003; Herron & Tomasello, 1992). A safe decision would therefore be to allow learners to induce the rules for themselves first, and then to provide them with the explicit rules to confirm or reject their initial hypotheses. This would satisfy both learners who prefer discovering the rules inductively as well as those ones who are less ambiguity-tolerant and are used to deductive learning with explicit rules.

Finally, the present lesson is inspired by Swain' output hypothesis, which postulates that output is not just the *product* of learning (as a result of exposure to comprehensible input), but also part of the *process* of second language learning (Swain, 2005). As previous research suggests, comprehension-based instruction methods should be combined with production-based methods (Shintani & Ellis, 2013). Therefore, learners in the current lesson will be engaged in active production of the target language structures in addition to the enriched input they receive.

3. Lesson Structure

A concise summary of the different stages in this lesson is provided in Table 2.

Time	Phase	Goal	Methodology	Social Form
5 min	Introduction & Warm-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To set goals for the class period - To get students to start using the target language 	The teacher briefly outlines the lesson plan and goals on the board. Then students play <i>Bingo</i> with questions in Italian. Materials are premade, but students have to form the yes/no questions themselves and circulate around the classroom to find other students who can answer the questions positively. The winner is the first student who finds positive answers to all questions in a given row, column, or diagonal (See Appendix). The student reads the answers and receives corrective feedback (CF) by the other students and/or the teacher.	All together
10 min	Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To review and consolidate <i>passato prossimo</i> 	Students discuss with a partner what they did the day before, then they report to the rest of the class what they did in common. The teacher provides CF as well as a summary of the grammar topic at the end.	In pairs
30 min	New material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To introduce <i>imperfetto</i>, so that students can talk about different past events 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Present</i> (5 min). The teacher uses PPT slides to present the new grammar structure inductively, followed by explicit explanations about the formation and use of the structure. 2. <i>Practice</i> (10 min). Students practice the new structure in a controlled exercise, while the teacher provides individual help. 3. <i>Produce</i> (15 min). Students use the new structure in a meaningful and creative activity (free-speech production, written & oral). 	Teacher-centered Think-Pair-Share In groups of 4
5 min	Cool-down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To allow time for questions - To assign homework - To set future goals 	The teacher answers any last-minute questions (either content- or organization-related). Then s/he communicates the plan for the next lesson, and assigns mandatory as well as voluntary homework as extension. Students are also asked to reflect on their learning outcomes and to determine what they still need to work on.	All the class together.

Table 2: Summary of the lesson plan

3.1 Warm-up

Good classroom management is the responsibility of the teacher, but it depends on both the teacher and the students. Therefore, it is recommended that at the beginning of the lesson the teacher briefly share the lesson outline and objectives with the students. This would ensure that students have clear goals and expectations for the class session. Once the students know what they will learn, it is the time to involve all of them in the learning process. This is best achieved through a warm-up activity. Akther (2014) outlines the many beneficial effects of warm-up activities at the beginning of a language lesson: creating a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, attracting students' attention, increasing their motivation, helping them to start thinking in the target language, activating background knowledge, etc. For a warm-up activity to be successful, it should follow certain principles, as outlined by Velandia (2008, see Figure 1).

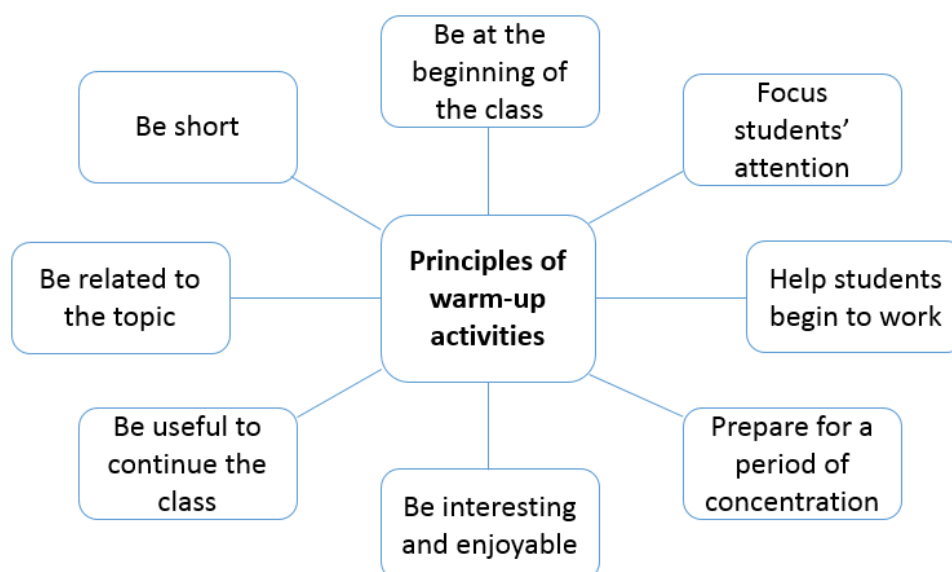


Figure 1: Required aspects of a warm-up activity

In the present lesson, each of the students will receive a handout with 16 items (see Appendix). For each item, students will have to form a yes-no question with the verb in *passato prossimo* as in (1).

- (1) (Visitare) l'Italia *Hai mai visitato l'Italia?*
 [(To visit) Italy *Have you ever visited Italy?*]

Students will move around the room and interview their classmates by trying to collect as many positive answers as possible. Each time one of their peers answers positively, they can add the name of that student in the box next to the question. The name of a given student can appear only once in each student's handout. This ensures that students will talk to as many peers as possible. The first student who completes all the items in a given row, column, or diagonal can yell "Bingo!" and report his/her findings to the rest of the class (e.g., *George ha visitato l'Italia* [George visited Italy], etc.). The rest of the class has to listen carefully and make sure that the student's report is a) truthful and b) grammatically correct, and if this is not the case, then a chance is given to the next student who yells "Bingo!" until there is a winner. This ensures that students are focused on both meaning and accuracy. The competitive nature of the game, on the other hand, is supposed to increase students' motivation and involvement. The teacher serves as a facilitator, and monitors whether students are following the rules. For example, if peers provide inappropriate feedback or fail to provide feedback, the teacher will then intervene and help².

3.2 Review

Long's (2015) argument that "very few grammatical features or constructions that can be taught in isolation, for the simple reason that most are inextricably interrelated," (p. 22) will be taken into consideration in the present grammar lesson. Before the new tense (*imperfetto*) is introduced, students will review and practice *passato prossimo*. Moreover, *imperfetto* will be introduced in relation to *passato prossimo*, because the two tenses are, indeed, inextricably interrelated. The review of the old material will also allow students to consolidate their prior knowledge and to build upon it.

For the purposes of this lesson plan, it is assumed that *passato prossimo* has already been introduced in the previous lessons through a *focus on forms* approach and controlled practice. Therefore, the present

² It is, of course, possible that only the teacher provides feedback. However, this would reduce students' active involvement and the benefits of peer feedback (see later discussion).

lesson can already employ a *focus on form* approach and allow students to use the target structure in spontaneous speech and more communicative activities. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an example of a *focus on form* approach (Long, 2015). The most important characteristic of this approach is that it allows students to complete authentic, real-world activities (Long, 2015). Ellis (2003) describes some of the fundamental characteristics of a language learning task: 1) it involves some kind of an information gap; 2) it motivates learners to use the target language in a meaningful way to close the gap; 3) it allows learners to freely choose what linguistic structures to use (although a *focused* task can predispose them to use a certain structure); and 4) it should have a clear outcome. A similar approach was already used in the warm-up phase, although it did not allow learners the freedom to choose the linguistic structures on their own. The review will be based entirely on TBLT, as described below.

During the review phase students normally receive feedback on their homework. As part of the homework for the present lesson, they will have written 10 sentences describing what they did the day before. Instead of handing in or reading their homework, however, students will be asked to discuss with a partner what they did on the previous day. The outcome of this discussion would be to identify three things they did in common with their partner. For this purpose, students will be encouraged to speak without looking at their notes from the homework. Eventually, they would also have to ask each other questions using the *passato prossimo* to fill the gap in the activity (e.g., *Sei andato in palestra ieri?* [Did you go to the gym yesterday?]), which would elicit more spontaneous speech.

Although in this lecture students will not hand in their homework, their work will still be formatively assessed, and they will receive qualitative feedback (as opposed to scores and grades). For example, after the teacher allows some time for their discussions (e.g., ~ 5 min), s/he can ask certain students (e.g., one student from each pair) to share their findings with the rest of the class. When students produce grammatically correct structures, the teacher will praise them as a way of positive reinforcement. Conversely, if they make grammar mistakes, they will not be criticized, but the teacher will point out what they need to work on (e.g., the choice of an auxiliary verb). Most importantly, they will receive corrective feedback (CF). While students speak, they will receive individual CF, which will be largely implicit in order to maintain the flow of communication. Although recasts are ideal for this purpose, Lyster (2007) warns that students often interpret them as positive, meaning-oriented confirmations or non-corrective repetitions of what they said. Therefore, in order to avoid such ambiguous interpretations, the teacher will use only *partial* recasts (i.e., recasts containing only the erroneous part of the utterance, Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2009)³, which are also the preferred form of recasts by students (Roothoof, & Breeze, 2016). At the end, the teacher will provide collective CF, which will include largely metalinguistic explanations. For example, if most students struggle with the choice of an auxiliary verb (i.e., either *avere* [to have] or *essere* [to be]), the teacher may review/introduce the notion of transitive and intransitive verbs (with the first type using *avere* in compound tenses, and the latter type generally using *essere*). Although this concept is particularly useful for understanding how *passato prossimo* is formed, it is often not included in modern textbooks, probably because of its overly form-focused aspect. However, metalinguistic explanations of this type are useful as they raise students' metalinguistic awareness. Metalinguistic awareness is learners' ability to think and talk analytically about language structures (Svalberg, 2007), and it "has the potential to serve students as an indispensable tool for extracting linguistic information from meaning-oriented input" (Lyster, 2007, p. 65). Therefore, metalinguistic explanations might be regarded as overly form-focused, but they can help students to become more aware of the language as they engage in meaningful and communicative exchanges.

3.3 New material

The presentation of the new material in this lesson will follow the traditional Present-Practice-Produce (PPP) sequence typical for the *focus on forms* approach. Long (2015) describes the PPP approach in the following way:

³ As Ellis et al. (2009) explain, partial recasts are slightly more explicit in nature, and they are less likely to remain unnoticed or to be misinterpreted.

The standard Presentation–Production–Practice (sic) (PPP) formula consists of student exposure to “simplified” dialogues and reading passages written using a limited vocabulary and “seeded” with the structure(s) of the day, intensive practice of the structure(s) via drills and written exercises, followed by gradually “freer practice” – in reality, usually pseudo communicative language use (p. 20).

Despite Long’s (2015) critique of this traditional method, there is no evidence that the method has failed, and it is still an effective tool used by teachers to introduce and practice structural features until they can be used in less controlled conditions (Swan, 2005). Claiming that we should abandon the PPP method and use only a *focus on form* approach is “like saying that, because planting seeds does not guarantee growth, we should stop planting and concentrate on high-quality watering” (Swan, 2005, p. 387). Moreover, the PPP technique is clear-cut and condensed, and as a result, it is also easily implemented in formal instruction (Maftoon & Sarem, 2015). As Ellis (2006) explains, the interface position also supports the idea that “a grammatical structure should be first presented explicitly and then practised until it is fully proceduralised” (p. 97). The sequence used in the PPP approach is also justified by DeKeyser’s (1998) automatization theory, according to which the first stage should involve the explicit teaching of linguistic features (leading to *conscious learning* and *declarative knowledge*), the second stage should include controlled practice (leading to *proceduralizing*), and the third and final stage should allow for practice in communicative activities (leading to *automatization*). While the last stage is very close to the *focus on form* approach, the first two stages are clearly based on a *focus on forms* approach. Presenting and practicing the grammar structures before learners use them in communicative tasks can also be interpreted as a form of proactive form-focused instruction, which represents “an array of opportunities for noticing, awareness, and practice” (Lyster, 2007, p. 59).

3.3.1 The Present-stage

Although the first P in the present-practise-produce sequence normally involves deductive teaching methods (Ellis, 2006), the present lesson will first encourage learners to induce information about the new tense based on the input alone. The students will read a short text, and they will attempt to notice how the target grammar structure is used in context. Since noticing is the starting point of acquisition (Schmidt, 1990), textual enhancement (i.e., boldfacing) will be used to facilitate the noticing process (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004):

C’era una volta un burattino di legno che **si chiamava** Pinocchio. Pinocchio **aveva** il naso lungo perché **diceva** molte bugie. Un giorno il suo papà Geppetto gli ha detto che **doveva** andare a scuola come tutti gli altri bambini. Pinocchio non si è rallegrato molto a questa notizia, ma ha promesso di farlo. Mentre **andava** a scuola il giorno successivo, Pinocchio ha incontrato il Gatto e la Volpe.

[There was once upon a time a wooden puppet whose name was Pinocchio. Pinocchio had a long nose because he used to lie a lot. One day, his dad Geppetto told him that he had to go to school like all other children. Pinocchio did not feel very happy at this news, but he promised to do it. While he was going to school on the next day, he met the Cat and the Fox.]

Students will be asked to infer from the text how *imperfetto* is used (i.e., how it is formed and what meanings it can express). Then the teacher will provide explicit information to support or reject their hypotheses. Most textbooks present learners with three separate sets of endings for the three verb groups, as shown in the example below:

1st Group (-ARE):Infinitive: andare (to go)1st pers. sing.: **andavo**2nd pers. sing.: **andavi**3rd pers. sing.: **andava**1st pers. plur.: **andavamo**2nd pers. plur.: **andavate**3rd pers. plur.: **andavano****2nd Group (-ERE):**Infinitive: correre (to run)1st pers. sing.: **correvo**2nd pers. sing.: **correvi**3rd pers. sing.: **correva**1st pers. plur.: **correvamo**2nd pers. plur.: **correvate**3rd pers. plur.: **correvano****3rd Group (-IRE):**Infinitive: venire (to come)1st pers. sing.: **venivo**2nd pers. sing.: **venivi**3rd pers. sing.: **veniva**1st pers. plur.: **venivamo**2nd pers. plur.: **venivate**3rd pers. plur.: **venivano**

Something innovative in this lesson will be that students will be made aware that there is only one set of endings that can be applied to all Italian verbs, provided that only the last two letters of the infinitive (i.e., ‘re’) are substituted⁴: *-vo, -vi, -va, -vamo, -vate, -vano*. Although this explanation might not use the correct linguistic terminology (i.e., the “endings” provided here represent only part of the suffixes that are added to the verb stem), it is a practical approach of explaining grammar that will help students notice the commonalities between the three conjugation types of *imperfetto*.

Following the explanations of how the tense is formed, students will be presented with the functions of *imperfetto* as it relates to *passato prossimo* through examples from the text. For example, in the sentence “Mentre andava [imperfetto] a scuola, Pinocchio ha incontrato [passato prossimo] il Gatto e la Volpe” [While Pinocchio was going to school, he met the Cat and the Fox.], *imperfetto* expresses an incomplete past action that had already begun and was interrupted by another (complete) past action that is expressed by *passato prossimo*. Although English does not have an equivalent tense, the Italian *imperfetto* is often translated in English with the past progressive tense (e.g., “was going”). Since learners’ L1 can be not only a source of linguistic interference but also a useful cognitive resource, anglophone students will be made aware of the similar functions that *imperfetto* and *past progressive* have in this context. Moreover, if possible, examples will be given from French and Spanish to show to speakers of those languages that *imperfetto* has an equivalent tense in their L1 in all contexts. This approach would heighten students’ multilingual awareness, and it will help them to positively transfer their L1 skills to their L2. Not surprisingly García (2008) suggests that one of the basic skills that L2 teachers should develop is to learn how to actively draw on learners’ multilingualism.

3.3.2 The Practice-stage

In the second P of the present-practice-produce sequence, students will use the target structure in a controlled practice activity. Exercises at this stage should not be mechanical and repetitive, as they should require a deep understanding of the text and conscious analysis of the target structures. In other words, grammar exercises “should not be drills but should stimulate reflection that will shape knowledge about the rules” (DeKeyser, 1998, p. 62). Following these criteria, the teacher will ask students to read the text below and supply the missing verb forms:

Pinocchio non _____(conoscere) il Gatto e la Volpe e non _____(sospettare) che in realtà quei due _____(essere) dei furfanti. Quindi, al loro invito di andare con loro li _____(seguire) senza pensarci due volte. Il Gatto e la Volpe _____(portare) Pinocchio in un circo dove lui _____(dovere) lavorare come burattino parlante. Siccome il padrone del circo lo _____(trattare) sempre male, un giorno Pinocchio _____(decidere) di fuggire e _____(scappare) col suo amico Lucignolo al paese dei balocchi senza dire nulla al suo babbo Geppetto.

4 Students should also be made aware of a few common exceptions (e.g., fare → **facevo**).

[Pinocchio _____ (to not know) the Cat and the Fox and _____ (to not suspect) that in reality those two _____ (to be) scoundrels. Therefore, at their invitation go with them, he _____ (to follow) them without a second thought. The Cat and the Fox _____ (to bring) Pinocchio to a circus where he _____ (to have) to work as a talking puppet. Because the circus master _____ (to treat) him always bad, one day Pinocchio _____ (to decide) to run away and he _____ (to escape) with his friend Lucignolo to the land of toys without telling anything to his dad Geppetto.]

Using the popular think-pair-share approach, students will have to first reflect individually about which verb tense (i.e., *passato prossimo* or *imperfetto*) would be appropriate in each case, and then to discuss their choice with a partner. Finally, examples will be shared with the class from various pairs of students, while the teacher will provide corrective feedback. The CF will mostly consist of prompts, such as elicitation and metalinguistic clues, which will allow students to self-repair and actively construct knowledge (Lyster, 2007).

3.3.3 The Produce-stage

In order to be effective, the PPP model should include both controlled exercises and tasks where learners can use the language in a meaningful and communicative way (Ellis, 2006). Thus, at this stage, students will work in groups of four, and they will discuss in Italian how Pinocchio's story could possibly end. Working together, the students in each group will write the end of the story in 4-5 sentences using both *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto*. Because they will have to collaborate in order to produce a grammatically correct and interesting text, the language will be not only the final product but also the means to produce it. In other words, students will engage in language-related episodes (LREs)⁵ and peer feedback in Italian, which will help them to achieve higher language awareness and to improve their accuracy (Sato & Ballinger, 2012; Storch, 2011). Because the effectiveness of peer CF depends on the social relationships between peers (Sato & Ballinger, 2012), the teacher will attempt to create a learning culture of trust and respect within the conversation groups by modelling some collaborative strategies for the students. For example, they will be shown how to politely express disagreement and provide constructive feedback in Italian. Moreover, to increase the effectiveness of this collaborative task in the present beginner level class, the teacher will ensure that there is at least one relatively higher proficiency learner in each group (Storch, 2011). Finally, one volunteer from each group will read the end of the story to the rest of the class, while the teacher will provide CF in the form of prompts in order to involve the whole group in self-correction.

3.4. Cool-down

The last few minutes of the class period will be used to summarize the main points and bring the lesson to a positive end. Students will have the chance to review what they have learned, to ask some concrete, last minutes questions, if necessary, and to set future goals and plans with the help of their teacher. It will be briefly communicated what the next lesson will focus on, and students will also receive their homework for next class. They will have to describe their childhood in 10 sentences using both *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto*. These texts will serve as a basis for another communicative task-based activity at the beginning of next class. As an extension, the most motivated students could also describe the biography of a famous personality and share their texts on *Dropbox* or another shared online platform. These assignments will not be graded, but other students will be able to see them and provide peer feedback. In this way at the end of the semester, students will have a portfolio with different papers, and they will be able to choose three papers to hand in for formal evaluation. They will do this based on the feedback they have received as well as based on their self-assessment. This procedure is an example of formative assessment that not

5 LREs are "segments in the learners' dialogues where they deliberate about language (grammatical form, lexical choices, mechanics) while trying to complete the task" (Storch, 2011, p. 277).

only reduces students' anxiety but also increases their learner autonomy (Nosratinia & Abdi, 2017), which should be a major goal of L2 instruction.

4. Conclusion

The present article has demonstrated how an eclectic approach can be used to plan a grammar lesson by combining the most effective aspects of a variety of teaching methodologies. Although the traditional *focus on forms* approach has been heavily criticized (e.g., Long, 2015), it is still “valid as long as it includes an opportunity for learners to practise behaviour in communicative tasks” (Ellis, 2006, p. 102). As Nassaji and Fotos (2004) explain, “no research has directly compared the effectiveness of a focus on form and a focus on forms approach, and the difference between them is suggested to be difficult to operationalize” (p. 131). Perhaps we should not think of the two approaches as dichotomous but rather as falling along a continuum of degrees of explicitness in grammar instruction. Different lessons can differ in the degree of explicit focus on form. Variations can be observed even across different parts of the same lesson, as shown in the present lesson plan. In their lesson planning, teachers should consider the instructional goals and the following principles:

- Use a *focus on forms* to concentrate on learners' accuracy when first introducing and practicing new grammar structures. Not only will learners benefit from this approach but they will also show positive attitudes towards it (Baleghizadeh & Firoozbakht, 2009; Roothoof & Breeze, 2016; Schulz, 2001).
- Use a *focus on form* approach during subsequent interactive activities that allow the learners to practice the target structures through meaningful exchanges. These activities can take place at the end of the lesson or, as demonstrated in the present plan, in the review phase of the following lesson(s).
- Use a *focus on meaning* approach when the goal is to develop learners' fluency or to boost their self-confidence. Such activities can be easily integrated at the beginning of the lesson to allow students to warm-up and to encourage them to start speaking in the target language.
- Use an error correction technique that is determined by the instructional focus. While form-focused activities require explicit corrections and metalinguistic explanations, meaning-focused activities should include more implicit types of corrective feedback (e.g., recasts). In the latter case it is recommended to limit corrective feedback to recurrent errors only (as opposed to correcting all mistakes).
- Use inductive teaching methods to encourage active learning whenever possible but include also deductive methods to accommodate different learning styles.
- Use a blend of receptive and productive activities when teaching new grammar.

Although the present lesson plan may appear to be quite rigid and prescriptive, it is only meant to provide some general guidelines for effective grammar teaching and an example of how these guidelines can be followed in the creation of a grammar lesson plan in L2 Italian. Were this plan to be implemented in practice, it would inevitably undergo some changes in order to be adapted to the dynamic and ever-changing teaching and learning contexts. Flexibility is a key aspect of effective L2 instruction, and teachers should adopt an eclectic approach of grammar teaching by using a toolbox of different teaching methods and techniques according to the instructional goals and the various needs of their students.

References

- Akther, A. (2014). *Role of warm-up activity in language classroom: A tertiary scenario*. [Doctoral dissertation, BRAC University, Bangladesh]. <http://hdl.handle.net/10361/3553>.
- Alzu'bi, M. A. (2015). Effectiveness of inductive and deductive methods in teaching grammar. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6(2), 187-193.
- Baleghizadeh, S., & Firoozbakht, S. (2009). Gender differences in students' and teachers' perceptions of the role of grammar instruction and corrective feedback. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 2(4), 28-56.
- DeKeyser, R. (1998). Beyond focus on form: Cognitive perspectives on learning and practicing second language

- grammar. In C. Doughty & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition*, 42-63. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- DeKeyser, R. M. (2000). The robustness of critical period effects in second language acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 22(4), 499-533.
- DeKeyser, R. (2003). Implicit and explicit learning. In Doughty & Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 313-348). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2006). Current issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 83-107.
- Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2009). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. In R. Ellis, S. Loewen, C. Elder, R. Erlam, J. Philp, & H. Reinders (Eds.), *Implicit and explicit knowledge in second language learning, testing and teaching* (pp. 303-332). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Erlam, R. (2003). The effects of deductive and inductive instruction on the acquisition of direct object pronouns in French as a second language. *Modern Language Journal*, 87(2), 242-260.
- García, O. (2008). Multilingual language awareness and teacher education. In J. Cenoz & N. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education: Vol. 6 Knowledge about language* (2nd ed., pp. 385-400). Berlin, Germany: Springer.
- Harley, B. (1989). Functional grammar in French immersion: A classroom experiment. *Applied Linguistics*, 10(3), 331-360.
- Herron, C., & Tomasello, M. (1992). Acquiring grammatical structures by guided induction. *French Review*, 65(5), 708-18.
- Johansen, C. (2019). Investigating the beliefs on English grammar instruction among Norwegian students and teachers in high school. [Dissertation, The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø]. <https://munin.uit.no/bitstream/handle/10037/16107/thesis.pdf?sequence=2>
- Long, M. (2015). *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching*. West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons.
- Lyster, R. (2007). *Learning and teaching languages through content*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Maftoon, P. & Sarem, S. (2015). A critical look at the Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) approach: Challenges and promises for ELT. *Brain: Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 3(4), 31-36.
- Markina, E. (2019). Comparing focus on forms and task-based language teaching in the acquisition of Russian as a foreign language. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Barcelona, Barcelona]. http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/130175/1/ELENA%20MARKINA_PhD_THESIS.pdf
- Nassaji, H., & Fotos, S. (2004). Current developments in research on the teaching of grammar. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 126-145.
- Norris, J., & Ortega, L. (2000). Effectiveness of L2 Instruction: A research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 50, 417-528.
- Nosratinia, M., & Abdi, F. (2017). The comparative effect of portfolio and summative assessments on EFL learners' writing ability, anxiety, and autonomy. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(4), 823-834.
- Pawlak, M. (2011). Cultural differences in perceptions of form-focused instruction: The case of advanced Polish and Italian learners. In J. Arabski & A. Wojtaszek (Eds.), *Aspects of culture in second language acquisition and foreign language learning* (pp. 77-94). Berlin: Springer.
- Roothoof, H., & Breeze, R. (2016). A comparison of EDL teachers' and students' attitudes to oral corrective feedback. *Language Awareness*, 25(4), 318-335.
- Sato, M., & Ballinger, S. (2012). Raising language awareness in peer interaction: A cross-context, cross-methodology examination. *Language Awareness*, 21, 1-2 (Feb-May), 157-179.
- Schmidt, R. W. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129-158.
- Schulz, R. A. (2001). Cultural differences in student and teacher perceptions concerning the role of grammar instruction and corrective feedback: USA-Colombia. *The Modern Language Journal*, 85(2), 244-258.
- Shintani, N., Li, S., & Ellis, R. (2013). Comprehension-based versus production-based grammar instruction: A meta-analysis of comparative studies. *Language Learning*, 63(2), 296-329.
- Spada, N., & Tomita, Y. (2010). Interactions between type of instruction and type of language feature: A meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 60(2), 263-308.
- Storch, N. (2011). Collaborative writing in L2 contexts: processes, outcomes and future directions. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 275-288.
- Svalberg, A. (2007). Language awareness and language learning. *Language Teaching*, 40, 287-308.
- Swan, M. (2005). Legislation by hypothesis: The case of task-based instruction. *Applied Linguistics*, 26(3), 376-401.

- Swain, M. (2005). The output hypothesis: theory and research. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*, 471-484. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Tammenga-Helmantel, M., Arends, E., & Canrinus, E. T. (2014). The effectiveness of deductive, inductive, implicit and incidental grammatical instruction in second language classrooms. *System*, 45, 198-210.
- Tammenga-Helmantel, M., Bazhutkina, I., Steringa, S., Hummel, I., & Suhre, C. (2016). Comparing inductive and deductive grammatical instruction in teaching German as a foreign language in Dutch classrooms. *System*, 63, 101-114.
- Velandia, R. (2008). The role of warming up activities in adolescent students' involvement during the English class. *Profile Profile Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 10(1), 9-26.
- Whittle, A., & Lyster, R. (2016). Focus on Italian verbal morphology in multilingual classes. *Language Learning*, 66(1), 31-59.

Appendix

Warm-up Activity Questions

Original document:

(Visitare) l'Italia	(Andare) a cavallo	(Essere) a un concerto rock	(Mangiare) gelato in inverno
(Vedere) un'eclissi solare	(Perdere) la carta d'identità	(Cadere) da una sedia	(Donare) sangue
(Giocare) a calcio	(Arrivare) in ritardo a scuola	(Guardare) TV per più di 4 ore	(Viaggiare) su una nave
(Restare) sveglio tutta la notte	(Vincere) una gara	(Chiamare) la polizia	(Scrivere) un poema

English translation:

(To visit) Italy	(To ride) a horse	(To be) at a rock concert	(To eat) ice-cream in winter
(To see) a solar eclipse	(To lose) your ID card	(To fall) from a chair	(To donate) blood
(To play) soccer	(To be) late for school	(To watch) TV for more than 4 hours	(To travel) by ship
(To stay) awake the whole night	(To win) a competition	(To call) the police	(To write) a poem