

AN INVESTIGATION ON EXPLICIT KNOWLEDGE WITH BRAZILIAN EFL TEACHERS*

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ABSTRACT: The present study, a partial replication of Erlam, Philp and Elder's (2009), aims at investigating the level of explicit knowledge in a sample composed by ten Brazilian EFL teachers as well as its implications in their teaching focusing on the form in the classroom. Based on the literature, it was hypothesized that these teachers would vary widely in their level of metalinguistic knowledge and would have a weak command of metalinguistic terminology to explain rules of incorrect sentences. Nevertheless, results reveal that the participants show a good command of the English language, can explain the rules for grammatically incorrect sentences and use metalinguistic terms to do so.

KEYWORDS: explicit knowledge; metalinguistic knowledge; EFL teachers; form-focused instruction.

RESUMO: *O presente estudo, uma replicação parcial da pesquisa de Erlam, Philp e Elder (2009), objetiva investigar o nível de conhecimento explícito em uma amostra de dez professores brasileiros bem como as implicações para instrução com foco na forma. Com base na literatura, tem-se como hipótese que esses professores variariam muito no seu nível de conhecimento metalinguístico e teriam fraco comando da*

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terminologia metalinguística para explicar regras de sentenças incorretas. No entanto, os resultados revelam que os participantes têm bom comando da língua inglesa e são capazes de explicar regras para sentenças gramaticalmente incorretas e de usar termos metalinguísticos para tanto.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *conhecimento explícito; conhecimento metalinguístico; professores de inglês como língua estrangeira; instrução com foco na forma.*

0. Introduction

According to Ellis (2008:437), explicit knowledge² can be defined as "conscious, declarative, accessible only through controlled processing, verbalizable, learnable [...], and typically employed when learners experience some kind of linguistic problem". Seeing like this, explicit knowledge about an L2³ would be recognized as the legitimate knowledge about that language, once a learner knows linguistic elements when they are available for verbalization together with the awareness of that capacity. Besides, such verbalization is under attentive control, involving conscious access of information from the declarative memory. Such a well-structured process of reflecting on features of an L2 may also trigger grounded learning of them, making the learner self-confident of the acquiring knowledge.

In agreement with Ellis's (2008) definition, Elder (2009) points out that metalinguistic knowledge can be learned and taught through formal instruction. It is the point where pedagogy meets the use of a foreign language, once the formal environment of a classroom would be the suitable place for provoking situations to have the L2 rules explicitly explained by the teacher and incorporated by the learner. However, such formal instruction can be delivered to learners in various different manners, mainly when it comes to metalinguistic knowledge. First, there is the preparation of such a structure by the instructor, who can apply a higher or a lower level of elaboration to the explanation of the target structure. Then, there is the degree of explicitness and the intensity with which the instructor will deal when providing that on the moment of the instruction. Such different features may have great influence on the learning of a foreign language. Long (1991) has proposed the term form-focused instruction (FFI), which refers to the teaching of grammar

²In the present article, the terms explicit knowledge and metalinguistic knowledge are used interchangeably.

³The terms second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) are used interchangeably in the present article.

form within its context of use. Therefore the focus does not solely relies on teaching grammatical aspects but rather on meaning which allows for a focus on formal aspects of the language. He emphasizes that FFI "overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning, communication" (LONG, 1991: 46). As well, Ellis (2006: 90) elucidates that "a form-focused approach emphasises meaning and message creation"; that the lesson focuses on meaning with attention to the form emerging from the communicative activity. Therefore, teachers are the responsible ones for the articulation of the different options available for manipulating instruction which combines grammar content and communicative tasks for an effective learning of the target language.

All in all, it is acknowledged that FFI and metalinguistic knowledge together may serve instruction in a fruitful way. Activities that are planned in order to raise learners' attention to form, which can derive from a primary communicative purpose, can affect learners' interlanguage positively and awareness is the key for this process to unfold successfully.

Ideally, EFL teachers display high levels of proficiency to provide rich and well-formed models for their learners; are able to tailor the input to make it comprehensible to learners; and have sufficient metalinguistic knowledge to explain grammatical rules and to respond to learner errors (ERLAM, PHILP & ELDER, 2009). Studies in this area have shown that L2 teachers should possess knowledge about the language as well as knowledge of the language. In their research, Erlam, Philp and Elder (2009), have found that there is a significant lacunae in the teachers' knowledge about language and a limited command of the metalanguage required to explain rules to L2 learners.

In this realm, the present study aims at investigating the level of explicit knowledge in a sample of EFL⁴ Brazilian teachers as well as its implications for Focus on Form (FoF) in the classroom. The article is organized as follows: (1) first, we present a brief review of the literature on the constructs *explicit and metalinguistic knowledge* and their relationship to *teaching in a form-focused instruction context*; (2) then we present details about the method of the present study - a partial replication of Erlam, Philp and Elder's study (2009) -, focusing on the research questions, hypotheses, study design, instruments, procedures, and information about the participants; (3) in the sequence, findings are presented and discussed; and (4) lastly, in the conclusion, a summary of the study is provided, along with its limitations, suggestions for further research and some pedagogical implications.

⁴EFL stands for English as a Foreign Language.

1. Review of the literature

1.1. *Explicit knowledge and metalinguistic knowledge*

For Hulstijn (2005), explicit knowledge entails awareness of the regularities underlying the information one has knowledge of, and the ability to verbalize these regularities, through effortful processing. Meanwhile, Hu (2002: 348) defines metalinguistic knowledge as “explicit and verbalizable knowledge about L2 grammar”. According to these statements, it is possible to understand explicit and metalinguistic knowledge as interchangeable constructs. However, Ellis (2009) points out that explicit knowledge being declarative does not mean that one verbalizes a rule through the use of metalanguage. He added that “although metalanguage is not an essential component of explicit knowledge, it would seem to be closely related” (2009: 13).

In this context, Roehr (2006) considers explicit and metalinguistic knowledge as only one construct, arguing that both the definition and the operationalization of metalinguistic knowledge have still varied across studies. Roehr (2006: 41) added that “metalinguistic knowledge has typically been operationalized as learners’ ability to correct, describe and explain L2 errors”. This study considers explicit and metalinguistic knowledge as interchangeable terms.

Hulstijn (2005) calls the researchers’ attention to the operationalization of explicit knowledge by saying that the view on the object of learning easily influences the process of learning, that is, the conduction of a treatment which aims at explicit learning would be carried out through explicit modes. Hu (2011) investigated the acquisition of metalanguage by exposing learners to large doses of explicit grammar instruction and found that, besides amassing much explicit knowledge of the target structure, the learners presented a productive knowledge of metalinguistic terms.

With the purpose of testing the explicit language knowledge and understanding of grammatical rules of a group of trainee teachers, Erlam, Philp and Elder (2009) implemented their version of the Metalinguistic Knowledge Test (MKT) and Ellis’ (2009) Untimed Grammaticality Judgment Test (UGJT) with 94 native and non-native trainee teachers of English as a second language. The researchers acknowledge that both tests are advantageous for such a goal, once they present a systematic sampling of a range of grammatical structures and indicate grammatical understanding, independently of the use of metalinguistic terminology. The teachers who participated in the study were selected because of their high level of proficiency in the target language, in spite of the author’s argumentation that proficiency does not mean high command of metalinguistic knowledge, but that there is

some relation between the two. Thus, besides proficiency, Erlam, Philp and Elder (2009) stated the importance for English teachers to possess language awareness, which comprises knowledge *about* the language and knowledge *of* the language. These researchers found that their sample of trainee teachers had a disturbing lack of knowledge about the rules of English grammar and a limited command of the metalanguage required to explain such rules to L2 learners. Moreover they found that plural –s, possessive –s, regular past tense and the comparatives were considered the easiest in terms of explaining errors while verb complementation, ergative verbs, relative clauses and unreal conditionals were considered the hardest structures by these teachers.

Accordingly, Wright (2002: 115) highlights the importance of linguistic awareness for L2 teachers, since "a linguistically aware teacher not only understands how language works, but understands the students' struggle with language and is sensitive to errors and other interlanguage features". In addition, the author notes that successful language teaching requires proficiency, and knowledge about and of the target language, with awareness operating within these domains. In such instructional environment, learners could benefit from the learning process as a user, as an analyst, or as a teacher, as Wright (2002: 118) defined.

The analyst domain covers knowledge of language – knowledge of how language in general and the target language in particular work. This might be described as a technical knowledge of language, expertise comparable to that of the knowledge of physics possessed by a physics teacher. The teacher domains involve awareness of how to create and exploit language learning opportunities, the significance of classroom interaction, and of learner output.

In sum, it may be recognized that linguistic knowledge, mainly the explicit one, accompanied by awareness, can unchain a thriving process of learning an L2 in an instructional context.

1.2. The relationship between EFL teachers and metalinguistic knowledge in a form-focused instruction context

The relationship between EFL teachers and metalinguistic knowledge within a FFI context should be a very narrow one. FFI being planned and applied by an instructor with a high level of metalinguistic knowledge may bring out more advantages for learners in all the moments of the instruction, like the presentation, the fixation or the correction of the target structure. Erlam, Philp and Elder (2009: 235), stated that:

language teachers not only need high levels of language proficiency to be able to provide rich and well-formed input for learners, but also need sufficient explicit knowledge about language to be able to plan FFI and respond appropriately to learner needs through judicious use of a range of FoF options.

Teachers who do not possess a good level of metalinguistic knowledge are candidates for not using all the FFI options effectively, once limitations in that kind of knowledge may suggest a deficient instruction. First, language teachers, when in the classroom, are constantly exposing their knowledge of the foreign language, once they articulate the instructional environment mainly through oral language. Such teachers, possessing an elaborated output, which is also related to metalinguistic knowledge, may provide learners with rich input. During the interaction in the instructional context, the learners may apply reasoning to the teacher's language forms, notice and understand such rules, and may be able to incorporate that to a range of possibilities to communicate. Thus, as Hulstijn (2005) explained, input can be processed with intention to describe and discover rules in the data.

Second, the teacher's metalinguistic knowledge may serve in the exploration of different options over the explanation of the target language structures. Clear and well-formed examples involving the language are more likely to raise learners' motivation to learn than examples which are linguistically inconsistent. Within a context of explicit instruction, as Dekeyser (1995) stated, some sort of rule is being thought about; and, as Ellis (2009) added, learners are being encouraged to develop metalinguistic awareness of the rule.

As Dekeyser (1995: 380) stated that explicit FFI involves "some sort of rule being thought about during the learning process", teachers with a wide range of metalinguistic knowledge are able to work on linguistic features and direct learners' attention to specific mistakes, providing appropriate corrective feedback through the technique which will best respond to that error. Differences in types of errors and in learners' individual learning styles ask for different strategies in providing feedback, and the possession of explicit knowledge may make teachers aware of that as well as appliers of that. Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2009) found a distinct advantage for metalinguistic information as corrective feedback. These authors also pointed out that metalinguistic feedback resulted not only in learning of structural details which were included in the treatment, but also in developing learners' capacity of dealing correctly with items which were not included in the treatment; suggesting not only item learning but also system learning.

Ellis (2008: 440) stated that "the goal of explicit instruction is not just explicit knowledge but rather implicit knowledge, with explicit knowledge seen just as a starting point". It seems there is an interface

force which connects both kinds of knowledge and which may be fruitful for learning. The explicit knowledge of linguistic features, which would correspond to Schmidt's (2001) level of understanding, may provide learners with grounds for using the L2 more consciously. Ellis (2008: 452) added that

Schmidt's (2001) claim that while awareness at the level of noticing is necessary for learning, awareness at the level of understanding will foster deeper and more rapid learning. Clearly, metalinguistic activity entails both awareness at the level of noticing and understanding and in doing so fosters the development of not just L2 explicit knowledge but also implicit knowledge.

As Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis (2002:2) stated, one of the ways FoF can be accomplished is by means of explicit comments on form involving metalanguage, but this aspect has been neglected. The mode of providing FFI along with metalinguistic awareness could be noted when those authors added that

focus on form, then, provides learners with the opportunity to take "time-out" from focusing on message construction to pay attention to specific forms and the meanings they realize. Thus focus on form enables students and teachers to draw attention to linguistic items that are demonstrably problematic to learners.

2. Method

2.1 Research Questions and hypotheses

As aforementioned, this study aims at investigating the level of explicit knowledge in a sample of EFL Brazilian teachers as well as its implications for Focus on Form (FoF) in the classroom. In order to pursue the objective, the present investigation attempts to answer the following two research questions:

(RQ1) What level of metalinguistic knowledge do these Brazilian EFL teachers have?; and

(RQ2) What kinds of rules/metalinguistic terms present particular difficulties for these teachers?

Based on the literature and more specifically on Erlam, Philp and Elder's (2009) study, our hypotheses are the ones as follow:

(H1) EFL teachers vary widely in their level of metalinguistic knowledge and as a group have a weak command of metalinguistic terminology;

(H2) EFL teachers consider plural –s, possessive –s, regular past tense and comparatives the easiest structures whereas verb complementation, ergative verbs, relative clauses and unreal conditionals the hardest structures in terms of explaining errors; and

(H3) EFL teachers display lack of knowledge about the rules of English grammar as well as limited command of the technical terms required to explain these rules to learners.

2.2 Research design, instruments and procedures

As Elder (2009) points out, metalinguistic knowledge is verbalizable; analytical; subject to conscious control; not automatized, thus difficult to access during spontaneous language production; and it is learned through formal instruction. Besides, metalinguistic knowledge can be learned or taught through different ways within FFI, which signals the combination of grammar instruction and communicative tasks for an effective learning or teaching of the target language. Thus, metalinguistic knowledge comes to be essential for EFL teachers, once it is the kind of knowledge which would enable them to use more options to teach the target language explicitly.

With the eye on such intriguing issues, we investigated participants' explicit knowledge by means of two tests: the Metalinguistic Knowledge Test (MKT) adapted by Erlam, Philp and Elder (2009) from a previous version proposed by Elder (2009); and an Untimed Grammaticality Judgment Test (UGJT), developed by Ellis (2009). In fact, this small scale study is an adaptation, a partial replication of the study Erlam, Philp and Elder (2009) conducted.

Data collection happened from the 19th to the 30th of November, 2012. The researchers met the participants individually in a single session that lasted less than two hours. Participants first signed the Consent Form, written in Portuguese, in which general information about the study, confidentiality and feedback was provided. Secondly, they answered a background questionnaire, in Portuguese, which raised information about these teachers' EFL learning and teaching history as well as personal information such as age and gender. Following, they performed the UGJT (Untimed Grammaticality Judgment Task) and the MKT (Metalinguistic Knowledge Test) in English. Last not but the least, participants answered a retrospective questionnaire, in Portuguese, which raised information about their perception of the tasks and their performance. Participants were rewarded for their willingness and readiness to come. Besides, they received feedback on their performance individually by e-mail and a copy of this research paper upon its publication.

The UGJT consists of 68 sentences (see Appendix 1), evenly divided between grammatical and ungrammatical structures. There are 4 sentences to be judged for each of the 17 grammatical structures proposed by Ellis (2009). For each item, participants are required to indicate whether the sentence is grammatical or ungrammatical and the degree of certainty of their judgment (from 0% to 100%). Each sentence judged correctly received 1 point, with a maximum of 68 points.

The MKT, adapted by Erlam, Philp and Elder (2009), comprises 2 parts. In part I, participants are presented with 15 ungrammatical sentences (see Appendix 2), each containing an error that was underlined. These sentences were based on 15 structures of the 17 structures proposed by Ellis (2009). Participants are required to write in English a 'rule' which explains why the sentence is ungrammatical. The scoring of this part was carried out by the two researchers independently and whenever a doubt appeared, an agreement was reached. This part of the test yielded two different scores: the rule score and the metalanguage score. Participants received 1 point for each rule correctly articulated and 1 point if they used metalanguage to articulate the rule, thus, this part had a maximum of 15 points for the rule score and 15 points for the metalanguage score.

Part II consists of two sections. In the first, participants are asked to read a paragraph-text and then find examples in it of 19 specific grammatical features. In the second section of part II, participants are asked to identify the named grammatical items in a set of four sentences. Participants received 1 point for each correct example, thus yielding a maximum of 19 points for section 1 and 4 points for section 2.

The data collected was organized into different files and descriptive statistics was run through the online environment SEstatNet⁵ (NASSAR, WRONSCKI & OHIRA, 2011). These researchers, based on the literature, assume that these two tests will reveal participants' explicit knowledge on the targeted structures as well as the particular difficulties these teachers display in explaining some rules and/or terms and the implications for L2 language classrooms.

2.3 Participants

Ten EFL teachers participated in this study: 5 working in Florianópolis (FL) and 5 in Rio Negrinho (RN), state of Santa Catarina, Brazil, at the time of data collection. From the pool of 10 participants, only one is a male and their mean age is 33.9 years old. It is interesting

⁵SEstatNet: Sistema Especialista para o Ensino de Estatística na Web. Available at <<http://www.sestatnet.ufsc.br/>>

to note that the mean age in the FL sample (29.8) is smaller than in the RN sample (38). These participants have been studying English for a mean period of 16.1 years (FL: 15.6; RN: 16.6) and have been working as teachers for a mean period of 12 years (FL: 8.8; RN: 15.2). As regards their experience, 8 participants have already worked in regular schools (kindergarten, primary and secondary education) for a mean period of 2.92 years (FL: 1.12; RN: 5.3); only 1 teacher from the FL sample reported having worked at a university for 4 years. Besides, all participants have already worked at language institutes for a mean period of 8.8 years (FL: 7.4; RN: 10.2) but only 3 participants from the sample (FL) reported having already worked as private English teachers.

As regards their formal instruction in English, the majority (8) reported having learned English at language institutes; 5 in high school; 3 at the Letras Program (university); 3 by working as teachers or translators; 2 by traveling; and 2 by listening to music, reading books and watching films in English. From the pool, the majority (9) have a college degree: 6 participants took Letras (Portuguese & English), 2 Letras (English) and 1 Pedagogy. Out of the 10 participants, 7 have taken or are presently taking a graduate course, from the FL sample: 2 participants are M.A. students and 1 has just taken his M.A.; 2 participants are Ph.D. students; and from the RN sample: 1 participant took an undergraduate course English Teaching Methodology and 1 participant in Portuguese Teaching Methodology. When asked about the importance of taking the Letras Program, P2 summarizes the opinion of most of the participants of this study:

É essencial que professores de inglês sejam formados, pois o curso oferece a bagagem necessária para o ensino de qualquer objeto; seja língua, seja literatura. Quando formado, um professor se mune das ferramentas necessárias para que seu aluno aprenda, e também, faz escolhas informadas sobre o processo de SLA⁶.

In the background questionnaire, participants were required to think of themselves as teachers, how they choose topics to use in the classroom, how they provide feedback and how they build a positive atmosphere for learning to happen. Two answers were selected to represent the thinking of the groups as a whole. From the FL sample, P1 stated:

⁶It is essential for English teachers to have the undergrad in Letras, since the course lays the necessary foundation for the teaching of any object; be it language; be it literature. By the time the course finishes, the teacher has the necessary tools to make her/his student learn and also s/he makes informed choices about the process of SLA" (P2, background questionnaire, answer to question 5, *our translation*)

Sou um professor dinâmico, que busca atividades que cativem o aluno ao longo do processo de aprendizagem. Promovo feedbacks ao grupo por email ao longo do curso, e após as avaliações o faço individualmente. A atmosfera positiva é construída c/ momentos de descontração e incentivo durante as aulas, deixando os alunos à vontade p/ participar⁷.

As well, P8, from the RN sample, stated that:

Como professora tenho um método para seguir e também um material específico onde os temas e enfoques nos são colocados. Quando há oportunidade e possibilidade usa-se algum tema importante para o momento. O feedback é feito através do resultado de provas escritas, apresentação oral e participação em sala de aula. A atmosfera positiva é criada pela motivação, e incentivo e recursos extras como música, diálogos e outros⁸.

Participants were also asked to think about how they provide students with rule explanations and whether there is any criterion to which items they provide such explicit instruction. Different issues were raised in their answers. From the FL sample, 2 teachers prefer to expose students to the targeted structures, making them perceive the function of the structure itself before presenting it explicitly; 1 teacher stated that the way she presents rules depends on the style of the group of students; 1 teacher stated that the criterion departs from the grammar section of the coursebook and from the students' needs; and 1 teacher responded that he provides explicit instruction only for verb tenses and items that contrast with Portuguese. From the RN sample, 2 teachers reported using Portuguese to explain difficult rules; 2 teachers stated that they follow the coursebook and only make a structure explicit when it is necessary, in which case extra material is provided; and 1 teacher said that after explaining the subject on the board, with many different examples, she invites students to provide their own examples, thus verifying what they can do by themselves and in the next class, she revises the same structure, yet focusing on a different skill.

⁷I am a dynamic teacher, the one who looks for activities that attract the learner throughout the learning process. I provide the group with feedback by e-mail throughout the course and after the evaluations, I do it individually. The positive atmosphere is built with moments of informality and incentive during the classes, by letting the students participate at their will. (P1, background questionnaire, answer to question 7, *our translation*)

⁸As a teacher I have a method to follow and also a specific material where the themes and approaches are put to us. When there is opportunity and possibility, we make use of an important theme for the moment. Feedback is provided through the result of written tests, oral presentations and participation in the classroom. The positive atmosphere is created by motivation, and incentive and extra resources, such as music, dialogues, etc." (P8, background questionnaire, answer to question 7, *our translation*)

Last but not least, participants were required to reflect upon the importance of knowing grammatical rules and whether this knowledge influences learning. All participants agree on its importance and P4's answer summarizes the thinking of the sample as a whole: "acredito ser de extrema importância pois vejo a forma como parte da competência comunicativa. Através de seu conhecimento como um todo o professor pode fazer escolhas para beneficiar o aluno"⁹.

In a nutshell, it is possible to conclude, from the data presented, that these participants are enthusiastic teachers, who believe that academic formation is essential to act as professionals, and do their best, according to their education and beliefs, to make students succeed in the EFL learning process.

3. Results and discussion

Participants performed two tests: the UGJT and the MKT, and answered a retrospective questionnaire. Results were analyzed having in mind the literature and the research questions posed for this study. Table 1 presents the results and the descriptive statistics for the totals in each part of the tests:

	UGJT	MKT (PART I) (RULE)	MKT (PART I) (METALANGUAGE)	MKT (PART II) (SECTION 1)	MKT (PART II) (SECTION 2)	MKT (PART II) (TOTAL)
P1	65	15	8	16	3	19
P2	66	15	14	17	4	21
P3	65	13	12	15	2	17
P4	62	14	12	17	4	21
P5	61	14	15	19	4	23
P6	63	11	9	19	3	22
P7	66	14	14	19	3	22
P8	64	12	12	18	4	22
P9	61	14	12	16	3	19
P10	55	13	9	16	3	18
Mean	62.8	13.5	11.7	17.2	3.3	20.4
Standard Deviation	3.32	1.26	2.35	1.47	0.67	2.01
Minimum	55	11	8	15	2	17
Maximum	66	15	15	19	4	23
Maximum allowed	68	15	15	19	4	23

⁹"I believe it is of extreme importance, because I see form as part of communicative competence. By means of her/his knowledge as a whole the teacher can make choices to benefit the student" (P4, background questionnaire, answer to question 9, *our translation*)

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Table 1: Main results
Source: data from the present study

Results reveal that participants performed well in all tests, displaying high means and low standard deviations (how spread results are). The highest standard deviation can be seen for the UGJT. For this test, these researchers analyzed the grammatical features that provoked more incorrect judgments. Thus, from the sentences judged incorrectly, the grammatical feature that appeared the most: dative alternation (5 incorrect judgments for sentence 31 and 5 for sentence 51; 3 for sentence 23); possessive –s (2 incorrect judgments for sentence 15 and 2 for sentence 43); since and for (2 incorrect judgments for sentence 11 and 2 for sentence 17); plural –s (2 incorrect judgments for sentence 16 and 2 for sentence 40); embedded questions (2 incorrect judgments for sentence 21); adverb placement (2 incorrect judgments for sentence 48); regular past tense (2 incorrect judgments for sentence 53); indefinite article (2 incorrect judgments for sentence 54); unreal conditionals (2 incorrect judgments for sentence 56); third person –s (2 incorrect judgments for sentence 57); and relative clause (2 incorrect judgments for sentence 67). As regards the degree of certainty, participants were almost sure (93.3%) they were judging the sentences correctly for dative alternation; 85% sure for the possessive –s; 82.5% sure for the usage of since and for; 72.5% for plural –s; 80% for embedded questions; 90% for adverb placement; 70% for regular past tense; 85% for indefinite article; 90% for unreal conditionals; and 100% for third person –s and for relative clause.

From the MKT part 1, 5 participants could not correctly explicit the rule for the mistake in the sentence 3 (unreal conditional) and 3 for sentence 9 (definite article). All participants could explicitly state the rule for sentences 1 (modal verb), 5 (plural –s), 10 (embedded question), 11 (yes/no question) and 12 (adverb placement).

As regards usage of metalanguage to explain the rule, 5 participants did not use metalanguage to explain sentence 1 (modal verb) and sentence 6 (ergative verb); 4 participants did not use metalanguage to explain sentence 9 (definite article). All participants used metalanguage to explain sentences 7 (possessive –s), 8 (regular past tense), 14 (since and for) and 15 (relative clause).

In relation to the MKT, part II, section 1, from the 19 grammatical features, most of the participants could find an example for each (see passage on Appendix 3), except for 4 participants who could not find a correct example of conjunction and of agent; 3 participants for finite

verb; 2 for modal verb and 2 for conditional verb; and 1 participant for adverb and 1 for infinitive verb.

Regarding section 2 (MKT part II), 5 participants had difficulties in underlining the indirect object and 3 of them displayed difficulty in identifying the direct object of the sentences provided (see Appendix 4). Just one participant did not underline the subject of the sentence.

In the retrospective questionnaire, participants revealed how they felt while performing the activities. Some of them (4) considered both activities, the UGJT and the MKT equally difficult; 4 rated the MKT as the most difficult activity; and 2 rated the UGJT as the most difficult since the sentences were displayed out of context. In their own words, 2 participants revealed they felt secure while performing the activities; 2 felt comfortable; 2 considered the activities challenging; 1 considered them fun; 1 felt a little insecure; 1 felt calm. P3 explicitly stated her difficulty:

Achei a parte 1 do 2º teste extremamente difícil. Quando era para explicar conteúdos que já trabalhei com meus alunos eu sabia porque havia tornado aquele conhecimento explícito, nas demais não sabia como explicar porque algo estava incorreto, apesar de saber qual seria a forma correta. Achei as demais atividades fáceis¹⁰.

As regards the grammatical items presented in the tests, participants were asked to rate their level of difficulty. The most difficult items rated by the participants were: relative clauses (6); transitive and intransitive verbs (6); verb complementation (5); conditionals (5); embedded questions (3); definite article 'the' (3); adverb position (3); modals (2); possessive case (3); and since and for (2). Participants considered the easiest items: tag question (10); regular past tense (10); third person -s (10); comparatives (10); yes/no questions (9); modal verbs (8); since and for (8); plural -s (8); definite article 'the' (7); and conditionals (5). It is interesting to note that the participants who judged incorrectly the sentences with regular simple past and displayed a degree of certainty of 70% in their choice stated in their retrospective questionnaires that the sentences were decontextualized, as P5 revealed: "Apenas fiquei em dúvida ao julgar frases no passado

¹⁰I think that the part I of the second test [MKT] was extremely difficult. When I had to explain the contents that I had already worked with my students, I knew because I had already made that knowledge explicit. As regards the rest of the contents, I did not know how to explain why something was incorrect, despite I knew which would be the correct form. I think the other activities were easy". (P3, retrospective questionnaire, answer to question 1, *our translation*)

simples (sem tempo específico no passado) como corretas, pois estão descontextualizadas. Achei que o certo seria usar o present perfect"¹¹.

It can be concluded from the data presented (tests results and retrospective questionnaire answers) that there is some congruence regarding the grammatical features participants rated as most difficult and the incorrect responses they displayed in verb complementation, definite article, relative clauses and since and for. By the same token, participants agreed in the items they rated as easiest and, in turn, committed fewer mistakes, such as those items related to tag question, modal verbs, plural -s, regular past tense, comparatives, and yes/no questions.

Our hypotheses, based on Erlam, Philp and Elder's (2009) study, are now analyzed. Hypothesis 1 - EFL teachers vary widely in their level of metalinguistic knowledge and as a group have a weak command of metalinguistic terminology - is not wholly confirmed since most participants performed well individually and similarly as a group. Hypothesis 2 - EFL teachers consider plural -s, possessive -s, regular past tense and comparatives the easiest structures to explain grammar errors, and verb complementation, ergative verbs, relative clauses and unreal conditionals the hardest - is confirmed. However, some features can be added to the lists when performance is taken into consideration, such as since and for and definite article for the most difficult issues and tag question, modal verbs, and yes/no question for the easiest structures. Hypothesis 3 - EFL teachers display lack of knowledge about the rules of English grammar as well as limited command of the technical terms required to explain these rules to learners - is refuted since these teacher-participants displayed a satisfactory command of metalanguage and rule explanation.

In view of the tests' results, we believe that the participants of this study have reached a considerable level of proficiency in English, which makes them linguistically aware teachers (WRIGHT, 2002). They are able to judge sentences as being grammatical and ungrammatical and promptly make use of grammar rules to identify the incorrect sentences. In addition, they have reached a satisfactory level of metalinguistic knowledge to explain these rules to their students. It is predictable that these teachers are able to provide rich and well-formed input, plan effective FFI and respond appropriately to their students' needs.

4. Final remarks: limitations, suggestions for future research and pedagogical implications

¹¹"I was in doubt to judge sentences in the simple past (without specific time in the past) as correct, because they are decontextualized. I thought the right way would be to use the present perfect" (P5, retrospective questionnaire, answer to question 2, *our translation*)

The purpose of the present study was to explore the level of explicit/metalinguistic knowledge in a sample of Brazilian EFL teachers as well as its implications for FoF in the classroom. In addition, the study aimed at identifying the grammatical features that present particular difficulties for these teachers. Ten participant-teachers were met individually by these researchers, in Florianópolis and Rio Negrinho (SC-Brazil), and were invited to answer two questionnaires (background and retrospective) and to perform two tests (the UGJT and the MKT). It was hypothesized that these EFL teachers would vary widely in their level of metalinguistic knowledge and would have a weak command of metalinguistic terminology and as a result would display lack of knowledge about the rules of English grammar as well as a limited command of the metalanguage required to explain these rules, and last but not least, these teachers would consider plural *-s*, possessive *-s*, regular past tense and comparatives the easiest structures whereas verb complementation, ergative verbs, relative clauses and unreal conditionals the hardest structures in terms of explaining errors.

Results revealed that participants performed well in the two tests (UGJT & MKT), showed a good command of the English language, were able to explain the rule for grammatically incorrect sentences and displayed a satisfactory command of metalanguage for rule explanations. Contrary to what was expected, our participant-teachers performed well in the tests and display a good level of metalinguistic knowledge and a satisfactory command of metalinguistic terminology for rule explanation. Based on data gathered by means of a questionnaire and their performance on the tests, these EFL teachers consider plural *-s*, possessive *-s*, regular past tense, comparatives, tag question, modal verbs and yes/no questions the easiest structures to explain. Furthermore, they consider verb complementation, ergative verbs, relative clauses, unreal conditionals, since and for and definite article the hardest structures in terms of explaining errors.

The fact that some teachers consider certain structures difficult to explain may be explained, in the words of Erlam, Philp and Elder (2009: 232), that "it is, therefore, feasible that the participants in this study may never have encountered or needed to articulate the relevant rule". It does not seem the case for this study, since the participants are language teachers, who encounter these structures and use them routinely. Possibly, they know how to use the structures correctly, yet, for lack of appropriate metalanguage to explain the errors, are not to make their rules explicit (a probable indicative of implicit knowledge).

As regards its limitations, this study comprised a small sample of participants (just ten), a fact that does not allow for conclusive data and generalizations. In addition, we had a limited amount of time to prepare

the instruments, collect and analyze the data, which prevented us from carrying out an in-depth statistical analysis. In the future, we would like to have the opportunity to run statistics with our data and also run Cronbach's alpha to check the reliability of the tests for the sample we studied. Moreover, it would be interesting to collect data from more EFL teachers, hence, having a more robust sample. Also, since most of the participants are graduate students who work at language institutes, it would be desirable to carry out the same study with regular school teachers. Likewise, it would be interesting to observe some of these teachers acting in their classrooms to see the extent to which they focus on grammar issues, provide rule explanation and whether they follow FFI. Finally, we hope this study may give teachers a chance to reflect on the role grammar plays in their classroom, although this was not the focus of the study.

As pedagogical implications, this study corroborates Erlam, Philp and Elder (2009)'s ideas that teacher education programs have an important role in helping teachers develop their metalinguistic knowledge and empowering them to use FFI in the classroom. Although grammar has been highly valued in English teaching programs due to the heavy tradition of grammar translation methods, Baca and Escamilla (2003) point out that recently teachers have not been required to pursue a formal study of the history and structure of English or of any other language they teach/are being prepared to teach.

Following this line, Wright (2002) comments that there is an unresolved discussion in the field of teacher education and SLA regarding how much knowledge about the language teachers need to have. We hold the view that human beings are constantly reshaping knowledge through the complex interplay between what is taught and what is experienced, and what is believed by the person and the community. We strongly believe that teachers, the population investigated, are "legitimate knowers, producers of legitimate knowledge", "capable of constructing and sustaining their own professional practice over time" (JOHNSON & GOLOMBEK, 2002: 3). We acknowledge that knowing grammar, metalanguage, vocabulary, didactics, cultural differences, theories about language learning and development – to mention but a few areas teachers should possess knowledge about – definitely empower teachers to better share knowledge, to better create situations in which learning can take place and also to better respond to students' needs and doubts.

APPENDIX 1

Sentences for the UGJT

1. I haven't seen him for a long time.

2. I think that he is nicer and more intelligent than all the other students.
3. The teacher explained the problem to the students.
4. Jeff says he wants buying a car next week.
5. Martin completed his assignment and print it out.
6. We will leave tomorrow, isn't it?
7. He plays soccer very well.
8. Did Jane completed her homework?
9. I must to brush my teeth now.
10. If he had been richer, she will marry him.
11. He has been living in New Zealand since three years.
12. Pam wanted to know what I had told John.
13. They had the very good time at the party.
14. Between 1990 and 2000 the population of New Zealand was increased.
15. Jeff is still living in his rich uncle house.
16. Martin sold a few old coins and stamp to a shop.
17. I have been studying English since a long time.
18. I can to speak French very well.
19. Joseph miss an interesting party last weekend.
20. Jane eats a lot of sushi.
21. Bill wanted to know where I had been.
22. Did Cathy cook dinner last night?
23. Rosemary reported the crime to the police.
24. Mary is taller than her sisters.
25. Jason live with his friend Max.
26. Kim wants to buy a computer this weekend.
27. She writes very well English.
28. If she had worked hard, she would have passed the exam.
29. Tom wanted to know whether was I going.
30. I saw very funny movie last night.
31. The teacher explained John the answer.
32. I must finish my homework tonight.
33. Kim went to the school to speak to her children teacher.
34. Jane has been studying in Auckland for three years.
35. This building is more bigger than your house.
36. That book isn't very interesting, is it?
37. Her English vocabulary increased a lot last year.
38. Jason received a letter from his father yesterday.
39. Does Kim live in Auckland?
40. Jeff left some pens and pencils at school.
41. If he hadn't come to New Zealand, he will stay in Japan.
42. My car is more faster and more powerful than your car.
43. Joseph flew to Washington to meet the President's advisor.

44. Joseph wants finding a new job next month.
45. Jeff works very hard, but earns very little.
46. Japan is a very interesting country.
47. I can cook Chinese food very well.
48. They enjoyed the party very much.
49. The boys went to bed late last night, is it?
50. She wanted to know why had he studied German.
51. He reported his father the bad news.
52. Jane spoke to the professor's secretary.
53. Jeff stayed at home all day and finished the book.
54. Jason found some keys on the ground.
55. They did not come at the right time.
56. If he had bought a ticket, he might have won the prize.
57. Martin says he wants to get married next year.
58. An accident was happened on the motorway.
59. Kim lives in Hamilton but work in Auckland.
60. She likes always watching television.
61. Did Martin visited his father yesterday?
62. Something bad happened last weekend.
63. Kim bought two present for her children.
64. She is working very hard, isn't she?
65. The bird that my mother caught it has died.
66. The boat that my father bought it has sunk.
67. The book that Mary wrote won the prize.
68. The car that Bill has rented is a Toyota.

APPENDIX 2

Sentences for the MKT – Part I

1. I must have to wash my hands.
2. Hiroshi wants visiting the United States this year.
3. If Jane had asked me, I would give her some money.
4. Learning a language is more easier when you are young.
5. Keiko grew some rose in her garden.
6. His school grades were improved last year.
7. Martin lost his friend book.
8. Keum happen to meet an old friend yesterday.
9. Because he was late, he called taxi.
10. They were interested in what was I doing.
11. Does Liao has a Chinese wife?
12. Jenny likes very much her new job.
13. They have already finished, isn't it?
14. He has been saving money since 10 years.
15. The bake that you baked it tastes very nice.

APPENDIX 3

Passage for the MKT – Part II

The materials are delivered to the factory by a supplier, who usually has no technical knowledge, but who happens to have the right contacts. We would normally expect the materials to arrive within three days, but this time it has taken longer.

APPENDIX 4

Sentences for the MKT – Part II

1. Poor little Joe stood out in the snow.
2. Joe had nowhere to stay.
3. The policeman chased Joe down the street.
4. The woman gave him some money.

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