RESEARCH ARTICLE

METALINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE OF GRADUATING ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AND HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS

Leonardo O. Munalim
Ma. Concepcion Y. Raymundo

ABSTRACT

This small-scale research aimed at investigating the nature and extent of metalinguistic knowledge among English teachers amid the little treatment of grammar, heavily literature-based, in the 2010 Secondary Curriculum. Sixteen intact female graduating English major students from three colleges, and 17 intact in-service high school English teachers from 6 schools in Manila, school year 2012-2013, completed two metalanguage tests. Using the SPSS, descriptive statistics were generated for quantitative data, while qualitative analysis centered mainly on the reasons of the difficulty of the tests. Although results showed that a significant difference of performances in two metalanguage tests exists between the two groups, it is argued that years of teaching may not fully influence teachers' declarative metalinguistic knowledge. In a nutshell, low MK among the English teachers can be used by policy makers to revisit the Domain 7 of NCBTS, and to reconsider/revisit the treatment of grammar teaching.

Keywords: *Explicit/Conscious Grammar, Grammatical Terminology, Knowledge about Language (KAL), Language Awareness, Metalanguage*

INTRODUCTION

> *"Who climbs the grammar-tree, distinctly knows where*
> *noun, and verb, and participle grow." – John Dryden*

Increasing evidence shows that many teachers are anxious about their gaps in their explicit knowledge about language (Macken-Horarik, 2009). One case of dissatisfaction was expressed by Dikici (2012) when he investigated 90 pre-service English teachers' beliefs towards grammar including their explicit metalinguistic knowledge. Although most respondents favored the use of metalanguage in the teaching/learning process, their metalinguistic knowledge was dissatisfactory because there was a lack of knowledge on what conjugation of verbs is, with a very low score of 8.9%. On the other hand, Shuib (2009) found out that many of the 71 primary school English language teachers from different schools in Malaysia were marked "below the passing mark". During his interview, he noted that "insufficient exposure to grammar during teacher training and lack of interest to improve grammar knowledge" (p.42) were reasons for low metalinguistic awareness.

In the Philippines context grammar is treated with little attention as evident in the latest 2010 Secondary Education Curriculum. In its conceptual framework, communicative and literary competence/appreciation center on five macro-skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and the newly-added viewing, heavily literature-based. By contrast, the 2002 Basic Education Curriculum "addresses the communicative needs of students by adopting a communicative, interactive, collaborative approach..." (DepEd, 2002, p.19). This present curriculum may have adverse effects upon the teacher quality, especially upon English Teachers' Metalinguistic Awareness (TMA).

Possessing some specialized knowledge about the language is imperative, if someone professes to be a language teacher (Johnson, 2009) in that a language teacher is expected to be a grammar maven the moment he or she gets in his or her language class. Arndt, Harvey & Nuttall (2000) assert that language teachers should have a reasonable understanding of the perplexities and different parts of the system, including the ability to correct, improve

and explain ungrammatical structures. Thus, language teachers can achieve this end goal with the aid of metalanguage— a shared language or grammatical terminology used in describing another language (Arndt, Harvey, & Nuttall, 2000; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2008; and Victoria & Rodman, 1974).

The requirement for every language teacher to be better equipped with enough grammatical knowledge is of prime importance in the teaching-learning process. Vijay (2010) held that there are many educational institutions in the world today that teach English, not as a medium of communication, but as a mere subject, making the teaching of grammar a mandatory practice. In ESL/EFL teaching, many linguistic forms are made explicit, intelligible and noticeable (Basturkmen, Loewen, & Rod, 2002) through the use of metalanguage, especially that learning a second or foreign language is limited, artificial and conscious (Mishra, 2010). Hence, the need for metalinguistic knowledge is not a loophole, because relying on an extensive range of metalanguage ensures successful fulfillment of pedagogic duties among language teachers.

In another vein, the qualitative study of Borg (2001) pointed out the importance of teacher cognition in the growing body in ELT research. He stressed that "enabling teachers to develop and sustain a realistic awareness of their KAL (knowledge about language) should be an important goal for teacher education and development programs" (p. 21). He further claimed that teachers' knowledge about all the aspects of language, including grammar, impacts on how they respond to students' impromptu questions that focus on language systems.

The latest study of Hadjioannou & Hutchinson (2010) demonstrated the need for classroom teachers to have a "solid foundation in understanding and applying English grammar in order to buttress their content and pedagogical content knowledge and support their students' literacy development" (p. 90). Their study fundamentally sought to trace how pre-service teachers were influenced by the grammar-centered literacy experiences and assignments in terms of the acquisition of grammatical meta-knowledge and of methodological skills.

"Teachers have depended overwhelmingly on grammar as an area in which to correct learners, perhaps because it is such a salient feature" (Glasgow, 2008, p.12). Needless to say, the traditional approach to teaching grammar is basically based on explicit explanations on rules, providing relatively theoretical and empirical view angle to formal grammar instruction. Obviously, language teachers zero in on discrete points, while learning grammar lessons (Choudhury, 2010). Presenting a clear explanation, and having a follow up practice until the rule has been internalized (Krashen, 1982) is commonplace in language teaching even to date. This finding is maintained by Ellis (2006) since explicit knowledge of grammar needs to be conscious, learnable and verbalizable.

For instance, Mishra (2010) contends that the analysis of sentences into parts and then parsing these independent constituents of sentences is the traditional method of teaching grammar. He takes subject, verb, object, and complement with their identification and description as parts of sentences which students have to know. However, he states that careful selection of grammatical rules and patterns with greater communicative potential should be taken care of. "Overtaxing of learners with rules which do not exist and which are pedantic and do not facilitate the learning of a language have a retarding effect on the learners" (p.173). He is supported by Berry's (2008) standpoint that there are times and situations where terminology is not appropriate, especially for those less advanced, younger or less mature students. Mishra (2010) maintains that:

> Teaching of isolated words and their forms distracts attention of the learners from their communicative use and do not provide practice to the learners to create and use full length sentences. Teaching isolated forms and sentences will serve no purpose without providing practice to the learners in creating a connected text (pp. 174-175).

Recently, Hammond & Derewianka (2011) held that metalanguage, a language that a teacher and students share and use in talking about language, has become one of the hotly debated topics to date. These debates would question into the merits and effectiveness of the use of grammatical terminologies during the

teaching of English as a second or foreign language. Recently, Correa (2011) averred that those teachers who focus on accuracy have been accused of failing to emphasize fluency of communication, while those who prefer teaching with a focus on meaning have been accused of not stressing grammatical accuracy.

Metalanguage/Metalinguistic knowledge

Metalanguage is defined as a shared language between a teacher and students in describing and talking about language (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2008; Correa, 2011; Hammond & Derewianka, 2011; and Victoria & Rodman, 1974). It can also be a jargon of the linguists whose nature is self-referential and self-reflective (Zongxin, 2006). Moreover, Dictionary.com claims that metalanguage is any language or symbolic system used to discuss, describe, or analyze another language or symbolic system, while En.wiktionary.org defines metalanguage as any language or vocabulary of specialized terms used to describe or analyze a language or linguistic process.

Metalinguistic knowledge (MK) is defined by Carter & Nunan (2011: 224) as an "explicit, formal knowledge about language that can be verbalized, usually including metalinguistic terminology, such as present tense, indefinite article, etc." They are supported by Jin (2011) with her position that the ability of manipulating words, constructing sentences and stating grammar rules holds one's metalinguistic knowledge. This conscious awareness or knowledge allows one to reflect on and manipulate the system of any language (Fielding-Barnsley& Purdie, 2005). Equally, Hu (2010) favors the teacher's use of metalanguage for explanatory precision only happens when one actually uses metalanguage.

Reasonable knowledge of metalanguage allows us to know and to reflect on why certain language forms are being used to understand grammar books and to have good translation skills. Having good metalinguistic knowledge means having a good knowledge of vocabulary and syntax and being able to play with language and use a lot of metalanguage (Arnó-Macià, 2009). As an avenue to talking about a language, these specific

grammatical terminologies such as *direct object*, *subject*, etc. provide teachers the ability to access linguistic references to discuss difficulties with clarity and comprehensibility, thereby helping the language students to understand concepts easier (Quirke, n.d.).

The "definition and operationalization of the notion of metalinguistic knowledge has varied somewhat across studies" (Roehr, 2007: 42). While other researchers mainly focus on the learner's ability to label parts of speech (e.g. Tokunaga, 2010), some researchers operationalize the concept through the learners' ability to correct, describe, and explain L2 errors (e.g. Tsang, 2011; Mirzaei, Domakani, & Shakerian, 2011; Shuib, 2009; Roehr, 2007, Andrews, 1999). The researcher has developed another level of metalanguage test, which asks test takers to construct one sentence based on the indicated metalanguage under the sub-sentential level including the traditional 12 tense-aspect combinations. In this task, verb conjugations should be correct; thus, if a test taker does not know about *present progressive/continuous*, he cannot produce a sentence like *I am writing at the moment*. As Gelderen (2006: 45) indicates, "the most prominent parts of formal analysis of structure include labelling word classes and parts of speech, morphological knowledge, idiom, sentence structure and conjugation".

Communicative language teaching and learning

"The use of grammatical terminology in the language classroom has received little practical discussion, perhaps because it is considered incompatible with most approaches to language teaching in the late twentieth century" (Berry, 2008: 19). Criticisms of the use of metalanguage became more striking when communicative language teaching (CLT) first appeared as a new approach to language teaching between 1970s and 1980s. "Under the influence of CLT, language continues to be conceived of as a set of rule-governed forms that when employed appropriately at the right time and in the right place were presumed to lead to the development of L2 communicative competence" (Johnson, 2009: 42). Thus, proponents of this new approach demand that grammatical competence be not the goal of language teaching (Richards, 2006). Hu (2010: 61) opined that "because of its time-honored association with formal grammar instruction,

metalanguage has been downplayed or even rejected as a legitimate component of pedagogical practices in many L2 classrooms". For Rico & Weed (1995), the treatment of grammar is given only when the need arises.

Despite these arguments, the teaching of grammar, including explicit knowledge has not disappeared in the age of CLT (Burns, 2009). In fact, Noonan (2004) indicated that the lack of grammar instruction in the Communicative Approach has often produced students who communicate well, but lack grammatical competency. Harmer (1983: 86) also added that "CLT has sometimes been seen as having eroded the explicit teaching of grammar with a consequent loss among students in accuracy in the pursuit of fluency". For teachers' benefit, "the more teachers know about grammar, the more expeditiously they should be able to raise a learner's consciousness about how the language works" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2008: 1).

In the Philippines, the 2010 Secondary Curriculum for English mainly focuses on the overall goal of developing functionally literate Filipino who can effectively function in various communication situations. This is perhaps the overriding reason for the lack of substantial research in this area of explicit grammar in the Philippines to date. Given these issues, this study may be considered timely and relevant to investigate possible gaps of metalinguistic knowledge of the graduating English major students and practicing high school English teachers. It aims to peruse how competent they are in recognizing and producing grammatical terminologies, which they should have mastered even from the onset.

In this scenario, there is a felt need to describe the pre-service and in-serve teacher quality within the English area to "identity what teachers know and can do at different stages of their career" (PNU, D-NCBTS, 2014) as novice and experienced teachers. Consequently, the results of the study may be utilized by policy makers to revisit the Domain 7 of the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS), such as the addition of teachers' declarative and procedural knowledge as one of its indicators, not only in English but in all subject areas.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper has been positioned based on four interlarding theories of Communicative Competence (Hymes, 1972), Teacher Metalinguistic Awareness (Andrews, 1999), Monitor Hypothesis (Krashen, 1981), and Teacher Cognition (Borg, 2003).

Hymes (1972, as cited by Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2002) introduced the term communicative competence—the concept of knowing a language. One among the competencies that he mentioned includes grammatical competence that involves knowing the language code: vocabulary, word formation and meaning, sentence formation, pronunciation and spelling.

Andrews (1999) used the term Teacher Metalinguistic Awareness (TMA) as an assertion that second language teachers need a sound knowledge about language. He further claimed that it "helps to emphasize the extra dimension of cognitions and reflections about language competence and communicative competence which is required by the language teacher in addition to the language awareness exhibited by any competent user of a language who consciously manipulates that language in order to achieve communicative purposes" (p.149).

Furthermore, in Krashen's (1981; 12) Monitor Hypothesis, "the monitor is an error-detecting mechanism; it scans utterances and the individual's monitor edits...confirms or edits..." Thus, metalinguistic knowledge of the students in a language classroom serves as a monitor to produce grammatical sentences and other utterances.

Lastly, this study extends the concept of Teacher Cognition that refers to the "unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching—what teachers know, believe, and think" (Borg, 2003: 81). One of the categories under Teacher Cognition includes teachers' *knowledge of grammar,* which covers declarative and procedural knowledge. Under *knowledge of grammar*, metalinguistic knowledge or grammatical terminology is under study. Moreover, Borg (1999) pointed out many categories that most teachers deal with the teaching of grammar: 1) whether to conduct formal instruction at all, 2) what language points to focus on, 3) how to structure

grammar lessons, 4) how to present and /or analyze grammar, 5) how metalinguistically explicit to be, 6) what kind of grammar practice activities to utilize, and 7) how to deal with students' grammatical errors (p. 25).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study aimed at describing the nature and extent of metalinguistic knowledge (MK) of graduating English major students from three private colleges/universities, and high school English teachers from six private high schools in Metro Manila in school year 2012-2013. Specifically, it sought to answer these research queries:
1. What is the metalinguistic knowledge (MK) of the two groups of teachers in terms of metalanguage recognition and metalanguage production?
2. Is there a significant difference of performance between grammatical forms and functions?
3. Is there a significant difference of performances between the pre-service and in-service English teachers?
4. What are the possible reasons of low performance in the metalanguage tests?

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative-qualitative method designs were employed in this small-scale research undertaking as they describe trends including a systematic, actual, accurate and objective situation, problem, or phenomenon as the same time explore and understand of a central phenomenon (Garcia, 2003; Creswell, 2002).
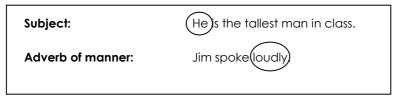
The study utilized two intact groups of respondents: 16 graduating English major students from three universities/colleges, and 17 high school English teachers from 6 private high schools, in Metro Manila for school year 2012-2013. The student-respondents – all female students – had an average age of 22.25, were bilinguals. In contrast, the teacher-respondents aged between 20-45 years who were also bilinguals, have been teaching from one to five years, rendering the respondents as either fresh graduates or novice teachers. In this

group, 23.53% were male and 76.47% female teachers whose highest educational attainment is Bachelor's Degree (58.82%), followed by Master's Degree (17.65%), both ongoing and completed.

The metalanguage tests designed by Dr. Wai Lan Tsang (2011) from the University of Hong Kong were e-mailed to the researchers. The tests are identical to those of Andrews (1999), Shuib (2009), Alderson & Horák (2010), Tokunaga (2010), Correa (2011), Dikici (2012), and Tswanya (2012). Items were modified to be culturally motivating and were evaluated for construct and face validity by four international authors all considered experts on grammatical terminology, and published international studies in this field. Tests were piloted to five graduating English major students and five high school English teachers, but as suggested, items were trimmed down to 12 because of the challenging and the explicit nature of the tests. All tests yielded *Good* interpretation for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha.

The first part of the questionnaire requested the respondents for personal, educational and linguistic backgrounds. Information included age, gender, language/s or dialect/s they use at home, and a question, if English major was their first choice. The second part included the actual metalanguage recognition and metalanguage production tests.

Test I. Metalanguage Recognition

Directions:
1. Select a word or phrase from each sentence that will exemplify the grammatical term requested.
2. ENCIRCLE the selected item.

Subject:	(He) is the tallest man in class.
Adverb of manner:	Jim spoke (loudly)

Test II. Metalanguage Production

Directions:
1. The underlined words are grammatical forms.
2. What grammatical terms would you use to describe the underlined item?
3. Writing in FULL description is preferred.

> 1. He is the **funniest** clown in the circus.
>   *Superlative adjective*
>
> 2. His **idea** was convincing.
>   *Abstract noun*

The researchers modeled the answers provided by Tsang (2011) herself. Answers were objective in that they were only focused on explicit grammatical forms and functions. Raw scores from every task were subject to a descriptive analysis using frequency, standard deviation, percentage and mean. Based on the percentage, all metalanguage tests were ranked accordingly to find the easiest to the hardest metalanguage in each skill category.

Furthermore, two tests were subjected to a verbal interpretation to determine the level of metalinguistic knowledge:

VH	H	L	VL
Very high	High	Low	Very Low
10-12	7-9	4-6	1-3

The recognition task was grouped into two qualities of lexical categories: forms and functions. T-test on two paired sample was used to see if there was a significant difference between grammatical forms and functions; and to see the difference of performance between the two groups of English teachers.

For the qualitative analysis, a semi-structured interview was conducted. Data were analyzed by describing the information and developing recurring themes based on the questions that centered mainly on:
i. Whether or not the metalanguage tests were easy;
ii. The possible reasons of difficulty; and

iii.   The need for metalinguistic knowledge

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The metalinguistic knowledge (MK) of the two groups of teachers in of *metalanguage recognition* and *metalanguage production*

Metalanguage recognition

Students' metalinguistic knowledge (MK) in terms of *metalanguage recognition* with the mean score of **4.13** can be considered **Low**, while the level of metalinguistic knowledge of the high school English teachers as to *metalanguage recognition* with a mean score of **9.24 High.**

As evident in Table 1, only one out of 12 language features is fully recognized by the students. The other 11 language features show weak performance, failing to pass the 75% mastery. Student-respondents do not even recognize two basic terminologies such as *direct* and *indirect objects*, both have 12.50% mastery. Surprisingly, the easiest functions such as *direct* and *indirect objects* appear to be the hardest words to recognize with only 12.5% mastery.

Table 1. Ranking of metalanguage recognition

Students' Performance (N= 16)			Teachers' Performance (N= 17)		
Rank	Metalanguage	%	Rank	Metalanguage	%
1	Subordinating conjunction	81.25%	1	Adverb of frequency	100.00%
2.5	Adverb of frequency	68.75%	3	Subordinating conjunction	94.12%
2.5	Auxiliary verb	68.75%	3	Auxiliary verb	94.12%
4.5	Abstract noun	37.50%	3	Relative pronoun	94.12%
4.5	Uncountable noun	37.50%	6	Uncountable noun	88.24%
6	Subject complement	31.25%	6	Indirect object	88.24%
7.5	Object complement	25.00%	6	Abstract noun	88.24%
7.5	Relative pronoun	25.00%	8	Subject complement	82.35%
9.5	Direct object	12.50%	9	Object complement	70.59%
9.5	Indirect object	12.50%	10	Present participle	47.06%
11.5	Attributive adjective	6.25%	11	Attributive adjective	41.18%
11.5	Present participle	6.25%	12	Direct object	35.29%
	AVERAGE	34.38%		AVERAGE	76.96%

The same table shows the performance of teacher-respondents in the recognizing metalanguage. An outstanding performance

comes from *adverb of frequency* with 100% mastery of recognition. The rest of the four grammatical terminologies do not perform very well, with mastery ranging from 70.59% down to 35.29% for *direct object*.

Subordinating conjunction becomes one of the well mastered metalanguage in terms of recognition from the two groups of respondents, although the problem in recognizing conjunction is that most subordinators have some affinities with preposition (Huddleston, 1988). For instance, Vitto (2006) points out that the conjunction '*before*' can be a preposition when followed by a noun as object. An a*dverb* was perfectly recognized by the group of teachers. It is easy to recognize adverbs because of their common forms (Huddleston, 1988); however, they are somewhat problematic since they include words of many different types with many different functions" (Endley, 2010).

The respondents' performance in *abstract noun* disappoints with only 37.5% mastery under student's group. *Abstract nouns* can also pose difficulties, because countability, a semantically-complex concept is closely associated with the concept of numbers (Endley, 2010) that even the word "idea" as an intangible entity (Vitto, 2006) was not recognized properly by the group of in-service teachers.

Among the least recognized metalanguage from both groups included *direct object, attributive adjective, present participle, object complement,* and *indirect object*. To illustrate:

Sentences	Correct answer	Incorrect answers
3. **Present Participle:** Being a bookworm, she enjoys staying in the library.	being	staying, enjoys
5. **Object complement:** His rude manners made everyone at the party upset.	upset	everyone, rude, manners, rude manners, at the party, everyone
7. **Indirect object:** A student sent me a Christmas card.	me	student, card, a Christmas card, Christmas card, colorful
8. **Attributive adjective:** His entire life is full of memories which are colorful.	entire	full, full of memories, colorful, entire life, which

Figure 1. Groups' incorrect recognized words based on the indicated metalanguage

Figure 1 indicates that two groups of teachers did not recognize the words or phrase that would exemplify the grammatical term requested. A "Christmas card" can never be an *indirect object*, and "everyone" can never be an *object complement*. *Adjectives* may be very easy since they are often used to modify or describe a noun, but can be misplaced. Attributive adjectives come before the head noun, while predicative adjectives appear after copular verbs.

Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2008) underline that "identifying standard parts of speech are an enterprise fraught with difficulty" (p.13) because English is a dynamic language with words that may fall under several parts of speech (Vitto, 2006). One grammatical form can bear more than one grammatical function, depending on which context or structure the form is used. This "dual category", as mentioned by Endley (2010), has been noticed to have one of more than one function (Colman, 2005).

Metalanguage production

The level of metalinguistic knowledge of the graduating English major students as regards *metalanguage production* with a mean of **4.81** can be considered **Low.** Based on the given verbal interpretation, the level of metalinguistic knowledge of high school English teachers as to *metalanguage production* with a mean of **8.29** can be considered **High.**

Table 2. Ranking of metalanguage production

Students' performance (N=16)			Teachers' performance (N= 17)		
Rank	Metalanguage	%	Rank	Metalanguage	%
1	Proper noun	75.00%	1.5	Coordinating conjunction	94.12%
2	Collective noun	62.50%	1.5	Comparative adjective	94.12%
3	Infinitive	56.25%	4	Modal verb	88.24%
4.5	Past participle	50.00%	4	Past participle	88.24%
4.5	Comparative adj.	50.00%	4	Comparative adverb	88.24%
6.5	Coor conjunction	43.75%	6	Proper noun	82.35%
6.5	Degree of adverb	43.75%	7	Infinitive	76.47%
8	Modal verb	37.50%	8	Demonstrative pronoun	70.59%
9	Demonstrative pron.	31.25%	9	Collective noun	64.71%
10	Gerund	18.75%	10	Gerund	58.82%
11	Determiner	12.50%	11.5	Determiner	11.76%
12	Superlative adverb	0.00%	11.5	Superlative adverb	11.76%
	AVERAGE	**40.11%**		**AVERAGE**	**92.16%**

As reflected in Table 2, out of 12 metalanguage, only *proper noun* (75.00%) is labeled accurately. This is followed by *collective noun*, with only 62.50% mastery of production. The rest of the language features have quite unsatisfactory performance whose mastery ranges from 56.25% down to 0.00% mastery of *superlative adverb*. As a whole, it is disconcerting that out of 12 language features, only one was considered within the passing rate of 75%. All of the 16 graduating English major students did not know how *the best* functions in the sentence. From the group of teacher-respondents, it is impressive that there are two metalanguage with 94.12% mastery: *coordinating conjunction* and *comparative adjective*.

Among the least produced metalanguage from both groups included *gerund, determiner,* and *superlative adverb*. To illustrate:

Sentences	Correct answer	Students' incorrect answers
2. <u>Some</u> Filipinos are hospitable.	determiner	conjunction, noun, adverb
11. In a contest, Tina performed <u>the best.</u>	superlative adverb	adjective, superlative adjective, abstract noun, direct object, superlative pronoun
12. We stopped <u>walking</u> because of the bad weather.	gerund	verb, present participle, simple past tense, direct object, future tense of the verb

Figure 2. Groups' incorrect recognized words based on the indicated metalanguage

O'Dwyer (2006) also defines *determiners* as structure class words signaling a forthcoming noun or noun phrase. Thus, this recent addition of determiners among the eight parts of speech may have made the respondents uncertain of the right grammatical terminology. Also, at the surface, the phrase *'the best'* can be considered as *adjective*. However, it modifies the word *'perform'* in the sentence; thus, a *superlative adverb*. Lastly, O'Dwyer (2006) examines the similarity of form between *present participle* and *gerund*.

Thus, to exploit syntactic cues to word class, the learner must already know something about the distributional regularities of the language because words do not fit neatly into the categories that have been assigned to them. In short, overlapping occurs (Colman, 2005). This finding strengthens Zyrik's (2009) idea that categorizing the words can be a complex process in that they have to be

parsed for morphological, syntactic and semantic cues. We are not assured, though, that a mere looking at the word helps us identify its class. How the word behaves in a given sentence is the only solution to the problem (Crystal, 1987).

Sentences	Full description	Incomplete description
3. We listened to his <u>extremely</u> boring speech.	adverb of manner	adverb
8. <u>Pedro</u> went to Chocolate Hills yesterday.	proper noun	noun
11. In a contest, Tina performed <u>the best.</u>	superlative adverb	adverb

Figure 3. Description of lexical items

Figure 3 also shows incomplete description of the given language features. First, the respondents might know one grammatical terminology that would describe the given language feature, but were unable to sort it into a specific terminology. Consequently, they opted to label the given language feature in a general term. This finding corroborates that of Tsang's (2011) study where primary English teachers had little knowledge of the sub-categories of grammatical forms.

Task to task discussion

In this study, metalanguage production is easier than metalanguage recognition – inconsistent with international studies (Tswanya, 2012; Tsang, 2011; Shuib, 2009). In the hierarchy of the constructs of metalinguistic knowledge, *metalanguage recognition* appears to be the easiest. Andrews (1999) contended that it is a task cognitively less demanding for respondents are only asked to match given terms to the examples. Tsang (2011), in patterning her study from Andrews (1999), confirmed this idea that *recognition* task requires the participants to identify examples with a scope in the given sentences. In short, the answers would come from the given sentences, which seem superficially easy and fast.

Recognizing metalanguage must have troubled the Filipino respondents which one to encircle. As reflected in the questionnaires, most respondents either left the items unanswered or encircled a different lexical item. Zyzik's (2009) asserts that the categorization of words into classes is a complex process that

involves parsing the input for morphological, syntactic, and semantic cues. In short, a mere look at a word will not assure identification of its class. Instead, analyzing how the word behaves in a given sentence is the only solution to the problem (Crystal, 1987).

In the same fashion, the difficulty is still evident in the *metalanguage production.* It may have an identical mental evaluation with *metalanguage recognition* that can pose similar problems. In recognizing metalanguage, test takers have to consider the grammatical terminology (form and function) being requested. They have to look for a word or phrase that behaves or acts accordingly. On the other hand, in producing metalanguage, test takers have to read the sentences and look into the underlined words. Then, they have to look "within their own mental store of explicit knowledge about language in order to seek the appropriate metalinguistic terms to describe a language item" (Andrews, 1999, p. 152).

Significant difference of performance between grammatical forms and functions

Table 3. Statistical difference of performance between forms and functions

Group	Mean Difference	t-Value	p-Value	Conclusion
Pre-service	21.09	3.645	0.002	Significant difference
In-service	11.76	2.315	0.034	Significant difference

Table 3 shows a p-value of 0.002 for pre-service respondents and 0.034 for in-service respondents, indicating significant difference between the mean percentage of correct answers of forms and functions. Moreover, the mean difference of 21.09 for student-respondents and 11.76 for teacher- respondents indicates that both groups of teachers scored significantly higher in form-related language features than in function-related features.

The data comparing two lexical qualities echoed Tsang's (2011) and Shuib's (2009) studies that grammatical functions are more difficult than grammatical forms. Vitto (2006) defines grammatical

form as the "way a word looks or can be changed to look", while "grammatical function is the way a word operates within a larger unit to help make meaning" (p. 18). As a whole, functional shift or the mobility of word class that causes metalanguage difficulties (Myhill, 2000) will testify the problematic case of classifying English words.

Significant difference of performances between the two groups of teachers

Table 4. Comparison of the performance of two groups of English teachers

Metalanguage	Mean Difference	t-Value	p-Value
Recognition	42.59	6.08	< 0.05
Production	29.01	4.27	< 0.05

Table 4 suggests that there is a significant difference in the mean percentage of correct answers between students' and teacher's performance in terms of *metalanguage recognition*. The mean difference of 42.59 implies that teacher-respondents have a significantly higher mean percentage of correct answers, as compared to the student-respondents.

Likewise, there is a significant difference between teachers and students' performance with regard to their mean percentage of correct answers on *metalanguage production* section. The mean difference of 29.01 suggests that teachers have significantly higher mean percentage correct answers than the student-respondents.

Table 5. Summary of MK performances

Metalanguage	Pre-service teachers			In-service teachers		
	Overall mean	SD	Interpretation	Overall mean	SD	Interpretation
Production	4.81	2.56	Low	9.24	2.36	High
Recognition	4.13	2.00	Low	8.29	2.11	High
OVERALL	**4.45**	**2.28**	**Low**	**8.77**	**2.24**	**High**

By inspection, the in-service high school English teachers with an average mean score of 8.77 performed better than the pre-service teachers with an average mean score of 4.45, considered **Low** using the verbal interpretation. This would suggest that teacher's explicit knowledge of grammar and grammatical terminology may

have been developed by teaching experience (Andrews, 1999). Explicit linguistic knowledge is honed through traditional grammar-oriented instruction, and this formal practice and study facilitates the development of explicit knowledge (White & Ranta, 2002) which has become automatic and spontaneous. In totality, this result needs to consider the claim that the development of explicit knowledge of the language system (i.e. grammatical terminology in this study) is influenced by a prolonged exposure to formal L^2 teaching/learning process.

Reasons of Low Performance in the Metalanguage Tests

In a semi-structured interview, all pre-service and in-service English teachers were asked whether or not the metalanguage tests were easy; the possible reasons of difficulty; and whether there is still a need for metalinguistic knowledge in the teaching and learning grammar to date. As a whole, all respondents from two groups had recurring themes based on the given questions during the interview.

All of the intact groups of English teachers averred that the two tests were difficult. In fact, most of them expressed their intention to review all grammatical terms had they known they were going to be tested. Grammatical terms are always objective, thus recognizing and producing metalingual terms should be taken with care. One in-service teacher who has been teaching for more than 20 years, and is a doctorate holder expressed her reasons for the difficulty by saying that, "... because that is not always a need when teaching this time, so there are terms I am rusty of." She also added that in the English curriculum, lessons are literature-based; although there is "language in literature", the explicit grammar treatment is not the main focus.

Other novice teachers also admitted that during their four-year training, grammatical terms were not the main focus. Instead, they were taught mainly on pedagogical skills, classroom management, and other contents for them to pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). They also expressed their intention to see the results and are willing to be tested again after reviewing these grammatical terms. As a whole, the researchers would like to underscore an impressive comment from one of the graduating

students:

> "Taking this test is an awakening experience; I love literature so much and that the very basic foundation of being a language teacher has been taken for granted."

It can be inferred that the 2010 Secondary Curriculum for English and the kind of continuing teacher training programs purveyed by the Teacher Education institutions in the country have immediate effects on teacher quality. The results may be attributed to the fact that English teachers finished their four-year degree with little attention paid to classroom pedagogy and grammar (Freeman, 2011; Williams, 2005). In fact, most of the standards in the 2010 English curriculum for high school target literature rather than language use (Plata, 2010). However, this scenario of scarce use of explicit grammar should not be employed to rationalize the low metalinguistic knowledge of these future language teachers, especially that mastering enough terminologies is imperative to many professionals (Tsang, 2011; Gabrielatos, 2002).

Implications

From the onset, the researchers mentioned that there is little grammar treatment in the 2010 Secondary Curriculum for English, in favor of the communicative and literary competence. However, this does not mean a total disregard of the grammar component. Despite the limitations of this study, the results provide some implications on teacher quality in Teacher Education Institutions.

First, for graduating English major students who averred that English was their first choice, the dearth of explicit knowledge should be a cause of concern, because they are likely to go straight into teaching after graduation. The result could imply that their level of metalinguistic knowledge may not suffice as English teachers.

What constitutes a good language teacher somehow lies on his or her ability to satisfy the extemporaneous questions raised by students even in a literature, reading, writing or a speaking class. With the results, Teik (2001) and Shuib (2009) warned that instead of empowering students for self-learning, we are exposing them to

serious language problems (Dikici, 2012).

Most importantly, by using reference grammar books, teachers might find ungrammatical sentences and misleading concepts. Their mastery of basic to advanced metalanguage will help them rectify these discrepancies. In this regard Gabrielatos (2002) asserted that teachers cannot provide clear explanations without language awareness that will inform the selection of materials and procedures to buttress their content and pedagogical content knowledge (Hadjioannou & Hutchinson, 2010).

Limitations

A caveat that needs to be noted is that the test was administered by the researchers themselves. This could have affected the results, as the student-respondents must have been thinking that the scores were not part of their grade. English instructors themselves should administer the test, thus obligating the respondents to take the tasks seriously. For teacher-respondents, Division Heads should administer the tests to in-service English teachers annually as part of evaluation of their professional expertise.

Moreover, the *metalanguage production* test should have a stricter marking system in future replications of the study. In this study, the test requires respondents to produce a full description of metalanguage. However, incomplete description was still accepted and given one point.

Only a total of 24 items for both metalanguage constructs were tested. More *forms* and *functions* in the advanced level should be used in future researches. Most pointedly, the study solely based on numerical comparison without delving deeper into some possible factors of low metalinguistic knowledge; thus, the recommendations for future studies.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study reinforce one of the findings of Myhill (2000): "The word metalanguage is itself a reminder that the study of

grammar is conceptually challenging, using language to describe language" (p. 157) because metalinguistic knowledge is understandably a problem-solving which involves high analysis and high control while looking at an object language (Roehr, 2000; White & Ranta, 2002). Admittedly, we could not expect that the two metalanguage tasks would be perfected even by the experienced high school English teachers. Arguably too, years of teaching may not fully influence teachers' declarative metalinguistic knowledge.

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