

Grammar and Grammaring: Toward the Integration of English Grammar Teaching in Senior High School

Yan Mo

China West Normal University, Nanchong, Sichuan, 637000, China

Email:1198705101@qq.com

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Abstract:

Despite the trend of “marginalizing grammar teaching”, grammar teaching remains necessary in senior high school English teaching and knowing grammar can improve students’ ability to think analytically and communicate confidently and effectively. This paper discusses the current grammar teaching situation and then argues that we should raising the consciousness of grammaring, deductive approach should be combined with inductive approach and several grammar teaching modes need to be integrated.

Keywords: Grammar teaching; Grammaring; Inductive approach; Integration

1. Introduction

When speaking of the reason to learn grammar, there are several arguments, such as The rule-of-law argument, The discrete item argument, The fine-tuning argument, The fossilization argument, The advance-organizer argument. In the actual senior high school English teaching, students’

lacking of grammar knowledge and dynamic grammar concept has led to their errors in using vocabulary and confusion in sentence components, making reading and comprehension difficult, let alone writing. Grammar teaching remains necessary in senior high school because both the teacher and students believe in the generative capacity of grammar rules, that knowing the rules of the language will help them to create and understand new utterance(Diane Larsen-Freman,2003). However, traditional ways of presenting grammar and rote learning still domain grammar teaching in high school English teaching. This paper makes a brief review of current grammar teaching and then tries to explore some measures to improve the current situation.

2. The current grammar teaching in senior high school

Despite there are varieties of teaching methods of grammar, such as Cognitive Grammar Teaching(Huang,2002; Lin, 2015), Task-based Mode(Zhang & Sun, 2009), Integrating Grammar Instruction(Zhao,1999), Content-based Instruction(Liu, 2012), Processing Instruction, Interactional Feedback, Textual Enhancement, Discourse-based Instruction, the actual grammar teaching remains the traditional method in senior high school. Grammar teaching still maintains the traditional model, centering on the accuracy of formal and rule learning, and mechanical practice is seen as a way to achieve grammar learning.

For a long time, English teachers in China have been using mechanical and deductive teaching methods to give students a clear description and explanation of complicated grammar rules. However, according to the descriptive statistics of difficulties that are often encountered during students' grammar learning, more than half students think that they all ever have difficulties in understanding teachers' explanation of new grammar knowledge in class(Chunyi Ji ,2018). That is to say, half of students still couldn't get the language rules in real use whether in writing or speaking and even know the rules, there is still inaccuracy and disfluency in their performance. Maybe it is teacher's grammar teaching presentation method or grammar teaching philosophy that hinders students from acquiring grammar skills. The negative transfer of Chinese grammar continues to influence the English grammar construction of learners. Besides, both teachers and students holds the traditional view that grammar is a set of static rules which exist there to be recited. According to some interviews, students think grammar is authoritative and irrefutable for that they were told from the beginning of their English learning so usually they have no questions about it, and they just follow rules beyond any doubt. Furthermore, in the actual grammar teaching class, grammar points are often be noticed in the reading context and then picked out for explicit explaining which follows sentence-making practices or fill-in questions. The grammar part in the senior high school English textbook usually contains question-answering, gap-filling exercise emphasized on the form, and vocabulary check-out multiple-choices questions and workbook corresponding to the related grammar forms most of students' homework. Students tend to be bored with this passive acceptance of grammar, thus causing them to give up learning grammar.

3. Measures corresponding to grammar teaching

3.1 Raise the consciousness of grammaring

Grammar is the system of a language. sometimes grammar is described as the “rules” of a language; but actually we can't depict it like that way. If we use the word "rules", we are actually assuming that there are rules first, and then we create the language according to the rules. But language doesn't start like that. Language begins with the sounds people make and evolves into words, phrases, and sentences. Language is fluid, not fixed, and what we call "grammar" can only reflect language at a certain period of time. Grammar is not simple about form; it is about meaning as well(Larsen-Freeman,2003). Therefore, grammar should not be considered as a set of decontextualized, meaningless structures and it is meaningful and flux.

We should not regard grammar as declarative knowledge but as procedural knowledge, for the reason that we need not only to know the form but also to know how to use it in real language situation. That is to say, nowadays we should hold the view that grammar is dynamic and flexible, as Larsen-Freeman put it, grammaring is the ability to use grammar structure accurately, meaningfully and appropriately and it can be productively regarded as a fifth skill, not only as an area of knowledge. By treating grammar as a skill that needs to be mastered rather than a set of rules to remember, we will help students to achieve the goal of accurately communicating meaning in the way they see fit.

When we think of grammar as a skill, we are more inclined to create learning situations that overcome the problem of inert knowledge. We may not ask our students to just remember the rules and then wonder why they don't use them in real communication or writing. Skill development requires practice, and learning grammar requires practice. However, as we will see, it is not the kind of practice involving a lot of rote, which is boring and ineffective. Scott Thornbury thinks there are three goals of practicing grammar, they are accuracy, fluency and reconstruing and in a bid to achieve these objectives, practice activities should have these characteristics: attention to form, familiarity, thinking time, feedback, attention to meaning, authenticity, communicative purpose, chunking, repetition, problematizing, push, scaffolding. He also gave some examples of practicing grammar such as through oral drills, written exercises and personalization task.

3.2 Try to give logical reasons when presenting grammar

Before practicing the skill of grammar, in terms of grammar presenting, the logic behind some grammar should be told. As Diane opines, it is important for learners not only to know the rules, but also why they exist. And rules tend to be limited to generalizing about the form of language, but grammatical forms have meanings and uses as well, which students also need to know. What's more, knowing the reasons for a rule also gives language learners an understanding of the logic that speakers of another language use. From the beginning grammar learning in middle school, most of the students learn rules by memorizing and they become weary of grammar since then. But if they were told the reasons behind those rules, maybe they will become the master of their own language learning rather than the slave or machine of rote learning.

Rules have exceptions and are often quite abstract, and knowing a rule will not guarantee that learners will invoke it when need it, so if teacher presents the logical reasons of the grammar, things may become different. For example, when encountering the part of passive voice, many teacher would present students with an active sentence and then turn it into its passive form. There is no doubt that the prior knowledge can scaffold students' understanding about voice, while it can't lead to the real understanding of passive voice when it takes place in actual situation. If passive voice is introduced into active voice, students may think that passive voice originates from the active voice and that they are interchangeable in all occasion. In fact, the use of the two voices is based on different reasons and situations. Passive voice is usually used when the agent is unknown, redundant or the agent is new information or scientific objectivity is required. In this sense, the situation and background of utterance are of great importance in passive voice teaching. Telling students the logic behind some rules may deepen their understanding of language system and make the retention last for a long time.

3.3 Integrate modes of grammar teaching

Though some new general approaches have been discussed recently, such as processing instruction, interactional feedback, Textual enhancement, Task-based instruction, and Discourse-based instruction, traditional rule-driven approach still play the main role in grammar teaching. Therefore, integration of several grammar teaching mode is highly urged and different approaches should cater for different language points. We may teach *used to* using translation, teach *articles* using grammar worksheets, teach *should have done* using a generative situation, teach the difference between past simple and present perfect through minimal sentence pairs, teach the verb *can* using an information gap activity.

Students prefer to be given explicit rules and they want the security of knowing what is right and what is wrong, which given by rules learning. However, though explicit grammar teaching is perceived to be indispensable by students and teachers, the process of grammar teaching is thought to be boring. For a long time, grammar teaching has been a headache for teachers since it is time-consuming while ineffective for some students. As a consequence, inductive approach and inductive approach should be integrated among several grammar teaching modes. Deductive approach starts with the presentation of a rule and followed by examples in which the rule is applied and get straight to the language point thus adapting to the Chinese English learning classroom which requires efficiency. Deductive approach has to be the main approach in explicit grammar teaching. On the other hand, inductive approach which means concluding rules from examples can be used in the process of implicit grammar teaching during the trend of learner-centeredness. And this is combined with context-based mode, which at first guided by teachers' semi-implicit instruction in the classroom and gradually turned into self-guided implicit grammar learning.

A discovery learning approach would favor induction, with the added benefit that students learn how to figure out the rules on their own. However, not all rules may lend themselves to induction easily. For instance, participants in studies by DeKeyser and Robinson showed that students learned simple morphosyntactic rules better under conditions of explicit-deductive learning and more complex rules better under implicit-inductive conditions, presumably because the latter were difficult to articulate

(Spada &Lightbown 2008). During the inductive grammar learning period, students receive assistance from the teacher in figuring out the rules rather than the teacher's providing the students with explanations, or the students' being left on their own to figure out the grammar explanations.

4. Conclusion

Learning is a gradual process involving the mapping of form, meaning, and use (Larsen-Freeman,2003);once students know a grammar structure doesn't mean that they can use it accurately or appropriately, and it takes a long time for learners to grasp a grammatical rule. That is to say, the grammar of their target language develop gradually and the process of grammaring, which not only include acquiring the grammar knowledge but also knowing why and how, takes a long time. And the ultimate goal of learner-centered approach to teaching is learner empowerment which is realized by means of language education. Language education involves the acquisition by learners of an understanding of language, language use and language learning, and of their own subjective interaction with the process of language study. In terms of grammar teaching, grammaring is the empowerment of grammar during which students become the master of the learning process and instead of just following rules, they create utterance naturally and flexibly.

In conclusion, the ability of flexible using of grammar instead of grammar rules should be the goal of teaching and through changing learners' consciousness and integrating several grammar teaching modes to develop the grammar skill, students' attitude towards grammar tend to be ameliorated. Teacher's effort through these measures is really to empower the students to become autonomous grammar learners and to be successful language learners.

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