

An Investigation on the Acceptance of Using Microlecture to Assist in High-School English Grammar Learning

Ye Shuang

The foreign language school,
Civil Aviation Flight University of China

Liu leilei

College of foreign language education,
China West Normal University

Abstract

This study aims to define microlecture as a tool to assist students in English grammar learning after class. Two questionnaires and interviews were applied into the investigation to find out teachers' and students' attitudes toward microlecture and its application in grammar learning.

Keywords: Microlecture; English Grammar; High school

1. Introduction

For a long time, grammar teaching of high school in China has been in a state of “time-consuming and low-efficiency”. There are a great number of articles about the popular topic --- “High school English grammar teaching”. Most of those articles focus on the content of the investigation about the present situation of high school English grammar teaching, high school grammar teaching methods or strategies.

In 2002, Mei Deming (2004) conducted an investigation on present situation of English teaching from elementary school to university in several cities of China. The result of the questionnaire about teaching situation in classroom showed that when asked “which teaching pattern has been used in teaching?”, 20.73% high school teachers answered “grammar explanation – student practice”; when asked “how about the participation of students?”, 10.98% high school teachers answered “very positive”. When doing the same questionnaire survey on students, the result showed that when asked “which is the most time-consuming thing in English class?” 83.3% students answered “teachers’ explanation”. The survey directly reflected that 20.73% teachers still applied “grammar explanation” method to teach grammar, but 83.3% students thought “teachers’ explanation” was the most time-consuming part in grammar learning. The current mode of English grammar teaching is still inflexible and dull. Both teachers and students may need a way to renew this kind of mode.

At the same time, “microlecture”--- a new way of informatization education, is responding such demand. It gradually applied widely into the field of teaching, because it can present students specific goals, flexible forms and refined content.

2. Grammar Teaching

Grammar, according to Chomsky (1965), was a system of rules which determined how sentences were to be formed, understood and used. Leech(1982) described it as a mechanism by which language operated and be used to communicate by language learners. Brown (2001) took grammar as a system of rules which governed the relationships and conventional arrangements of words in a sentence. From the definitions of above, grammar indicates the rules or observable patterns in a concrete language.

Grammar teaching, which changes from domination to auxiliary in English teaching, have gone through dramatic shifts. Grammar-translation Method took the dominant role in English learning in 19th century. In accordance with it, grammar rules of the language should be analyzed at first when learning a language, then sentences or articles should be translated into and out of the target language. This kind of method presented the grammar rules by illustrating with their translation equivalents and English teachers should teach grammar in a systematic and organized way. Grammar teaching is sentence-oriented and focuses on grammatical rules. Obviously, this kind of methods emphasizes on the learning grammar through doing exercise of single sentences out of context. Harmer (1987) believed that this traditional method make learning grammar dull and difficult. Hedge(2000) pointed out that on the basis of the traditional grammar texts, formal teaching was proved that it was not favorable for average students to enhance their capability to read or write grammatically. As a foreign language in China, English, especially the grammar part, is too difficult to master. Teachers struggle to find ways to make grammar teaching interesting and effective. Microlecture is proved to be a good way to solve it.

3. What is Microlecture?

The term microlecture is used not to refer to microcontent for microlearning, but to actual instructional content that is formatted for online and mobile learning using a constructivist approach. David M. Penrose (aka the One Minute Professor), the Director of Academic Technology at Antioch University, of SunGard Higher Education has articulated the process for creating these micro lectures. It is a simple multimedia presentation that can be from 1 to 3 minutes long and combined with specific activities designed to promote the epistemic engagement of the learner. He thinks that the “Knowledge Excavation” can catch up with the traditional teaching for a long time to achieve the same effect if discussed in the corresponding assignments and support (Shea& Bidjerano, 2009). Penrose proposed a micro course should be provided with five steps: list the core concept of classroom which needs to be transferred, and the core concept would form the core of the micro course; write 15 to 30 seconds of introduction and the summary which is the core concept of providing context; record the above content with a microphone or webcam, and the length of final show is better to be 1-3 minutes; design the task after class to guide students to read or explore, and help students learn the content of the course material; upload the video of teaching and the task to curriculum management system.

At the same time, Penrose think it will also become a kind of frame of “Knowledge Excavation”. The framework of the course will provide a platform of Knowledge mining, and tell the students how to search the corresponding resources according their study need; it allows students to be more initiative in their learning, to excavate the required knowledge, carry out the learning aiming at the target; what’s more, this kind of curriculum with centralized focus can effectively save learning time.

In conclusion, micro lecture has developed rapidly abroad, and nowadays, there are some famous learning websites which apply microlecture videos to help students learn by themselves on the internet, such as Khan Academy, TED - Ed, Watch Know Learn and Teachers TV.

In this study, microlecture is not simple fragment form of the classroom teaching. It adopts videos which are about 10 minutes as main carrier to record the whole process of teaching and learning activities about a certain knowledge point (key point, difficult point or doubtful point), which can be watched anywhere to get the helpful information. The teaching plan of contains a complete teaching process, such as teaching materials, teaching objectives, teaching procedures and teaching aids, and so on. Moreover, microlecture could be subdivided down a lot of classification according to different usage, teachers’ teaching practice, and other aspects. In this study, microlecture was classified into different English grammar points, such as non-predicate verb, non-clauses, and so on.

4. Research Design

This study designed questionnaire for two parts, one part was about grammar, and another part was about microlecture. The purpose of grammar questionnaire was to know their current understanding and difficulties about grammar learning. Their attitudes were the main concerning in this study. What’s more, the purpose of microlecture questionnaire was to know students’ attitudes toward microlecture. 86 students in senior Grade one of Guanghan High School in Sichuan Province, took part in this study.

Question 1-3 were applied to know basic information of grammar learning. Question 4-6 were used to know students’ attitudes toward English grammar. Questions 8-11 were about teachers’ ways of grammar teaching in class. Question 12-15 were about students’ situation of grammar leaning. Question 1-6 were about students’ understanding about the definition and function of microlecture. Question 7-10 aimed to know whether students can accept applying small module to learn grammar, that is to say, one small module contains one grammar point, such as non-predicate verb. Question 11 asked students to choose which grammar parts need the assist of microlecture. Question 13-15 were about their suggestions about learning time and ways of using microlecture.

In order to avoid that translation caused the misunderstanding, two sets of questionnaire were in Chinese. All students were asked to finish two sets of questionnaire without their names, therefore they can complete them according to real ideas.

4. Data Collect and Analysis

4.1.1 The Grammar Questionnaire

Questionnaire used in this study contains two parts, one part is about microlecture, and another part is about grammar. All 86 subjects finished two sets of questionnaire. 80 questionnaires were collected in the end, but only 76 questionnaires were effective for grammar part, and only 74 questionnaires were effective

for microlecture part, others were ineffective for some reasons.

As what have been shown in the Table 1, although the new standard clearly points out, “the focus of the curriculum reform is to change the current situation that English teaching paid too much attention to impart grammar and vocabulary, thus neglecting to develop students’ ability of language use (2003)”, most of students in three English levels still held that English grammar occupied very important position in the field of English learning. What’s more, 100% students in the above average level and average level thought English grammar was important, but only 84.4% students in the below average level thought English grammar was important. In a word, the higher English level students have, the bigger proportion of students will hold that English grammar is important.

Table 1. Cross table of English level and the significance of English grammar

			The significance of English grammar					Total
			Very important	Important	General important	Unimportant	Very unimportant	
English level	Above average	Count	5	4	3	0	0	12
		% within English level	41.7%	33.3%	25.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
	average	Count	17	11	4	0	0	32
		% within English level	53.1%	34.4%	12.5%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
	Below average	Count	11	11	5	1	4	32
		% within English level	34.4%	34.4%	15.6%	3.1%	12.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	33	26	12	1	4	76
		% within English level	43.4%	34.2%	15.8%	1.3%	5.3%	100.0%

Table 2. Ways of grammar learning after class

		Responses		
		N	Percent	Percent of Cases
Ways of Grammar learning	Reciting	49	26.1%	68.1%
	Understanding with book	41	21.8%	56.9%
	Reading English material	23	12.2%	31.9%
	Utilizing internet	28	14.9%	38.9%
	Consulting teacher	15	8.0%	20.8%
	Discussing with classmates	32	17.0%	44.4%
Total		188	100.0%	261.1%

Table 2 reflected the result of a multiple choice in the grammar questionnaire. The content of this question discussed ways of grammar learning after class. The result has shown that reciting was still used among most of students to learn English grammar. Meanwhile, to the author's surprise, utilizing internet to learn English grammar occupied the fourth position of the whole choices. There is no doubt that with the coming of the information explosion era, most students began to choose internet to help grammar leaning. This phenomenon was a good beginning, and it also provided one of possibilities to apply microlecture into grammar learning.

4.2 The Microlecture Questionnaire

As for the microlecture part, the main purpose of the microlecture part was to know students' understanding of microlecture, and find out their attitudes toward the use of microlecture to learn grammar. When students were asked "Are you willing to use microlecture to learn grammar?" about 93.3% students showed that they were willing to accept micorlecture to assist in grammar learning (as the Table 3 shown). Their positive attitudes toward microlecture were the most important foundation of conducting the whole experiment.

Table 3. Q: Are you willing to use microlecture to learn grammar?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very willing	21	28.4	28.4	28.4
	Willing	35	47.3	47.3	75.7
	General willing	13	17.6	17.6	93.2
	Unwilling	1	1.4	1.4	94.6
	Very unwilling	4	5.4	5.4	100.0
	Total	74	100.0	100.0	

Then the Table 4 showed students' opinions about the relation between microlecture and tradition teaching. The result was about 83.8% students thought that microlecture should assist in traditional teaching instead of replacing tradition teaching. This point of view corresponded to the previous assumption about the role of microlecture in the above chapter.

Table 4. The relationship between microlecture (M) and traditional teaching (TT)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	M replacing TT	6	8.1	8.1	8.1
	M coexisting with TT	6	8.1	8.1	16.2
	M assisting TT	62	83.8	83.8	100.0
	Total	74	100.0	100.0	

From all the results have been shown above, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- (1) Most of students, especially students who in the relatively high English level, hold English grammar is still important in the field of English learning.
- (2) Reciting is still a main way to help students learn grammar after class, while utilizing internet also has a rising tendency in grammar learning.
- (3) Most of students hold positive attitudes toward microlecture and they are willing to accept microlecture to assist in grammar learning.
- (4) In students' opinions, microlecture should assist in tradition teaching instead of replacing it. Their opinions are consistent with the previous assumption of this study.

4.3 Discussion

From what have been shown above, brief discussions are in the following:

- (1) Most of students, especially students who in the relatively high English level, hold English grammar is still important in the field of English learning.
- (2) Reciting is still a main way to help students learn grammar after class, while utilizing internet also has a rising tendency in grammar learning.
- (3) Most of students hold positive attitudes toward microlecture and they are willing to accept microlecture to assist in grammar learning.
- (4) In students' opinions, microlecture should assist tradition teaching instead of replacing it. Their opinions are consistent with the previous assumption of this study.

5. Conclusion

From what have been shown, about 83.8% students were in favor of using microlecture to assist traditional teaching instead of replacing it. This finding was also proved again through interviewing their English teachers. They said at least in their school, there were no enough conditions to apply microlecture on a large scale. They admitted the good effect of microlecture, but under the pressure of college entrance examination, they had to choose microlecture as an assistive tool. And they suggested at present time, it would be better treat microlecture as assistive tool instead of replacing traditional teaching method. Therefore, we strongly suggested that teachers could apply microlecture as much as possible to assist grammar learning.

As what have been discussed before, students hold positive attitudes toward the use of microlecture in English grammar learning. On one hand, most of them still held that grammar occupied the important status in the field of English learning, and they had strong desire to learn it well. In addition, the higher English level students have, the bigger proportion of students will hold that English grammar is important. On the other hand, reciting was still a main way for students to learn grammar, thus students also needed a new way to learn grammar.

When the author interviewed teachers, teachers were also in favor of applying new way into grammar teaching, because they found out that nowadays most of students are living in a world of electronic products, such as computer or mobile phone. They thought new and fresh things would be more attractive for students, therefore they were willing to try to use microlecture to assist grammar teaching.

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