Teaching Pattern of College Students Grammar Input Aided by Information Technology

Ai-Hui WANG1,a, Wei-Xuan SHI1,b and Zhen-Zhen GU1,c
1North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, China
a xiaoai7946@sina.com.cn, b shiweixuan3458@126.com, c pg091130@126.com

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Abstract. There exists discrepancies whether English grammar should be taught and how to be taught in second language learning classroom. Grammar teaching in Chinese colleges has been downplayed with communication competence becoming the primary goal of language learners. Its direct consequences are difficulties in students’ English comprehension and considerable grammatical mistakes in writing, translation parts due to low grammatical level. High grammatical level calls for both explicit knowledge input and a large amount of implicit input for college students to internalize the grammatical rules. Information technology has provided the platform for adult college students to access to vast English language materials in various forms. Grammar teaching patterns in college will be explored in this study.

Introduction

Grammar is the study of the rules by which words change their forms and are combined into sentences and serves as communication base and determines its fluency and accuracy. Grammar teaching has long been a controversial topic since its appearance. In the first half of the twentieth century, when communicative competence cultivation dominated language learning, English grammar even disappeared from the curriculum of most England schools. According to Krashen (1981), second language learners can acquire the grammar naturally by their language acquisition system; grammar teaching will not contribute to the learning process [1]. However, the comprehensive analyses by Norris and Ortega (2000) of related 49 studies indicate that grammar teaching will benefit both grammar knowledge acquisition and grammar knowledge learning [2]. This has brought a resurgence of grammar teaching, and its role in second language acquisition has again become the focus of much current investigation. Many researches have been carried out intending to probe into the validity of different methodologies concerning effective grammar teaching. However, with the information technology development and appearance of different language theories, many researchers propose combing both grammar teaching and communication competence.

Existing Problems of College English Teaching in China

Chinese students have been required to study English as a second language for many years within the second language classroom, while college students’ experiences range from six years to 12 years or even more. Though elite English learners sprout continuously, the overall English grammar output level of Chinese College students is not optimistic, which involves considerable grammatical mistakes and cause misunderstanding of their real meaning or even cannot achieve the purpose of communication.

With the rise of communicative methodology in the late 1970s, the role of grammar instruction in second language learning was downplayed. Linguists of communicative methodology advocate cultivating learners’ communication competence as its teaching focus, neglecting the accuracy and appropriateness of the expressions that are governed by grammar rules. Influenced by the communicative theories, Chinese college English teachers began to focus on teaching text content, the background of the text and the culture the text reflects, totally neglecting explicit grammar teaching. This content-oriented teaching method may promote senior level students, while students...
of middle or junior level cannot follow the steps due to their lack of explicit grammar knowledge, eventually quitting their English learning. The consequence followed this teaching method is that most college students have a poor command of English sentence structure, cannot express meaning with morphology and syntax correctly. The most severe result is reading comprehension level will remain low because they cannot understand sentence structure and comprehend the meaning. Serious grammatical mistakes occur in their output like writing and translation leading to failure in the exam. English level declines during their college period compared with their past.

**Input Theory**

The input Hypothesis is the most important one of Krashen’s theories of second language acquisition. It attempts to explain how learners acquire a second language. Krashen argues it is essential to center on occupying classroom time with acquisition tasks or activities rather than on explicit grammatical structures [3]. As long as sufficient input is provided to the language learners, “i+1” will be provided, and deliberate attempt to provide “i+1” is not necessary. He also argues that a certain amount of comprehensible input must be built up before learners start to produce their own structures. Acquisition will come when learners feel “ready”. Krashen believes that by means of context and other extra-linguistic cues language acquisition is caused by acquirers’ understanding input “i+1” which is slightly beyond their current stage. Therefore, providing both explicit grammar knowledge and comprehensible implicit language resources are key to language learners.

**Explicit and Implicit Input**

Grammar is an indispensable aspect of language study. Over the past 30 years, the role of grammar teaching has been of great interest to researchers and language teachers in the field of second language acquisition. In recent years, one key concern in grammar teaching in SLA is whether grammar should be taught explicitly or implicitly. Before the 1970s, the mainstream of L2 teaching is traditional teaching which is mainly presented by the Grammar-Translation Method. Accordingly, explicit grammar teaching pays more attention to language forms and requires teachers to explain language rules deductively and then guide students to do related exercises [4]. In the late 1970s, Grammar-Translation Method was criticized for overemphasis on grammatical rules but ignoring language use in real communication. The research by Swain suggested that some type of focus on grammatical forms was necessary if learners were to develop high levels of accuracy in the target language. The appearance of the Direct Method in the early 1960s gradually replaced explicit grammar teaching represented by GTM. Implicit teaching began to prevail language teaching. Implicit grammar teaching claims that learners should study grammar in a meaningful and natural environment.

Researchers have done a lot of experimental study concerning these two methods of grammar teaching. Countless studies indicate that learners can benefit from either implicit instruction or explicit instruction. But neither explicit instruction nor implicit instruction can simultaneously give attention to both accurate and fluent use of language, and in teaching practice learners always attend to one thing and lose another.

In recent years, further studies have been carried out. Many scholars propose that the new trend of grammar teaching is to integrate these two kinds of grammar teaching. Scholars, Larsen-Freeman’s(1991) and Ellis(1990), think that the of explicit and implicit grammar teaching can provide learners with more opportunity that enable learners to be exposed to a variety of language forms on the one hand, and on the other hand get learners to use language in an actual context[5,6].

**College English Grammar Teaching Patterns Aided by Information Technology**

Nowadays, it is a common phenomenon that college students are equipped with information technology devices such as PC, IPD and almost a cellphone for everyone, which enables them to
have easy access to vast authentic meaningful language resources online. This brings us the question “should college students be taught grammar and what a more proper way of teaching grammar is?” This study aims at exploring the role of grammar teaching under the information and technology context and the optimal method or approach of teaching grammar based on input theory of SLA, so that communicative competence and language accuracy can be balanced simultaneously for college students.

Changes Occurring in the field of foreign Language Teaching

From one discipline to multi-discipline throughout 20th century, teaching method has evolved from Grammar-Translation Method to Audio-Lingual Method to Communicative Language Teaching to Natural Approach to Silent way to Suggestopedia to Community Language Learning to Total Physical Response. Foreign language teaching has involved the fields of linguistics, pedagogy, psychology, sociology, language testing and computer – aid teaching. Language teaching focus in class has changed a lot: (1) **Focus shift from teaching to Learning** Larsen-Freeman put forward that language teaching entails 3 parts: language learner(how to learn), language and culture (what to learn), teachers (how to teach). Researchers of foreign language teaching began to focus on individual differences and study both internal and external factors causing the differences. (2) **Foreign language teaching shift the skill focus to content focus** Communicative teaching theory advocates language learners try to learn real, natural and meaningful language materials. To access and acquire information based on meaningful interaction has become the trend in language teaching. (3) **Foreign language teaching in class turned to Student-centered** Information technology application really can optimize the process of English grammar teaching, arouse the interest of students, solve the difficulties and the stresses in teaching, and improve the teaching efficiency. (4) **Knowledge Presentation Form of teaching materials Varies** Computer Assisted Language Learning with the information technology development will challenge the traditional teaching method depending on one textbook, one piece of chalk and teacher’s explanation. The new technology offers flexible learning schedule.

College English Grammar Teaching Patterns

Considerable changes both in language theories and new technology occurring in the field of language teaching means college teaching mode should update accordingly to suit the new generation college students who are brought up under the environment of the internet.

**A New Teaching Pattern Based on Network**

Compared with the traditional grammar teaching, network assisted grammar teaching can offer college students a platform which presents comprehensive and authentic meaningful language materials, both classic literature works and updated news, lectures, real situational conversations in the form of both scripts and audio files. College English teachers can make use of multimedia to vividly show students explicit grammar points with multiple authentic language materials from audio, video and other real language corpus which will interest students and understand grammar rules in a deeper and comprehensible way. This teaching mode will enlarge students comprehensible input in an implicit manner as well.

**Cultivating Extracurricular Autonomous Pattern**

Networking teaching requires students to have strong desire to learn autonomously both inside and outside classroom study, and make students realize that learning is a kind of learning attitude as well as the ability to learn independently. The students can take advantage of network English resources to learn the grammar independently either in explicit or implicit ways. They can either refer to grammar rules explicitly through grammar explanations or review language rules implicitly by accessing to tremendous real meaningful language materials. College teachers should be responsible for guidance and supervision. By resorting to the internet, students can choose their own comprehensible input material based on their interest and the flexible learning time to maximize their learning efficiency.
Conclusion

Compared with traditional teaching mode, English grammar teaching aided by information technology can better cater for the students’ expectations and requirements from English class to keep up with times. Explicit and implicit grammar teaching in college English class aided by the internet will activate students learning interest both inside and outside the classroom. Internet assisted grammar teaching patterns will both strengthen college students’ communicative competence and improve grammar level by enlarging explicit and implicit grammar input.

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References


