Education Bureau Funded Professional Development Programme

Grammar as Choice: The Role of Grammar in Enhancing Students' Writing in the Senior Secondary English Language Classroom

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Warm-up reflections on teaching grammar in writing lessons

Read a teacher's quote below. To what extent do you share this teacher's view? How is this relevant to the teaching of grammar in your writing lessons?

"It's easy if you ask them to rewrite the sentences, because they find it easy to follow… However, they just don't know when we are supposed to use passive voice and when we are supposed to use active voice. And, one student even asked me why we have to use passive voice in our daily lives. I find this question difficult to answer, and in fact so do my colleagues. No one can give me a correct answer. I've thought about it, but even now I really don't know how to handle the question. I finish the worksheets with them and they know how to rewrite the sentences. But, I don't know how to explain to them when it is used. " (Andrews, 2007)

Overview

1. The notion of text grammar: What is it and how can we promote it in our senior secondary writing lessons?

2. Reflections on reading-to-write teaching units:

   - Example A: A proposal letter

   - Example B: A letter to the editor

3. Understanding the language criteria in the HKDSE Writing Paper with students' sample essays
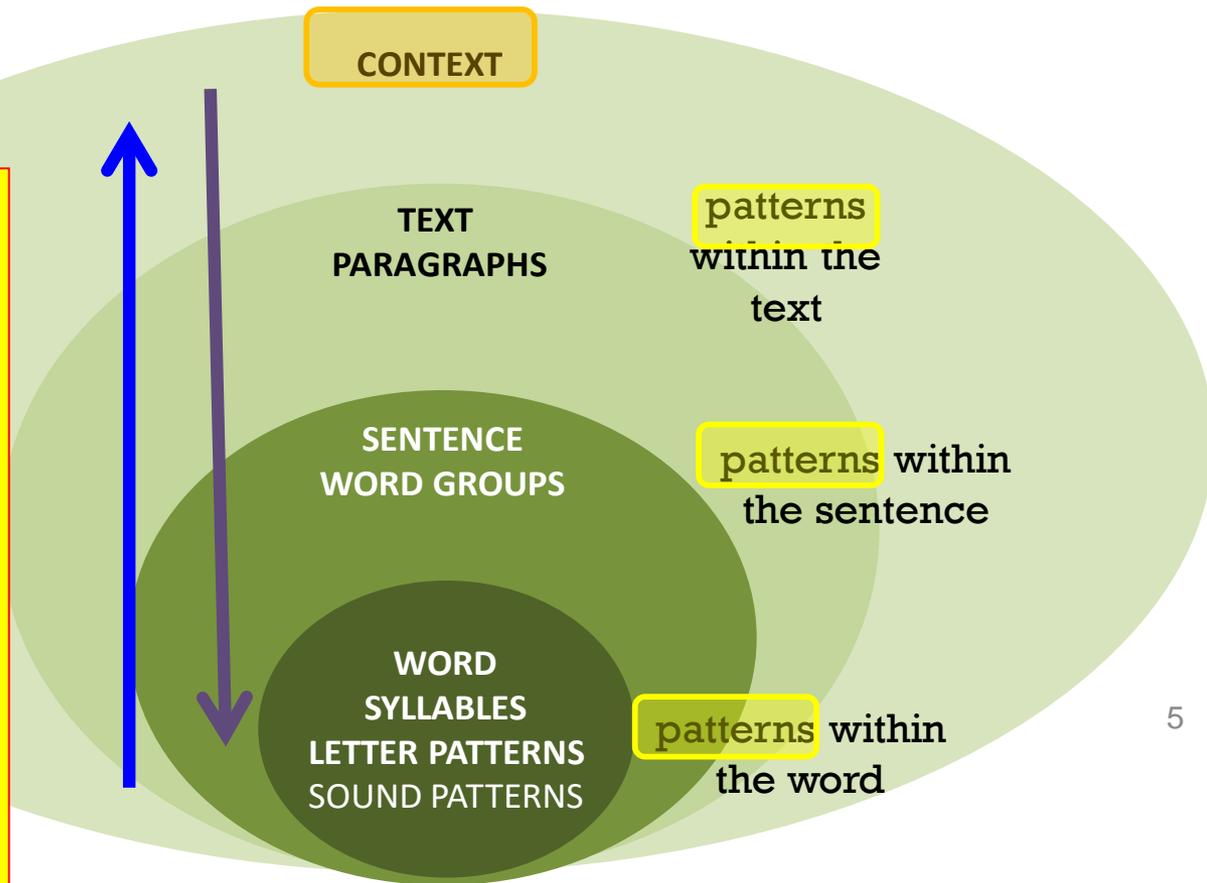
1. What is text grammar?

- Teaching grammar through texts enables students to see how the choice of language items is affected by the context and how it shapes the tone, style and register of a text. (CDC, 2017, p.68)

+ A Functional View of Language in Context (Rose, 2005) (The Genre Egg Approach)

→ Provide scaffolding to students through different levels

Grammar is across all levels of language. Let's take 'short stories' as an example!

CONTEXT

TEXT
PARAGRAPHS

patterns within the text

SENTENCE
WORD GROUPS

patterns within the sentence

WORD
SYLLABLES
LETTER PATTERNS
SOUND PATTERNS

patterns within the word

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Grammar as Choice: Short Stories

- What can be the purpose of the short story that the students are to write?

- What can be its rhetorical structure?

- What sentence patterns/vocabulary can they use?

Grammar as Choice: Other Genres

What can be the communicative purpose(s) of each of the genres? What are the grammar choices writers use to achieve those purposes?

Debate speeches	Procedural texts
Expository essays	Witness reports

Sometimes writers or poets intentionally break the typical grammatical conventions to create certain effects.

e.g. "I'm loving it"!

Why do our secondary students need text grammar?

In the marking scheme of the Writing paper of HKDSE :

- Language:
  - Range of accurate and complex sentence structures
  - Register, tone and style being appropriate to the text-type

- Organisation:
  - Text being organised extremely effectively
  - Sophisticated cohesive ties
  - Coherent structure appropriate to the text-type

How choice of language (i.e. grammar and vocabulary) shapes the tone, style and register of a text

Where as can we find the criteria?

KS4
(S4 – 6)

- *Present information, ideas, views, attitudes and feelings clearly, coherently and appropriately in a variety of written texts*
  - plan and produce coherent and structured texts
  - organise and integrate information and ideas, and create written and multimodal texts appropriate to context, purpose and audience
  - present different views and arguments clearly and logically
  - present and elaborate main ideas and supporting details through exemplifications, paraphrases, explanations, etc.
  - relate events and their causes and effects
  - adjust the balance of ideas and the length of text to meet the requirements of different text types
  - draft, revise and edit a piece of writing
  - use appropriate discourse markers to signal the development of ideas
  - use appropriate linguistic and structural devices, a variety of structures, an appropriate range of vocabulary and visuals to achieve desired purposes
  - use the salient features of a range of text types appropriately
  - use persuasive devices effectively*
  - use appropriate style and register in writing*

Why do our secondary students need text grammar?
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How choice of language (i.e. grammar and vocabulary) shapes the tone, style and register of a text

English Language KLA Curriculum Guide (CDC, 2017, A46)

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How can we promote text grammar in our secondary classrooms?

Reading-to-write tasks

Example A: A proposal letter

Example B: A letter to the editor

2. Reading-to-write tasks:

Example A: A proposal letter
Example B: A letter to the editor

- Goal: Building students' awareness of uses of grammar items in texts (through which communication takes place)

- Strategy: Analysing texts and matching grammar items with their communicative purposes with the rhetorical structure of common genres

Reading-to-write Example A
—A proposal letter

Reading-to-write Example A—A proposal letter:

October 15, 2015

Mr. Nadim Dalwal
English Language Coordinator
Dar Al-Jandal School, Riyadh

Dear Mr. Dalwal,
Subject: Proposal To Hold An ELT Book Fair At Your School

Dar Al Jarad Publishing and Distribution House is pleased to invite your school to host an English Language Teaching (ELT) book fair.

We at Dar Al Jarad believe it is essential that we work directly with schools in Riyadh in order to enhance English literacy among students. We have chosen to approach your school to host one of these events because we are aware of your high educational standards and your interest in improving English literacy at your school.

Objectives:
Our objectives for holding the book fair at your school are as follows:
- To empower both teachers and students with our valuable ELT educational resources which include: readers, textbooks, support materials, and exam books.
- To introduce the students and the teachers to new ELT resources that are available on the market and how these resources can enhance literacy in the classroom.
- To familiarize parents with new ELT materials and the selection process that Curriculum Coordinators go through when developing an English program.
- **Benefits:**
  Direct benefits that will come from hosting a book fair will be:
- The school will receive valuable publicity which will result in increased student enrolment.
- 15% of the proceeds from each title sold will go toward supporting the school's English program.
- The school staff and administration will work closely with the ELT distributor which will enhance cooperation between the school and Dar Al Jarad.
- ….
-

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Reading-to-write Example A—A proposal letter:

Section	Function in the text	Typical language/sentence patterns (examples)
Subject	To state what the letter is about	A noun phrase beginning with 'Proposal to...' e.g. Proposal To Hold An ELT Book Fair At Your School
Introduction (first two paragraphs)	To...	
Objectives	To...	
Benefits	To...	
Arrangements	To...	
Conclusion	To...	

Step 2: Analysing grammar features typical of the genre with the use of a sentence making table

How can we vary this step to cater for learner diversity?

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Example for the use of writing frames: A proposal letter

_____(Date)

_____ (The receiver's full name and position)

_____

_____

Dear Mr/Ms_____,

Subject: _____

(introduction)

I am_____ (introducing yourself). **Our group have_____. I am writing to_____**
_____ (state the reason for writing)

Objectives:

Our objectives for holding_____:

- **To…**
- **To…**
- **…**

Step 3:
Guiding students to use the grammar features identified to write their text with a writing frame

How can we vary this step to cater for learner diversity?
The use of sentence-making tables

Sentence making tables

Communication function	Sentence patterns
Giving suggestions	It is suggested/proposed that…
	…is a good idea

Communication function	Sentence patterns
Giving explanations	This results from…
	This is due to…

Communication function	Sentence patterns
Giving examples	Take… as an example.
	For instance,…

Reading-to-write Example B
—A letter to the editor

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

- We're going to examine this example more closely from both the perspectives of the teacher and the senior secondary students. You'll switch roles between the two.

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

Part 1: Read Text 1 *"Key to a happy Hong Kong family could be a mobile messaging group on WhatsApp or WeChat"* and answer the following questions.

1. Read line 18: "The quality of your family communication will be better" if the elderly are in a family messaging group.

2. Identify two words in the text which can replace 'enhance' (Line 49).

   boost (line 26)   improve (line 38)

3. The purpose of Text 1 is…

A) to promote the use of mobile messaging groups.

B) to report a study and a project launched by a university.

C) to explain how local families should take care of the elderly.

D) to ask for more resources from the Government on family service.

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

4. Decide whether each of the following is true, false or not given.

	True	False	Not given
i) All Hong Kong families communicate through mobile platforms like WhatsApp.		◯	
ii) The government's integrated family service centres are currently not functioning well.			◯
iii) Social workers will communicate with their clients more through WhatsApp.	◯		

Part 2: Compare Texts 1-3. What do they share in common? What are the differences among them? List as many points in the table below as you can. You may find the following prompting questions useful:

Do the texts…

- focus on the same topic?

- target the same group of readers?

- adopt a subjective or objective tone?

- belong to the same text type?

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

Similarities among the three texts:	Differences among the three texts:		
	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
Same topic	Different genres		
Same target readers	Different purposes of writing		
Inclusion of quotation marks			
Arguments supported by evidence	Different language styles/formalities		
What are the grammar patterns suggesting these?			

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

Part 3: Read Text 2 and Text 3 again and answer the following questions.

1. What is the text type of both texts?

   Letter to the editor

2. What is the purpose of this text type?

   To express personal opinions on an issue

3. Circle/underline all the verb groups in Text 2 and Text 3. Then answer the following:

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

3a) What tense(s) is/are used in this text type? For what kind(s) of meaning? Complete the following table.

Tense(s) used	Example(s)	Meaning(s) expressed
Present simple	The article refers to…; People use…	- Putting forward the writer's arguments - Describing what the writer thinks is true to support the arguments made
Present continuous	I am writing to…; …is increasing	- Stating the writer's intention - Describing trends
Past simple	The researchers also emphasised…; …said they were not …	- Reporting survey/report results for supporting the writer's arguments

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

3b) Some verb groups are not in any tense. Can you identify them and the meanings they express?

Verb group type(s)	Example(s)	Meaning(s) expressed
Modals, e.g. can, should, may, might	can help boost…; may not be able to…; Why should people…	- Stating obligations, possibilities, abilities etc. in supporting the writer's arguments
Imperatives	Take action directly; Care for people…	- Making suggestions in relation to the writer's arguments
To infinitives	To answer Mr Wong; To teach the elderly	- Stating purposes
Gerunds	having no choice…; Being able to stay in…	- Describing phenomena, facts

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

Tenses/Verb group type(s)	Example(s)	Meaning(s) expressed
Suggestions on catering for learner diversity: - For weaker students, teachers may focus on less verb forms or scaffold their students in completing the above two tables - For more able students, teachers can focus on additional verb forms like those in conditional sentences and present and past participles as verbal adjectives		
Do these tables look like the sentence making tables exemplified in Example A?		

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

4. Circle/underline all the cohesive devices in Text 2 and Text 3. What meanings do they express?

Cohesive devices	Meaning(s) expressed
And; also; besides; too	Introducing an additional point which is in line with the previous one
However	Introducing a comment which contrasts with the previous one
As	Because
When, if	Introducing a condition for a consequence
They; many	Referring to a group of people mentioned in the previous clause
Such as	Introducing example illustrating the writer's arguments
This	Referring to and summarising the ideas in the previous clause/sentence

4. Circle/underline all the cohesive devices in Text 2 and

Text 3. What meanings do they express?

Cohesive devices	Frequency of occurrence?
And; also; besides; too	Which are the more frequently used cohesive devises?
However	
As	
When, if	
They; many	
Such as	
This	

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

5. Complete the following graphic organiser summarising the rhetorical structure of Text 2 and Text 3. You may use the information in the help box or your own words.

	Major stages of the text	Special language features found in each stage
Stage 1:	Heading	A simple statement or question with the use of a modal verb
	⬇	
Stage 2:	Stating the purpose of writing and the topic of the text	A statement beginning with 'I am writing to...'
	⬇	

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

5.

	Major stages of the text	Special language features found in each stage
Stage 3:	Stating the writer's stance on the topic	The adjective frames: 'it would be + adjective + to…' and 'it is + adjective + that…'
	⬇	
Stage 4:	Giving evidence justifying/illustrating the writer's stance	Rhetorical questions (answers known to everybody already)
	⬇	
Stage 5:	Summarising the text with the writer's stance restated	Conditional sentences: 'If/when/no matter…., …will…..'

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

6. Do you know the meaning of the following expressions? If not, can you deduce their meaning from where they are found in Text 2 and Text 3:

...regarding the trend of... (Text 2, line 9)

...can benefit... (Text 2, line 20)

...is much more important and better than... (Text 2, line 26)

...is key for... (Text 3, line 10)

...may not be able to... (Text 3, line 11)

...means... (Text 3, line 20)

...help boost... (Text 3, line 25)

Rationale:
Introducing vocabulary at the phrase level (i.e. collocations) that the students can make use of in the subsequent writing task; thereby achieving lexico-grammar

Part 4:

With reference to the tables completed in Part 3 above, write your response to the following prompt:

"It has been claimed that in the workplace many Hong Kong fresh university graduates are less hard-working and less willing to face challenges compared to those in the past.

You strongly disagree with this opinion. Write a letter to the editor of the Hong Kong Daily disagreeing with this opinion. Support your view with three reasons and/or examples."

(HKDSE 2017, Paper 2: Q8)

Debriefing on Examples A & B

- Following a genre-based pedagogical approach
- Focusing on grammar items typical of the target genre(s), and the meaning functions they express within the rhetorical structure of the genre(s)
- Potential for promoting self-directed and self-regulated learning
- Useful references for promoting text grammar:
  - Thornbury, S. (1999). How to teach grammar. Harlow: Longman.
  - Thornbury, S. (2001). Uncovering grammar. Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann.

Let's have our well-deserved break!