



# Effective Use of an Inductive Approach to Enhance Students' Grammar Knowledge and Develop their Self-directed Learning Capabilities in the Primary English Classroom

Benjamin Moorhouse  
Department of Education Studies  
Hong Kong Baptist University

# Workshop objectives

1. to enhance teachers' confidence and competency in planning and teaching grammar in context;
2. to help teachers develop the skills needed to extend grammar learning from sentence to the text level; and
3. to help teachers utilise and promote self-directed learning of grammar through an inductive approach in the primary English classroom.

# Grammar teaching and self-directed learning

Self-directed learning (SDL) refers to the skill that a learner, who takes the initiative and responsibility for learning with or without the assistance of others, possesses. A self-directed learner may identify his/her learning needs, formulate goals, and choose resources and strategies for learning. SDL enhances students' sense of agency or control and metacognitive skills. SDL may be interpreted as self-regulated learning, self-learning or independent learning in other contexts.

# Grammar and self-directed learning

- Learning is most effective when students play an active role in the learning process and when they take charge of their own learning. The promotion of learner autonomy and independence should start at an early age.
- While self-directed learning is regarded as an integral part of students' ultimate achievements, more effort should go into demonstrating how to monitor the learning process and providing opportunities for students to develop metacognitive strategies. In the learning process, teachers can help students:
  - learn how to learn;
  - make choices as to what, when and how they want to learn;
  - use a range of language development strategies;
  - carry out self-assessment and reflection;
  - plan, monitor and evaluate the strategies adopted and their own learning effectiveness, which forms the basis for goal-setting in subsequent tasks or activities; and
  - develop the knowledge, skills and strategies, attitudes and perseverance to foster lifelong language learning.

# SDL strategies

SDL strategies	Description
Goal setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students identify own learning goals &amp; learning activities</li></ul>
Self-planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students regulate and plan for the detailed decisions and arrangements associated with own learning, such as planning, creating outline of schedule</li></ul>
Self-monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students self-manage their own time</li><li>• Students monitor own repertoire of learning strategies</li><li>• Students adjust own learning pathway as they progress</li></ul>
Self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students are aware of the assessment criteria</li><li>• Students critically evaluate work according to set criteria</li></ul>
Revision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students revise their work based on the feedback received from their teacher or peers at various stages</li><li>• Students reflect on their own learning and apply what they have learnt to new contexts</li></ul>

Source: <https://jcstem.cite.hku.hk/conceptual-framework/what-is-self-directed-learning/>

# Cambridge Grammar of English

Traditionally “Grammar is concerned with how sentences and utterance are formed. In a typical English sentence, we can see the two most basic principles of grammar, the arrangement of items (syntax) and the structure of items (morphology).” (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p.2)

# Grammar beyond the sentence

- Today, grammar is still concerned with syntax and morphology at the sentence level, but we also need to consider grammar at the text level as well.
- We can call this “text grammar” or “discourse analysis”.

# Text grammar

What is it?

- 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 text grammar is **the study of texts above the level of the sentence**. It shows how texts are put together so as to convey ideas, facts, messages, and fiction. A similar term is discourse analysis. Both are mostly concerned with natural language use; discourse analysis would include spoken language.



# Cognitive processes in the learning of grammar in our L1

- Children are **exposed** to meaningful language that is fully contextualised in discourse.
- They **notice** language patterns and how they are used.
- They **hypothesise** about the “rules” and the system of language.
- They use language meaningfully and in the process they **structure and restructure** their internal grammar.
- Eventually the language patterns become **automatised**, i.e. they are used accurately and appropriately with little conscious thinking or planning.

# Implications of this for our L2 classroom practices

1. Provide opportunities for learners to be exposed (**exposure**) to grammar in meaningful contexts.
2. Guide students to **notice** patterns and help students infer rules or **hypothesis**.
3. Provide activities that can guide students to use language and provide opportunities for **structuring** and **(re)structuring**.
4. Provide opportunities for students to **apply the rules to express meaning grammatically**.

# Texts for authentic exposure

- are contextualised in the social world;
- reflect natural use of grammar;
- have varied social purposes (text types/genres);
- should be age-appropriate and have interest-value; and
- should elicit meaningful and natural interaction with the text.

# Implications for learning and teaching grammar

- Grammar is a tool for expressing meaning.
- Grammatical features in texts are intimately connected to the social function and communicative purpose of the text.
- It is important we expose students to texts that make the connection between the social purpose and the grammatical features clearer to students.
- Teachers need to critically analyse texts and their language, and select authentic texts carefully based on criteria such as the level of difficulty, relevance, interest and age-appropriacy.
- Teachers can encourage students to notice and hypothesise about language used in authentic texts.

# Implications of this for our classroom practice



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# Features of good 'noticing' activities

- The grammatical feature has already been encountered in discourse, and responded to meaningfully.
- The noticing activity draws from students' discourse experience.
- It helps learners isolate the feature for focused attention.
- It requires active participation (and thus attention) by the learner.
- It makes learners think about both form and meaning.
- It requires thinking and reasoning; cognitive processing; construction of understanding.
- It is at a level of detail appropriate to the learner.
- The learners notice: they do not use or produce the language.

(based on Batstone, 1994, and Cameron, 2001)

## Noticing **for** the learner

- Learners are presented with explicitly formulated information about forms and their functions.
- Teacher centred, transmission oriented



## Noticing **by** the learner

- Learners are guided to work out for themselves information about forms and their functions.
- Student-centred, discovery oriented

(based on Batsone, 1994)

# Typology of activities that promote noticing **by** the learner

(adapted from Willis and Willis, 1996)

- Reconstructing or deconstructing
  - taking apart or putting back together language in a way which reveals its underlying patterns
- Sorting, classifying or categorising
  - working with a set of data and sorting it according to similarities and differences based on structural or semantic criteria
- Identifying and comparing
  - studying a set of data to identify a particular pattern or usage, including cross language analysis and analysis of errors
- Interpreting
  - identifying the meaning(s) realised by specific grammatical features



# In teaching beginners and younger learners ...

- We may need to simplify and even oversimplify the grammar for learners in the beginning stages (But still ensure a level of authenticity).
- Children will only have partial understanding.
- We should help them “notice” regularities and patterns and let them “grow their own grammar” – this is also called ‘consciousness-raising’.
- We do this through tasks and games – rules of the language are gradually raised. (Nunan, 2005)
- If we do it too fast, we will kill motivation!

# Hypothesising

**Principle:** *By the learner*, i.e. involving students actively through questions, elicitation and inviting participation.

**Strategies:**

- Highlight grammatical form on the board through tabulation, colour coding, arrows etc.
- Check understanding of concepts through concept questioning (yes/no, short answer), elicitation of further examples, application of the rule to a few examples.
  - NB: Asking students to correct wrong examples is also a strategy for checking concepts, but it may confuse students!
- Avoid complex metalanguage and explaining the language or providing lengthy grammar 'rules'.
- At this point, written exercises may be useful (remember the difference between "a task", "a communicative activity" and "an exercise"?)

# Hypothesising

- How might we help students hypothesise the use of different tenses depending on information being presented?
  - ✓ We could ask them to go through another authentic text and find examples of each form.
  - ✓ We could create the pedagogical rules table with them on the board and ask them to copy it in their notebook.
  - ✓ We could give them some key words and ask them to make an accurate sentence in different forms.
  - ✓ Any other ideas?

# SDL, Noticing and Hypothesising

- How might we draw on SDL principles during the noticing and hypothesising stage?
- Actively involve learners in noticing grammar for themselves.
- Develop 'pedagogical rules' with the students.
- Record their learning in a notebook (Pedagogical rules table).
- Encourage students to ask questions if they are unsure of something.

# Implications of this for our classroom practice

1. Provide opportunities for learners to be exposed (**exposure**) to grammar in meaningful contexts.
2. Guide students to **notice** patterns and help students infer rules or **hypothesis**.
3. Provide activities that can guide students to use language and provide opportunities for **structuring** and **(re)structuring**.
4. Provide opportunities for students to **apply the rules to express meaning grammatically**.



# Features of (re)structuring activities

- They require students to **actively use the language** (as opposed to noticing it) to express meaning i.e. form and meaning are interconnected.
- They involve problematising i.e. **gives students choices in content and form** which compel the learner to make adjustments in grammar to express meaning.
- They push students to “**out-perform their competence**” i.e. they are producing or understanding language which is a **notch more complex than what they would normally produce or understand**, and in this way restructure their internal grammar.
- They involve **sufficient scaffolding** i.e. finely tuned support so that students can focus on grammar and meaning.

(adapted from Thornbury, 1999 and Cameron, 2001)

# Teaching grammar

“The purpose of a pedagogic grammar is to provide the learner with useful insights into the language under study.”

(Willis, 1996)

**PRACTICE STAGE  
IS CRUCIAL**

# Possible restructuring tasks for young learners

- **Game task:**

Children are asked to use the grammatical structure in a game setting, which will make grammar use fun and spontaneous.

- **Experimental task:**

Children are asked to apply their knowledge of grammar by producing, for instance, a dialogue or written text.

(Lewis and Mol, 2006, p. 5-6)



# (Re)structuring activities

## Importance of **context** and importance of **choice**

“In actual contexts grammar is not a static object: it is a resource providing us with options from which we choose in order to express our meanings effectively and appropriately.”

(Batstone, 1994, p. 66)

# SDL, and restructuring

- How might we draw on SDL principles during the restructuring stage?
- Encourage students to monitor their own language use. Support sheets or answer sheets can be provided. Students can be reminded to refer to their notebook.
- Facilitate peer feedback during restructuring activities.
- Provide additional restructuring activities for students to engage with outside of class. Digital tools could be used.

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