

## Supplementary Notes

### Learning and Teaching of Grammar

*[Supplementary notes to Chapter 4.3.1 Task-based Learning and Teaching in the English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6) (CDC & HKEAA, 2007), pp. 74-75]*

Grammar is an essential component of language learning. To enable learners to use a variety of language items accurately and appropriately in different contexts, it is important to help them connect grammar items and structures with the communicative functions they perform. In doing so, learners will gain a better understanding of how, why and when to use particular language items and structures and develop an awareness of how the items make meaning in the texts.

To enhance the effectiveness of grammar learning and teaching at the senior secondary level, teachers should consider learners' previous knowledge in grammar and design meaningful tasks for the application of their grammar knowledge in context. The following are some suggestions for planning grammar learning and teaching at the senior secondary level.

Building on learners' learning experiences in the previous key stages

As learners at the senior secondary level should have encountered most of the essential structures and grammar items in KS1-3, the focus of grammar learning at this level should be on consolidating grammar knowledge and extending it to a greater degree of complexity by exploring how different grammar items and structures perform the same or a similar communicative function or how multiple communicative functions can be achieved by the same grammar item or structure. When planning for grammar learning and teaching, teachers can review the coverage of grammar items in the previous key stages and identify items that need consolidation or extension, and provide tasks for the application of such items in context. To extend grammar knowledge to a more advanced level, in addition to everyday use of English for general communication, learners should be exposed to more complex, formal and academic texts on a variety of topics to enhance their understanding of how grammar functions in different contexts. This not only helps them cope with the language demands at the senior secondary level, but also addresses their needs in learning content subjects through English.

## Extending sentence grammar to text grammar

Teaching grammar at the text level enables learners to develop more sophisticated grammar knowledge through exploring the relationship between language and context, and heighten their awareness of how grammar affects the coherence and structure of a text. To prepare learners to be proficient language learners and users, grammar learning and teaching should move from controlled practices, such as substitution drills at the sentence level, to communicative tasks which require learners to apply their grammar knowledge to make or convey meaning at the text level. For example, learners can be asked to read a narrative text and identify the typical grammar features such as the past tense and sequencers that link events in time (e.g. when, after, before, as soon as). Guiding questions can be used to help them focus on the grammatical choices made by the writer. Other activities that help heighten learners' grammatical awareness include sequencing of events and filling gaps in the middle section of the text with the beginning and final sections provided. Learners can also draw on their grammatical knowledge and apply it in writing similar narrative texts. They can be engaged in activities such as dictogloss, paraphrasing, writing based on a model text, and editing and elaborating a text by providing additional information which is typically associated with certain grammatical features.

When selecting appropriate texts for teaching grammar at the text level, texts related to different topics and students' learning experiences in other subjects, such as biographies of scientists and historical figures and research reports, can be chosen to help learners understand the salient language features of the texts they may come across in other subjects. This not only enhances learners' understanding of how grammar makes meanings in different texts but also kindles their interest in, and equips them with the text processing skills essential for, reading across the curriculum.

## Adopting an inductive approach to learning and teaching grammar

Raising learners' awareness of how grammar varies according to the context and function of language is a crucial step towards helping them become proficient language users who are able to understand the relationship between forms and functions, apply the grammar knowledge in understanding different kinds of texts and use appropriate items and structures to communicate the intended meanings. With most language items and communicative functions covered at the junior secondary level, more opportunities should be provided to allow learners to work out the rules and apply their grammar knowledge when some grammar items or communicative functions are

revisited.

Learning activities which engage learners in identifying the grammatical features of a text or the meaning of the target grammar item can be motivating. Teachers can select a text as a starting point for learners to identify the language items and grammatical features typical of that particular text type, or they can provide opportunities for learners to compare two texts on the effectiveness of grammar use or how the grammar of the texts differs. Learners can then be guided to 'notice' the forms and functions of the target items. For example, when teaching how to write a film synopsis, teachers can ask learners to bring samples of film synopses to class, and work together to formulate their own hypotheses about why and how the present tense is used in this particular text type. Questions or short tasks that encourage learners to reflect on the functions of the highlighted items in a text are also provided. Developing learners as active explorers of language and guiding them to consciously reflect upon the grammar use in various contexts will facilitate consolidation and internalisation of grammar knowledge.

#### Teaching grammar as a set of choices

It is not uncommon to find that learners make grammatical mistakes or use grammar inappropriately when applying their grammar knowledge in context. It is therefore crucial for teachers not to teach grammar merely as a body of knowledge to be learnt for its own sake. While it is necessary to engage learners in activities conducive to understanding how language items and grammatical features are used to communicate the intended meanings, it is equally important to develop their ability to choose and use the appropriate forms to express different communicative meanings in creating or producing texts in specific contexts. Grammar tasks should be designed to help learners see that grammatical choices enable them to make different kinds of meanings and shape the tone, and the decisions about which form to use are determined by the meaning one wishes to make and the communicative function to perform. For example, learners can be asked to compare two texts of the same topic (e.g. spoken and written texts, narrative and academic texts) and discuss how the writers can get their message across through the use of different grammar items and structures and how the tones, styles and registers of the texts differ. The writing lessons can also be used to link grammar as a choice or resource used in the creation of texts. Learners can be asked to write an email to invite their friends to the school drama performance and an invitation letter to the principal of the neighbouring school to this event so that they can see how the degree of formality differs when different grammar items or

structures are used to convey similar meaning.

In short, both receptive and productive tasks are needed to provide opportunities for learners to explore the communicative functions of grammar items and structures and how they add to coherence as well as shape the tone, style and register of a text. Different activities can also be employed to extend grammar learning and teaching from sentence level to text level and highlight the importance of grammar as a set of choices for effective communication.