

The learner as creative writer ... of grammar rules

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NOTE: This is the text of the slides from the presentation, followed by a reference list. They will only be clear to someone who has attended the presentation.

Outline

- There is evidence that teaching grammar rules is effective
- One option in some contexts: inductive grammar teaching
- How this happens in *Navigate*

True or false?

1. The best way to teach grammar is to wait until the need for a specific grammar point emerges, and then teach it. T... but...
2. Learners will always acquire grammar in a natural order, no matter what order you teach it in. T – but only for a very few language features
3. The best way to teach grammar is via tasks. F
4. There is evidence that teaching grammar rules works. T
5. If people learn enough vocabulary, they'll acquire the grammar of the language. F

What I am not saying

- I am NOT saying that grammar is the most important aspect of language
- I am NOT saying that most of the time in English language lessons should be spent teaching grammar

Should we teach only vocabulary?

- It's arguably more important than grammar
- ...but: there are many words, and many multi-word units; grammar can help while learners are acquiring these
- ...and you cannot count on grammar to emerge from vocabulary use in instructed learning, not even in a morphologically light language like English: there's not enough exposure

Should we let grammar needs emerge?

- Three problems: individual differences, coverage and classroom affordances.
 - Individual differences: different students' needs will emerge at different times → problems in a classroom situation
 - Coverage: tasks won't necessarily provide stimulus for all the grammar that learners need
 - Classroom affordances: can you as a teacher improvise rules reliably and consistently?

Problematic theoretical stances that argue against explicit grammar teaching

- Krashen's Input Hypothesis: falsified
- Natural Order Hypothesis (Miesel *et al.*):
 - small number of features
 - evidence that having the rule 'ready' may help even for developmentally sensitive features

- ‘Vygotskian’ peer scaffolding: Vygotsky wouldn’t recognise it, and evidence is lacking

Explicit grammar teaching: theoretical justification

- *Input-interaction-output* says conscious knowledge
 - a) can help noticing
 - b) can encourage comparison of noticed input with learner’s own output
 - c) can convert directly into unconscious knowledge
 - d) can provide negative feedback
- *Task-based instruction*: allows a place for pre-planned grammar instruction
- *Skills approach*: ‘declarative crutches’

Explicit grammar teaching : evidence

- Norris & Ortega (2000): *meta-analysis*: explicit teaching is better than implicit teaching, effects of explicit teaching last
- Gass & Selinker (2008): *review*: after early childhood, acquiring complex forms requires meaningful input and explicit grammar focus
- Spada & Tomita (2010): *meta-analysis*: explicit teaching is more effective than implicit teaching for both simple and complex features, and the effects are lasting
- Spada & Lightbown (2008): explicit teaching of rules, combined with communicative practice, leads to conscious and unconscious knowledge that lasts over time
- Spada & Tomita (2010): teaching rules separately from communicative practice is just as good as integrating it for conscious and unconscious grammar knowledge that lasts over time.
- All of this removes support for Krashen’s proposed irreconcilable learning/acquisition dichotomy.

Should we teach all grammar rules?

- Hulstijn excludes some ‘rules’: the ones that are more like fuzzy categories

Example:

In English, words with Germanic roots dative and words with Latin roots don’t. OK, this seems to work...

- *give them £10, but NOT *donate them £10*
- *send us a parcel but NOT *transport us a parcel*

BUT what about these verbs? *promise, serve, shout (a warning)*

- For rules that are reliable statements of the regularities in the language, Hulstijn says, you need to balance two features:
 - Scope (How much of the language does the rule apply to?)
 - Frequency (How often is the rule used in the language the learner needs?)

NB: ‘rule’: There are two kinds of rule:

1. No bicycles, whether ridden or not
(*Sign in Oxford University Parks*)
 2. Pure water at sea level boils at 100° Celsius.
- The ‘bicycle’ rule is imposed by an authority.
 - The ‘water boiling’ rule is a statement of observed regularity.

- Grammar rules are ‘water boiling’ rules, but too often they are presented as ‘bicycle’ rules

Should we teach grammar inductively?

- Terminology (also: *consciousness raising* ☺, *structured input*)
- Theoretically, how might it work? → Deeper processing
- Demonstrates that grammar is not just an arbitrary set of rules (and this may engage some learners more, notably some previously recalcitrant learners)
- Empirical evidence that it works as well as deductive (e.g. VanPatten & Oikkenon, 1996; Chan & Li, 2002; Ming & Maarof, 2010)
- However, evidence that relying on learners to derive rules without help doesn’t work (Erlam, 2003)

Inductive teaching: ingredients:

- A good clear rule to aim at
- Samples of the grammar feature (quantity, quality)
- Clear guidance for the learners

EXAMPLES OF INDUCTIVE GRAMMAR TEACHING FROM NAVIGATE:

Example 1: give alternatives

[After work identifying the tense forms in an article]

Underline more examples of these tenses in the article. Choose the correct options to complete the rules below.

- We use the past ¹simple/perfect to describe the main events of the story.
In 1893 she sailed to modern-day Sierra Leone.
- We use the past ²continuous/perfect to show that a past action or situation took place before another past action.
She decided to travel to West Africa, a place she had always dreamed of visiting.

Example 2: gap-filling

[Previous exercise = list of T/F sentences about article]

Study the sentences in Exercise 4. Complete the rules with *simple* or *continuous*.

- We use the past perfect when we are already talking about the past and we want to talk about an earlier past time.
- We use the past perfect ¹_____ with action verbs to talk about actions over a period of time.

His body hurt because he had been sitting in the same position for hours.

- We use the past perfect ²_____ for ...

Example 3: matching examples to rules

[Previous exercise = listening and completing sentences in context]

Match the completed sentences in Exercise x to the explanations:

Will: We use *will*

- 1 when we want to **make a prediction based on what we know now.**

- 2 _____
when we **make a spontaneous decision.**

[...]

Example 4: Adding examples

[Previous work with meaning of article]

Read [the rules] and add two more examples of each verb tense from the article.

We use the **future continuous** to talk about an action in progress at a certain future time. *will + be + verb with -ing*

This time next year, I'll be living in another country.

[...]

Example 5: structured questioning

[Previous work with meaning of article – it contains examples of *get/have + object + past participle*, e.g. *get my hair cut*]

- a. Look at the underlined sections of the article. Do these verb forms refer to actions you do yourself, or actions someone does for you or to you?
- b. Check your ideas by reading the grammar focus box. Then add some of the underlined examples to the box.

When we arrange for somebody else to do something for us or to us, but we don't say who does it, we use

have + object + past participle

¹ _____ [...]

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