

A Case Study of Integrating Language Awareness into Grammar Teaching in the Chinese EFL Context

Xiangyang Zhang

Department of Foreign Language Studies, the Open University of Jiangsu, Nanjing, China

Shu-Chiu Hung

Department of Applied English, Ming Chuan University, Taiwan

Abstract—The study employed a case study method to investigate the affective effectiveness of integrating language awareness into grammar teaching in the Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. In the case study, fifty-eight participants were given language awareness teaching interventions. Questionnaires and interviews were developed, and administered for data collection. The findings of the case study have showed the potentials of language pedagogy in relation to its affective effectiveness in grammar classrooms in three aspects: a) a majority of the participants showed positive changes in their attitudes toward and beliefs in learning grammar; b) a majority of the participants are found to apply more cognitive-affective grammar learning strategies; and c) a majority of the participants responded to positively integrate their learning of grammar with four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). To conclude, the case study has shed light on the potential of integrating language awareness into grammar pedagogy in the Chinese EFL context as well as its future development in second/foreign Language teaching and learning.

Index Terms—language awareness, case study, affective effectiveness, the Chinese context EFL, integrating language awareness into grammar teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

Language awareness, more recently, has been enriched from a multi-disciplinary perspective including applied linguistics, psychology, and learning theory. Language awareness pedagogy, thus, accommodates a diversity of definitions, interpretations and pedagogic practices (van Lier, 2001). Particularly, it is assumed and believed that language awareness as a pedagogic methodology can benefit learners from five integrative domains of language learning, namely, affective domain, cognitive domain, power domain, social domain and performance domain (James & Garrett, 1991; Garrett & James, 2004; van Lier, 1995, 1998, 2001). Nevertheless, the centrality of language awareness as a pedagogic approach in language education should be multifunctional. Metaphorically speaking, language awareness is likely to act as ‘language windows’ (Hawkins, 1984, 1987, 1992, 2005) to provide learners with pictures of the language they are learning, as a ‘language bridge’ (Hawkins, 1984, 1987, 1999) to pave the way of language transitions for learners in their journey of language learning, and as ‘a door’ to enhance the literary and linguistic competence of learners (Carter, 2007). Moreover, language awareness as a pedagogic methodology is believed to benefit learners in the area of five integrative domains of language learning: the affective domain, the cognitive domain, the power domain, the social domain, and the performance domain (James & Garrett, 1991; Garrett & James, 2004; van Lier, 1998, 2001). However, such benefits of language awareness pedagogy remain largely speculations, and classroom-based research into its applicability and practicability is under-researched. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to answer the following three research questions:

a). Research Question One:

To what extent may the participants change their attitudes towards and beliefs in learning grammar after receiving the teaching treatment?

b). Research Question Two:

To what extent may the participants present different strategies of learning grammar after receiving the teaching treatment?

c). Research Question Three:

To what extent may the participants change their perceptions of the relationship between learning grammar and language skills?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Language Awareness as Pedagogic Methodology

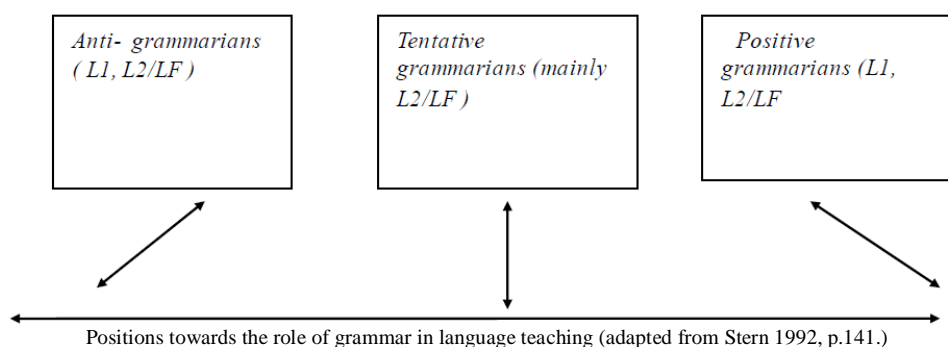
Language awareness as a pedagogic methodology is characterised by two key features. Firstly, it is assumed that language awareness pedagogy can enable teachers and learners to learn beyond the surface of a language in ways which knowledge-based approaches alone can never reach (Bolitho et al., 2003). That indicates that the application of language awareness as a pedagogic approach may lead to develop learners' mental attribute for better insights into how language works. As Tomlinson (2003) points out,

Language Awareness is a mental attribute which develops through paying motivated attention to language in use, and which enables learners to gradually gain insights into how language works. It is also a pedagogic approach that aims to help learners to gain such insights (Bolitho et al., 2003, p.251).

Secondly, language awareness 'instruction' is characterized as "a more holistic and text [discourse]-based approach to language (Carter, 2003, p. 65)". Such approaches, according to Carter (2007), should "not just simply be at the level of linguistic form but should include awareness of language as discourse and sensitivity to social and interpersonal functions of language". In addition, language awareness teaching is concerned with developing the active use of learners' cognitive learning strategies such as discovering the language, analyzing/ parsing the target language, comparing the differences and similarities between the target language and their mother tongue while constantly facing with language (i.e. texts, language samples, or terminology), and reflecting language use. Such cognitive development may lead learners to be more independent their learning and then facilitate language acquisition (Sharwood-Smith, 1981). In other words, the development of language awareness in second/foreign language teaching may result in a principled process or mechanism to allow learners to capitalise their knowledge about the target language for communication, learning purpose (Papaefthymiou-Lytra, 1987), 'language capabilities' (Fairclough, 1992) and 'linguistic/literary competence' (Carter, 2003, 2007).

B. The Role of Grammar in Language Pedagogy

The role of grammar has been controversial, a continuum can be drawn as following according to three positions where grammarians stand.



The first is a 'zero position' held by Anti-grammarians who believe that the teaching of grammar has little role to play in both L1 and L2/LF. In L1, particularly in Western Europe, it is believed that learning grammar could inhibit learning and did not help the learner to communicate well. Learning grammar of the first language could make L1 learners self-conscious, and lack of confidence to take part in discussion in an acceptable manner. In L2/LF situations, focusing on grammar seems to be an undermining and de-motivating force for most learners. In terms of language acquisition, Krashen (1985) argues that acquisition only takes place when learners are exposed to input which they are able to comprehend, not to grammatical points. The tentative grammarians, taking the second position, acknowledge that a cautious tentative attitude towards grammar is needed. One important aspect of second language acquisition cannot be influenced by grammatical analysis, but language learners cannot entirely do well without overt grammar teaching, particularly in the L2/LF situation. Harley and Swain (1984), for instance, recognize the limitations of the anti-grammarians position in their research on the inter-language of immersion students. The positive grammarians stand on the third position, arguing for grammar teaching either in L1 or L2/LF. In L1 situation, it is assumed that knowing more about how grammar works is to understand more about how grammar is used and misused; knowing more about grammar can impart greater choices and control over grammar as an expressive and interpretative medium; knowing more about grammar is to be empowered to use grammar as central to the creation of textual meaning (Carter 1990, p.120). In L2 situation, learning grammar through formal instruction can facilitate language acquisition indirectly or after a delay (Ellis, 1992, 1994). For most L2/LF learners knowledge of grammar is important to enable them to 'mean', and it is impossible to communicate beyond a very rudimentary level without grammar (Swain, 1985; Widdowson, 1990).

Despite the fact that researchers holding different stands regarding the role of grammar teaching and learning, the importance of grammar has been re-noticed and recognized in language pedagogy in recent years. Misconceptions and questionable claims are made on grammar in language teaching, as Larsen-Freeman (1997) points out:

Grammar is often misunderstood in the language teaching field. The misconception lies in the view that grammar is a collection of arbitrary rules about static structures in the language. Further questionable claims are that the structures do

not have to be taught, learners will acquire them on their own, or if the structures are taught, the lessons that ensue will be boring (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p.1).

That is to say, grammar should be given a new role in language teaching. More importantly, grammar should act as 'Facilitator' (a means to an end) rather than as 'Terminator' (an end) to language acquisition.

C. *Language Awareness and Grammar Pedagogy*

Language awareness is increasingly being seen as a central goal of language education, and is gradually recognized as an indispensable approach already enshrined in teaching practice. Woods (1995, p. xiii) writes,

The cognitive methodology, with its consciousness-raising tasks, applies to learner both L1 and L2.

That is, language awareness pedagogy has been developed in grammar teaching, particularly related to consciousness-raising. Such grammar pedagogy, as Ellis (1992) also states, constitutes an approach compatible with current thinking about how learners acquired L2 grammar, and with progressive views about education as a process of discovery through problem-solving tasks. The grammar teaching for language awareness is identified with the following features (Carter & McCarthy, 1997; Ellis, 1992, 1994).

a). *a cognitive approach*

Language awareness pedagogy deliberately makes learners be aware of specific features of the target language. This pedagogy is different from memory-based grammar translation methods and drill-based audio-lingual methods. It, as Ellis (1994) notes, can help learners develop a cognitive representation of the target language features.

b). *both deductive and inductive learning*

Consciousness-raising, as Ellis (1992) points out, can be both deductive and inductive learning. Deductive language awareness teaching means that the learner is provided with a rule which they can use in order to carry out some task. Inductive language awareness pedagogy is to supply the learner with data and then ask the learner to construct an explicit rule to illustrate the grammatical feature of the language data.

c). *contribution to the acquisition of implicit knowledge*

Explicit knowledge can contribute indirectly to acquisition of implicit knowledge directly, that is, to facilitate the acquisition of the grammatical knowledge needed for communication. Ellis (1992, p.238-239) argues that a delayed effect of consciousness-raising to the acquisition of implicit knowledge occurs in two major ways.

d). *contribution to inter-language development*

Language awareness teaching contributes to noticing, re-noticing, and comparing, which are involved in the processes of acquiring language, and thus to prepare the ground for integrating new linguistic features into learners' inter-language development when the learners are developmentally ready.

To put into a broader aspect, grammar should be perceived beyond limited sentence-level of morph-syntactic structures to features of discourse, and socio-cultural rules of appropriateness of language-in-use. Hence, language awareness to grammar should be able to enhance learners' grammatical sensitivity in grammatical and pragmatic level of linguistic studies. As van-Lier (1995, p.85) points out:

Language awareness does not mean sticking your nose into a grammar book or textbook in a more intense manner, rather, it means looking up and around, and picking up your ears to hear and appreciate the language around you (van-Lier 1995, p.85).

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

A. *Research Participants*

The fifty eight participants in the study were second-year students, studying at one university in the EFL context. Among them, fifty-five are female, and three male. The age of the participants ranged between 19 and 20 years old, with an average age of 18.97 years old. The participants have been studying English for 7 to 9 years, with an average of 7.09 years.

B. *Research Methods:*

Pre-and-post questionnaires were developed, and interviews were employed in the present study for data collections. The pre-questionnaire is composed of two main parts. The first part of it was to collect personal information of the participants, including name, gender, age and years of learning English. The second part of it has a particular focus on learner perceptions of grammar learning, including feelings, beliefs and attitudes. The pre-questionnaire was designed in the format of a Likert scale (strongly agree (SA) / agree (A) / neutral (N) / disagree (D) / strongly disagree (SD)). The participants were requested to circle their opinions (Ⓟ) after reading each statement). After the grammar teaching treatment, the post-questionnaire was administered to elicit perceptions of the participants. The post-questionnaire was also developed in the format of a strongly agree-strongly disagree Likert scale, containing fifteen statements. The participants were requested to circle their opinions (Ⓟ) after reading each statement. In addition, interviews were employed to collect retrospective data in the study. Ten voluntary participants were recruited for one individual structured interview after teaching treatments. The interviews were employed to triangulate research data collected from questionnaires on learner perceptions. The following four interview questions were used to elicit the interviewees' responses:

- Q1. *Could you tell me something about grammar class?*
 Q2. *What ways do you use to learn grammar?*
 Q3. *Is there any other ways else you use to learn grammar?*
 Q4. *Which ways you feel are more effective to learn grammar?*

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from pre-and-post questionnaires were coded and analyzed. First of all, the reliability of questionnaires was checked by the SPSS 16.0 Statistic package tool. Cronbach's Alpha of the pre-questionnaire reads as 0.960. Similarly, the post-questionnaire also displayed good reliability with the Cronbach's Alpha reading 0.982. The interview data were transcribed, and are cited to support the findings drawn from the questionnaires. The results of the case study are reported and discussed in relation to the three proposed research questions in the following sections.

A. Research Question One:

To what extent may the participants change their attitudes towards and beliefs in learning grammar after receiving the teaching treatment?

The participants' feelings about grammar learning before and after teaching treatments were compared and analyzed as shown in Table 4.1.

TABLE 4.1:
FEELINGS ABOUT GRAMMAR LEARNING BEFORE & AFTER THE TEACHING
(STRONGLY AGREE=1, AGREE=2, DISAGREE=4, STRONGLY DISAGREE=5)

Code	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
FGL1	58	3.52	1.030
FGL2	58	3.36	1.119
FGL3	58	4.10	.852
ARFGL1	58	1.98	1.034
ARFGL2	58	2.53	1.127
ARFGL3	58	2.40	1.008

As seen from Table 4.1 above, the participants have showed positive changes in their feelings about grammar learning after the teaching treatment. The mean score was M = 3.52 when the participants responded to the statement that 'grammar learning is challenging (coded FGL1)' before the teaching treatment. However, after teaching treatments, the mean score was changed to be M = 1.98. Similarly, the mean score was M = 3.36 in the participants' responses to the statement that 'grammar learning is interesting (coded FGL2)'. After the teaching treatment, in contrast, the mean score was reported to be M = 2.53 while responding to the same statement. The mean score was M = 4.10 while the participants responded to the statement 'grammar learning is relaxing and stimulating.'

After the treatment, the mean score of the participants' responses to the same statement is M = 2.40. These findings have indicated that the feelings of the participants regarding to grammar learning have changed positively after the teaching treatment. In addition, a majority of the participants, after the teaching treatment, positively changed their beliefs in learning grammar. For example, 96.5% of participants responded that they strongly agreed/agreed that learning grammar was not only a matter of memorizing rules and doing forms/patterns practice. After the treatment, 74.1% of participants responded that they strongly agreed/ agreed that 'I like to study more about grammar after grammar class.' In contrast, only 17.2% of participants responded that they liked to learn grammar before the teaching treatment. The difference is 56.9%, which is above the significant level at 10%. That is, the grammar teaching treatment appeared to have significantly changed the will of participants. In other words, they are more willing to study grammar further. As one interviewee said,

'Reading English books or newspapers, I pay more attention to grammar whenever I study English... (S9)'

B. Research Question Two:

To what extent may the participants present different strategies of learning grammar after receiving the teaching treatment?

Table 4.2 shows that the participants' different strategies of learning grammar after the teaching treatment.

TABLE 4.2:
STRATEGIES OF GRAMMAR LEARNING

Strategies of Grammar Learning	Code	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
S.4 I pay more attention in grammar lessons.	AR 1	2.40	1.107	0.145
S.5 I talk more about grammar in grammar lessons.	AR 2	2.60	1.154	0.151
S.6 I discover the rules of grammar for myself.	AR 3	2.53	1.217	0.160
S.7 I have more confidence to learn grammar.	AR 4	2.10	0.968	0.127
S.8 I like to discuss grammar with my classmates.	AR 5	2.62	1.226	0.161
S.10 I ask my teacher more questions on grammar.	AR 6	2.78	1.060	0.139
S.11 While I am studying English, I notice the grammatical features I have learned.	AR 7	1.69	0.863	0.113

The result of the study is consistent with Fotos' study. A majority of the participants responded that they strongly agreed/agreed ($M=1.69$) with the statement: "While I am studying English, I notice the grammatical features I have learned." Fotos (1994) reported that the Japanese participants presented better 'noticing' in her study. The finding also confirms Ellis' (2007) view that teaching grammar with a focus on awareness-raising could help learners re-notice linguistic features in their subsequent input. That implies that the grammar teaching for language awareness is likely to be effective in terms of learners' noticing and re-noticing grammatical features in their subsequent learning of the target language. Also, the Chinese participants responded that they strongly agreed/ agreed ($M=2.40$) that they paid more attention in grammar lessons. One Chinese participant in the interview stated that:

'...I pay attention to grammar whenever I learn English....(S9).'

Moreover, the participants reported that they strongly agreed /agreed ($M=2.10$) that they had more confidence to learn grammar. That is, learners are likely to develop more confidence in learning grammar. The participants also strongly agreed/agreed ($M=2.60$) that they talked more about grammar in grammar lessons. Likewise, the participants strongly agreed /agreed ($M=2.53$) that they discovered the rules of grammar for themselves. These findings indicate that grammar teaching for language awareness is likely to be effective in promoting learning of grammar through discovery learning. The following two citations taken from the interview data would lay supports to the findings:

'I would like to discover the grammar problems while I am reading English articles, or book.... (S6).'

'When I read books, English newspapers, magazines or novels, I'll try my best to find grammar points out... (S10).'

After the teaching treatment, a majority of the Chinese participants also reported to develop their social strategies of learning grammar. They strongly agreed/agreed ($M=2.62$) that they liked to discuss grammar with their classmates. They strongly agreed/agreed ($M=2.78$) that they asked their teacher more grammar questions. These findings have showed that grammar teaching integrating with language awareness appears effective to help learners expand their strategies of how to learn grammar. The following three citations from interview data may provide further supports to the findings.

'I can discuss grammar questions with classmates. Make grammar rules easier to be memorized....(S4)'

'...have free time to discuss grammar questions with classmates. (S8).'

'...Do some activities, and have some discussions on grammar (S3).'

C. Research Question Three:

To what extent may the participants change their perceptions of the relationship between learning grammar and language skills?

After the teaching treatment, the participants appeared to display positive perceptions of the relationship between grammar and English listening and speaking. Table 4.3 shows the participants' perceptions of the relationship between grammar and four language skills before and after the treatment.

TABLE 4.3:
PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GRAMMAR
AND LANGUAGE SKILLS BEFORE AND AFTER THE TEACHING TREATMENT
(STRONGLY AGREE=1, AGREE=2, DISAGREE=4, STRONGLY DISAGREE=5)

Codes	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
GSL	58	4.12	.860
GWL	58	1.71	.459
ARGSL	58	1.50	.822
ARGWL	58	1.33	.574

Before the teaching treatment, the mean score was $M=4.12$ when the participants responded to the statement 'Grammar lessons could improve my listening/speaking (coded GSL)' The mean score was $M=1.71$ when they responded to the statement 'Grammar lessons could improve my writing/reading' (coded GWL). By contrast, the mean score was $M=1.50$ when the participants responded to the statement 'Grammar lessons can improve my listening/speaking' (coded ARGSL) after the teaching treatment. The finding indicates that grammar teaching for language awareness could provide an interface between grammar learning and listening/speaking skills. In addition, the participants remain perceiving a close relationship between learning grammar and writing/reading skills after the teaching treatment. The mean score was $M=1.33$ when they responded to the statement 'Grammar lessons could improve my writing/reading (coded ARGWL)' after the treatment. The following citations from interview data provided more research data to these findings:

'.. I learn grammar from reading materials...(S5).'

'... I learn grammar by talking in English and writing passages. (S7).'

'.. Apart from remembering the grammar rules, I put grammar into use in my everyday composition... (S10).'

'... and through reading, I learn grammar.... (S1).'

'...Connect grammar with speaking, reading, listening and writing...(S9).'

V. CONCLUSION

The case study was undertaken to investigate the affective effectiveness of teaching grammar for language awareness within classroom contexts with a focus on learner perceptions such as feelings, attitudes and beliefs. Research findings have showed that the participants displayed their positive changes in feelings of, attitudes towards, and beliefs in learning grammar, and a majority of participants applied more affective-cognitive strategies to learn grammar after receiving the teaching treatment. To a greater extent, the case study has been illuminative and provided research evidence on the affective effectiveness of implementing language awareness pedagogy in the Chinese EFL context. The study has a pedagogic implication for teaching grammar for language awareness as a viable alternative approach. In the future, more research into language awareness pedagogy in global EFL contexts will give better insights into its potentials, applicability and practicability in language classrooms.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bolitho, R., Carter, R., Hughes, R., Ivanič, R., Masuhara, H., & Tomlinson, B. (2003). Ten questions about language awareness. *ELT Journal* 57 (3), 251-259.
- [2] Carter, R.A. (ed.) (1990). *Knowledge about Language and the Curriculum: The LINC Reader*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- [3] Carter, R. A. (2003). Key concepts in ELT: Language awareness. *ELT Journal* 57(1), 64-65.
- [4] Carter, R. (2007). Spoken English, written English: using a corpus for research in applied linguistics. CRAL 2006-2007 Postgraduate Seminar Series, Centre for Research in Applied Linguistic, the University of Nottingham 21st, Feb. 2007.
- [5] Garrette, P. and James, C. (2004). Language awareness. In Byram, M (Ed.) (2004). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning*. pp. 330-333 London: Routledge.
- [6] Ellis, R. (1992). *Second Language Acquisition and Language Pedagogy*. Clevedon; Multilingual Matters.
- [7] Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [8] Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Changes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [9] Harley, B. & Swain, M. (1984). The inter-language of immersion students and its implications for second language teaching In Davies, C., Criper, C. and Howatt, A. (eds.) (1984). *Inter-language*. pp. 401-435 Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- [10] Hawkins, E. (1984). *Awareness of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- [11] Hawkins, E. (1987). *Awareness of Language (Revised Edition)*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press.
- [12] Hawkins, E. (1999). Language awareness and Foreign Language Learning. *Language Awareness* 8 (3&4), 124-142
- [13] Hawkins, E. (2005). 'Address to the Opening Plenary of the ALA 2004 Conference at the University of Lleida Spain' *Language Awareness* 14 2&3), 82-83.
- [14] James, C. and Garrette, P. (1991). *Language Awareness in the Classroom*. Essex: Longman.
- [15] Krashen, S. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issue ad Implications*. New York: Pergamon Press
- [16] Larsen-Freeman, D. (1997). *Grammar Dimensions: Form, Meaning and Use* Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.
- [17] Papaefthymiou-Lytra, S. (1987). *Language, Language Awareness and Language Learning*. Athens: The University of Athens Press.
- [18] Palyfreyman, D. (ed.) 2007. *Language Awareness* 16 (1) Special Issue. Clevedon; Multilingual Matters.
- [19] Polauf, I. (1995). Language Awareness. *Language Awareness* 4(1), 3-14.
- [20] Sharwood-Smith, M. (1981). Consciousness-raising in the second language learner. *Applied Linguistics* 11, 159-169.
- [21] Stern, H. (1992). *Issues and Options in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [22] Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: The roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In Gass, S.M. & Madden, C. G (eds). (1985). *Input in Second Language Acquisition*. pp. 235-253 Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- [23] van Lier, L. (1995). *Introducing Language Awareness*. London: Penguin.
- [24] van Lier, L. (1998). *Interaction in the Language Curriculum: Awareness, Autonomy and Authenticity*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- [25] van Lier, L. (2001). Language awareness. In Carter, R. and Nunan, D. (Eds.) 2001 *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. pp. 160-165. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [26] Widdowson, H.G (1990). *Aspect of Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- [27] Wood, E. (1995). *Introducing Grammar*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

Xiangyang Zhang has been a senior visiting fellow at the University of Nottingham, UK. Currently, he is working at the Department of Foreign Language Studies, The Open University of Jiangsu, Nanjing. His research interests are English Teacher Education, Learning Strategies, Learner Belief System, and English Distance Learning, and Web-based Learning System.

Shu-Chiu Hung has obtained her Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics/English Language Teaching, School of English Studies, the University of Nottingham.UK. Currently, she is teaching at the Department of Applied English, School of Education and Languages, Ming Chuan University, Taiwan. Her research interests include Grammar Pedagogy, Second/Foreign Language Acquisition, Distance learning.