A Survey of the Importance of Foreign Language Grammar Learning

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Abstract

All students face grammar learning for their language study. Currently, there are some language experts raising up the theory of grammar useless for foreign language study. This article takes qualitative method and aims to take a stand against that view, combined with the author’s own and her 3 friends’ learning language experience in different countries. Her 3 interviewed friends consist of two Chinese girls and one Polish girl. In the end of this chapter, this composer summarizes that language grammar is useful for language students, especially for Juniors and Adults. She also proposes some suggestions or recommendations for students and teachers to study foreign language grammars and interact each other. While there mentions some merits and demerits that this only 3 surveyed candidates can not stand for all language learners and further improvements for this kind of research needs to be done in the coming days which are always same as other documents.

Keywords

Grammar, English, Japanese, German, Foreign language grammar

1. Introduction

Larsen-Freeman, D. in his thesis of teaching and researching grammar skills points out that grammar has played a leading role in theories of language, language learning and teaching, also indicates that grammar of all language skills always annoy lots of students. Now for English learning students, who are not native speakers, many scholars have suggested that they should not study English grammar so hard, just let students immerse themselves in the authentic English environment like European and American children, touch English, memory English, then, they will know English, use English, and make English as their second language naturally like European and American children. In this way, they could master English comparable to their mother languages. Based on this, all students who learn foreign languages, better not study grammars any more. Only let themselves be in foreign language environment, afterwards, they can master one foreign language easily, similar to babies learning languages. However, when I was a postgraduate of English Education in Beijing Foreign Studies University, my teacher asked all of students that what we could think of English grammar, and how to metaphor English in the reality in the first class. A lot of answers were from my classmates, none of the answer is that the English grammar is not useful. My answer to that question is that English grammar is the law and rule to make English in order and higher efficiency to learn. If I have to metaphor English grammar, I can regard it as a piece of thread, which is so vital and can be used to do a bracelet with some pearls. There is no one can say one pearl bracelet could be made without thread. Thus it can be seen that I hold opposite view against to those professionals who recommend it is not essential to study English grammar or Foreign language grammar.
2. Interviewed Cases:

2.1 Jenny’s experience -- the writer of this article

As a Chinese, who was born and raised in China, I am an English major. Since I have studied English from junior high school, I extremely hate learning dull English grammar. Also, even in college, even English majors I am, I still hold opposite view to the study of English grammar, especially when I hear that some scholars preach the so-called "useless theory of English grammar", I am more hostile to the study of grammar. I am very disgusted with the school's English grammar curriculum, and openly stand in the position that it does not need to learn English grammar, and that learning English grammar is a waste of time, energy and a mere increase of aversion to English learning. I always think that our students should like children outside of china immersing into English atmosphere, think that the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China does not pay more attention to Chinese people's learning English or other foreign languages, and think that the curriculum arrangement is unreasonable. Finally, I also feel so sad that my destiny is not good, my family is not good, compared with other children, who can go abroad to study easily and be in foreign languages environment to acquire one language naturally. They don't have to experience the pain of grammar learning. However, everything is changed dramatically when I go to Germany and learn a new kind of language - German, I have some new understanding of all this.

When I first arrived in Germany, I was so happy that I really would have the opportunity to experience the "baby" language learning and believed no longer need to suffer learning words and grammars as I did in China. Later, I found that I was not a "baby" any more. Even if I was completely immersed in German environment, there was no teacher like "parents", without patience to "tutor" me for a long time. It was impossible to learn language like baby - learning style. Then I know why babies don't learn grammar, because they don't have the ability to understand grammar at all at their ages. Honestly, it is neither appropriate nor normal to teach an adult like a baby, as we all know, mental and body growth of adults and children have big differences. The learning and application of grammar will enable persons with right ages to master a language faster and better. Everything has its own rules, and language is no exception. Grammar is English’s internal law, which is the result of linguists doing research through countless days and nights. If listening to right ages to master a language faster and better. Everything has its own rules, and language is no exception. Grammar is English’s internal law, which is the result of linguists doing research through countless days and nights. If listening to some so-called language experts' new propaganda "grammar useless theory", learners completely abandoned this on their English learning paths, it is "silly" to the extreme. Yes, some experts, to tell the truth, are really smart, but can not be as smart as education ministries of countries worldwide, that is to say, can not be smart as the governments of countries in the whole world. Actually, the real elites are working for countries. When I studied German in Germany, after a period of research, I found that not only students from China, Vietnam and other countries need to learn German grammar, but also German natives need to learn German grammar, just like we have to learn Chinese words, chapters, articles, grammar, etc in our childhood. While grammar teaching, the best way is that native teachers teach in their native languages, because some of the artistic conception of translation can not be expressed in words. It is more difficult to understand and use the grammar for students with lower level of foreign languages to help study foreign languages. All this, really make a teacher feel awkward. When German grammar is firmly memorized in my mind, all bands of my German, including reading comprehension, listening, writing and speaking, have really increased significantly. I feel German is "alive" anyway, and really can be used freely by myself.

2.2 Lele’s experience -- Chinese friend of the writer studying in Japan

I have a friend whose name is Lele. Although her major is not Japanese in university, she has to learn Japanese because she would study in Japan for a master degree. While she only started to learn Japanese since she arrived in Japan, and she has always thought that the style she learns Japanese, equivalent to "baby" learning. She has studied English in China for many years, and she felt great pain. She believes that she has been harmed by this china’s education style. When She arrived in Japan, she was very happy at first, but finally found that her "baby style" learning Japanese was not so good, too. In Japanese language classes, she had also to learn some courses which is similar to courses in domestic classes. Grammar is also a required course. The only one advantage of learning Japanese in Japan is that you can practice the language knowledge you just learned at anytime and anywhere. But for her, who is studying and living in Japan, it is far from enough to just practice little spoken Japanese. She only has to try her best to study Japanese. So, it is almost same to compare with the learning style in China. When the Japanese grammar system slowly is memorized in her mind, her Japanese is improved by leaps and bounds, then she realized clearly she benefits a lot from learning grammar.

2.3 Annie’s experience - Chinese colleague of the writer studying in UK

Annie was one of my Chinese colleagues in an English training center in Beijing, and she has been studied in UK for long time. Annie was not English major when she was in university, so, she paid more efforts to studying English be-
fore going to England. She is an English teacher now, who teaches children from 6-15 years old. Once, we talked about the importance of English grammar for these students, she admitted that it is necessary to learn English grammar for non-speaking English persons. When she was in Beijing, her English grammar was good, which could make her organize English sentences more smoothly and orderly. After she arrived at England, she still had to think about the grammar in her brain to form an sentence at first as she speak English, later, she was getting more and more familiar with overseas life, she found that she did not think of the grammar firstly when she spoke English or wrote English in UK, especially for her spoken English, never thought grammar any more, but for her written English, thesis in particular, English grammar must be very right and important.

At that time, she was not only an English teacher but also a leader for that training center, every time, she highlights the importance of English grammar in the week meeting, and communicate with parents to attach importance to English grammar for kids’ language study, beginners in particular. In her classes, she always explain the knowledge points of grammar in details or at least mention some grammar, considering the teaching contents and objectives. Obviously, her students all get high grades of English exams, yes, high grades passing the exams must be attributed not so much to the good study in grammar, but more comprehensive ability of English of these students. But we also can not say good grammar is not meaningful and helpful in the examinations.

2.4 Vasha’s experience - Polish friend of the writer studying in Germany and China

Vasha is one of my foreign friends from Poland. She could speak 4 kinds of languages, including German, Chinese, English, Polish when we know each other. We met in Beijing language and culture university as she was trained Chinese there. Vasha’s major was Chinese in her college, and she was studying Chinese in Germany at that time. Then, of course, Chinese is foreign language for her, and as we all know, Chinese is one of the most difficult languages to learn, she said Chinese grammar plays a significant role for her to study this language well. Looking back on our childhoods’ time, we had Chinese courses, too. We all should remember that Chinese is the most important subject among all courses, same as mathematics, especially in our premier and middle school. We needed to learn Chinese grammar to make sentences, chapters and also sometimes were criticized by teachers for wrong order of characters in the sentence we did. Just like us, native Chinese, Vasha had to learn Chinese grammar, not only for the study of Chinese but also for attaining her Bachelor degree in Germany, as this is one of her courses whose test must be passed through in her major. Actually, so many facts prove that learning Chinese grammar well partly contributes to her Chinese well.

Vasha also could speak fluent English as she worked in England a while, even if everything around her was totally English, she still believed that her English study when she was young in Poland gave a big hand to her English. I asked her if she needed to learn English grammar in Poland, and she said yes. Similar English courses as China’s English curriculum from premier school, she had to learn English laws from all these English lessons in her student time in Poland. Though she was not English major, while it is a must for her, no, not only for her, but also for all Polish students to study English rules.

One time, I asked her that how she thinks of German grammar even though she is living in Germany now, she smiled and asked me a question back, “Jenny (English name of this article Composer), we are both language learners, how do you think of this?” I laughed and answered, as a language student, I can put it like this way that language grammar is essential for any language learners, wherever she or he stays in. Frankly to speak, the environment of pure foreign languages are actually good for language learner, as there are much more interactions with the surroundings, positive feedback around, and practice language at any time any place in this. Vasha sister remained smile and nodded again and again, thumbing up to me. Then I understand, she does agree with my answers.

From my friend’s and my personal experience, we can see that grammar study is the compulsory way to learn the language, and also the shortcut to help master the language. Adults are adults, babies are babies. It is impossible to learn foreign languages by avoiding systematic grammar but in the so-called "baby style". We observe that when children learn languages, that means, when children learn to dialogue adults, we can find that: 1) There are a lot of incomplete paragraphs in the process of dialogue, which need to be constantly completed by children and expanded when kids express their ideas. When kids encounter difficulties in language expression, they can imitate adult language. If either party does not "continue", the dialogue will be terminated; 2) Because of the "continuation" of dialogue, language understanding and production are closely combined, and understanding is always accompanied by rich context. There are previous reminders, facial expressions, and gestures, which can greatly ease the difficulty of language understanding, and provide an opportunity to combine the context knowledge with the language structure learned, enhance the subsequent proper use of language, consistent with the principle of learning with use. More importantly, what we understand comes from adults, and what we produce comes from young children. The language level of adults is higher and that of children is lower. Close combination of this different levels leads interaction, interaction leads to coordination, and
coordination leads to leveling up, all these result the improvement of children's language production level, and their rapid development of language use ability, so as to have high efficiency in language acquisition (Wang Chuming, 2017). In the process of dialogue learning, children also unconsciously acquired grammar knowledge, but only they were not systematically taught and understood. The biggest difference between adults and young children is, not only the body and brain of adults much more developed than kids, but also the ability to understand and use language better.

3. Suggestions

How to teach and learn foreign language grammars and how to make teachers and students free from the dull grammar study at present are the big issues that teachers and students, schools and the Ministry of Education should think about. Because I was once deeply troubled by learning foreign language grammar, I give the following suggestions for learning foreign language grammars, combined with my own study experience.

3.1 For teachers

1) As students' age, foreign language proficiency and character are different, it is impossible for teachers to teach foreign language grammar in one same way. However, referring to the "overall foreign language teaching concept" (Han Baocheng, 2018) developed from the "comprehensive perception method", we can find that the foreign language teaching content should select the authentic materials which interests students and can promote their mental development. By systematically guided learning these materials, students can trigger their multidimensional perception and experience of language, get language sense and master language. At the same time, understanding of the foreign language and culture we have learned and humanistic quality of us would be improved (Han Baocheng, 2007). Therefore, for boring foreign language grammar, it should be better to choose materials and teaching methods that students like and feel interesting.

2) To teach grammar knowledge to students with higher foreign language proficiency, teachers can consider the "output-oriented method" (Wen Qiufang, 2015) for college foreign language teaching, and try to make their own grammar teaching process composed of three stages: "driving", "facilitating" and "evaluating". Teachers should properly play an intermediary role in the whole process (Wen Qiufang, 2015).

3.2 For students

1) Students must have a clear understanding of our foreign language level, communicate with our teachers if there is any problem, actively interact with teachers in class and finish homework carefully after class.

2) Students should do more grammar exercises, carefully check and memorize every useful grammar knowledge point. Mental attitude should be good. The idea of "grammar is useless" must be abandoned.

4. Conclusion

This article adopts qualitative method to collect data with 4 candidates to be interviewed. As these persons are author herself and her own friends, they should not lie to writer logically when they are questioned for this survey, thus, this could make higher reliability of this investigation result. While the number of interviewed persons are only 4, including writer herself, this could make a big limitation of it, because 4 language learners could not represent all language learners across the world. Also this article can be improved by tables and figures, which can let readers understand the research content much easier and clearer. In the near future, the research of importance of foreign language grammar could cover more people from distinct areas with different ages.

References


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