

RULE ADAPTATION PROBLEMS IN THE COURSE OF MISTAKE CORRECTION (BASED ON A PROFESSIONALLY ORIENTED ENGLISH GRAMMAR COURSE AT UNIVERSITY)

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Abstract: The paper focuses on a vital issue faced by the English teachers regarding correcting grammatical mistakes, which involves not only identifying, correcting and commenting on mistakes, but also producing a valid and relevant grammar rule, usually modified and different from the prescriptive grammar books. Though this process of correcting mistakes may seem primitive, the research shows that problems arise at the initial stage of mistake identification and tend to have a snowball effect and result into communicative failures if not properly addressed. The main research methods employed are observation, question and answer sessions and written work screening. A total of 243 second-year students' written samples (tests, quizzes, homework exercises) with formulated grammar rules over the period of 2018-2021 as well as their oral answers in class have been analyzed. First all of all, the reasons for the students' inability to spot and correct grammatical mistakes are ignorance of the grammatical rules and their inability to matchconf2022@iseic.cz mistakes with a particular grammatical principle. The second reason is students' lack of experience in grasping concepts from English grammar textbooks for teaching schoolchildren. Finally, faulty correction of mistakes is put down to lack of skills to synthesizing grammatical information. To overcome these problems, exercises on grammar rules from authentic textbooks of varying complexity, critical discussions on student presentations aimed at correcting grammar mistakes and introducing the corresponding rules, and role-plays where the aspiring teachers must respond to the students' answers and correct their mistakes are suggested.

UDC Classification: 378; **DOI:** <https://doi.org/peb.v3.297>

Keywords: grammar, rules, mistakes, descriptive, prescriptive.

Introduction

This article attempts to summarize the experience of teaching English grammar to aspiring teachers of English as a foreign language at the department of foreign languages, Voronezh State Pedagogical University, Russia. The ability to correct grammatical mistakes involves many challenges associated not much with identifying and correcting mistakes, but with formulating grammatical rules. Since the delivery of grammatically correct speech depends on the knowledge of the grammar rules and the ability to apply them, teachers are therefore required to adequately formulate relevant rules and make them understandable and accessible to their students. At the same time, the phrasing of the rule in the introduction and at the level of mistake correction cannot be different. However, during the formation of a grammatical rules, a significant number of difficulties are revealed. To overcome these, it is necessary to analyze their causes and characteristics to improve the ways of teaching English grammar, with due consideration to the students' future careers.

Literature review

The issues considered in the article are in line with a number of problems raised in the modern theory of teaching foreign languages (Uibu, 2015). Mistake correction as one of the key aspects of the academic activity (Terenin, 2014) of a foreign language teacher, attracts the attention of methodologists, educational professionals, and psychologists (Frolova, 2007) owing to the negative attitude of students towards it (Mikhasenko, 2007), especially in adolescence (Arkharova, 2014). During the learning process, a mismatch between a teacher ignoring mistakes and their correction rate can lead to decline in the cognitive and speech motivation (Kondrashova, 2015), negatively affecting the foreign language competence of the students. The tendency to ignore the mistakes can be due to the desire to create natural conditions for communication, time constraints, and other organizational matters during a correction. No matter how significant the mistake correction is, the question of how not only to acquaint the students with the correct option, but also to strengthen their knowledge of the grammatical rule to prevent such future mistakes, remains insufficiently answered (Kondrashova, 2015).

The modern learning theory also mentions the importance of grammar rules for mastering the grammatical skill (Ryazanova, 2012), discusses the teaching approaches for implementing these grammatical rules in communication (Newby, 1998), and raises questions about the relationship between deductive and inductive methods of teaching grammatical rules (Belkina, 2014). To varying

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degree, all these aspects related to the problem are correlated with the issue (Johnson, 1988) considered in this article. Closest to solving problems related to the formulation of a grammatical rule are researchers who discussed the need to quantize a grammatical rule. Quantization refers to the creation of rules-instructions (quanta) depending on the functional difficulties that each grammatical form potentially has. The degree of difficulty can be assessed depending on its relationship with the corresponding grammatical phenomena of the native language (Terenin, 2014), as well as previously studied phenomena of a foreign language, which can negatively affect the delivery of speech in a foreign language (Terenin, 2014). Furthermore, the students' nature, characteristics, and level of education should be considered. In other words, the suggested fragment of the rule must correspond to the specific goal of learning at the corresponding stage, the nature of the mistake, students' characteristics, and other factors significant from a pedagogical point of view. The quantization process itself (Antonova, 2011) causes several problems associated with objective and subjective reasons. The experience of using quantization techniques will be discussed below in connection with one of the difficulties in the rule formulation.

Methodology

This paper aims to identify and organise the difficulties aspiring teachers face in formulating English grammar rules for correcting grammatical mistakes of their students. The research methods employed are observation, question and answer sessions, and screening of written work. The grammar rules formulated by the second-year students (243 written samples) specializing in "Pedagogical education" ("English /German" and "English / French") in the years 2018-2021, as well as their oral answers in the class have been analyzed. The rules were formulated spontaneously and as a part of the students' homework on grammatical mistake correction. The aspiring English teachers also formulated the rules under study in their individual presentations to correct the student mistakes made in their tests. Finally, certain parts of the rules analyzed for the study were based on the role plays in the class.

Results

The first difficulty the students faced while taking an initial test on mistake correction prior to their actual training on the methods of presenting a grammatical rule for mistake correction. When the aspiring teachers were asked to identify and correct a grammatical mistake, they either could not see the mistake or, when they recognised it, they were unable to correct it. This applies to oral quizzes as well as written tasks performed at an average speed. However, it should be noted that the number of difficulties during quick oral correction is almost twice as high (35% and 20% respectively for the high-performing students and 85% and 45 % for low-performing students).

After discussing the test results in groups, it becomes clear that it is due to the speech tempo and oral comprehension. As for relatively slow written mistake correction, the students fail to identify and/ or correct mistakes due to the lack of a clear understanding of the grammatical pattern. For example, in response to the teacher's questions, *how are "no" and "not" used in the sentence structure? What meaning do infinitives and gerunds have in sentences after the verb "to stop"? etc.*, they could not give any explanation at all, provided incomplete information, or distorted the information about the pattern considerably. These difficulties indicate that the students failed to understand that speech accuracy correlates with the knowledge of grammatical patterns and their application in various spoken activities. At this point, it was observed that the students should become aware of one of the key aspects of their future professional activity and realize that it is necessary to prepare for it. Therefore, such tests with subsequent discussions can partly be considered one of the ways to overcome this difficulty. It makes the students think about the existence of a problem, which is already a step towards its solution. It is also a step on the individual route of self-education. At this stage, future teachers begin to question themselves or their teacher, "Why is it so?" instead of "What is the correct option?" and realize how embarrassed they will feel if they are unable to correct mistakes and give an appropriate explanation.

Next, the problems arise at the first attempts to formulate a grammatical rule. About 70% of the rules formulated by the students at the beginning of their course were not valid. They lack a description of regularities and do not explain the conditions for their usage. The inability to describe these conditions, where the main part of the grammatical regularity is hidden, and / or the lack of awareness that these conditions should be understood and remembered not only by the students, but also by the teachers themselves, result in the formulation of a "rule" as per an extremely simplified model of the following

type: “*In this sentence / case / combination / here, etc. ___ must be used (e.g., the form or grammatical unit).*” Such phrases are not explanatory; they just indicate the correct version of the sentence part in which the mistake was made. To learn how to answer the questions “Why? Under what conditions?” rather than “What exactly?” in a rule, one needs to be familiar with the principles of describing patterns, the logic of building a rule, which bears fruit only if there is self-motivation to figure it out and explain it to their classmates/schoolchildren, which is the subject matter of psychology and cannot be discussed in detail in this article. Experience shows that a search methodology applied in learning/explaining grammar rules can be one of the ways to solve this problem.

The same problem is associated with the students’ perception of the relationship between the grammatical phenomenon and the context of its usage as a fixed pattern. In their first drafts of the rules, many students insist that school children should memorize certain phrases or whole sentence fragments like “You cannot use the future tense after *if*”; “With the structure *there is* we should use the indefinite article”; “Remember “What a fine day!”, but “How fine the day is!””, etc. It takes much time for the aspiring teacher to understand the fact that grammar is a system of patterns/regularities regarding the use of specific units, forms, and structures under specific conditions. Only then, it will be possible to successfully develop the grammatical skills for correcting student mistakes. This conceptual difficulty could be described as the primary difficulty. Different ways to overcome this difficulty in practice are as follows:

1. Isolation of the condition: To deduce the correct variant from this condition.

I'm sorry for all ill animals. – Before nouns, instead of “ill” we use ...

Nobody never helps me with my homework. – In an English sentence we can't use two negatives with ...

2. Removal of significant fragments from the description of the conditions: To restore these fragments.

If I don't have to work so much, I wouldn't be so tired. – To describe ___ conditions in the present and future, we use Past forms. (imaginary)

The next difficulty, closely related to the previous one, is related to the validity of the grammatical rule. Validity can be defined as truth, correspondence to reality, reliability, adequacy, correctness, or the absence of mistakes associated with the definition of assumptions. In the context of the study, it is related to describing the conditions for using grammar rules formulated by them. Thus, while correcting mistakes related to the sequence of tenses, it is useful to make the students’ aware of an additional reference point, for example, that the future was looked at from the past and not from the present: “*He promised he will (would) never forget me (and forgot me very soon)*”.

The validity of a rule is violated when a part of the regularity deviates from the rule and simplified for the sake of accessibility. For instance, the assertion like the use of two negatives is impossible in an English sentence and cannot be applied to sentences like *There are no students who know nothing at all; I'm not the only student who didn't pass that exam*, etc. To make the rule valid, it can be stated that one cannot negate the same thing (or the same action) twice. At the same time, it is important to remember about double negative conjunctions, in which each negative component corresponds to a separate component in the sentence (noun, verb, adverb, etc.), e.g., *neither smokes nor drinks too much, neither Mum nor Dad, neither here nor there*, etc. Not many techniques are required to handle this difficulty : “*Must*” is often used to talk about an obligation that depends on the person speaking or listening, “*Have to*” is generally used to talk about obligations from “outside”, “*Must*” describes your duty, “*Have to*” describes circumstances.

As a difficulty, one can also consider the interference of the students’ ideas of grammar rules developed as a result of using prescriptive grammar textbooks with the lack of familiarity with modern trends in communicative description and teaching grammar (Muldagaliyeva, 2014).

In a traditional (prescriptive) grammar textbook or grammar reference, the systematization of the material requires following a path from a grammatical phenomenon (form) to its meaning and patterns of usage. If the form is wrong, the conditions of usage need revision, as well as the realization of the grammatical form in the context. Most students (89% of the respondents) prefer prescriptive references like: “Adjectives describe nouns. They have the same form in the singular and plural. They go before nouns (e.g., *a small house*) but after the verbs *be, look, smell, sound, feel, taste, seem, appear, become,*

get, stay, etc. (e.g. *She is beautiful. They seem unhappy.*) There are opinion adjectives and fact adjectives. Opinion adjectives such as boring, exciting, etc. show what a person thinks of somebody or something. Fact adjectives such as tall, thin, new, etc. give us factual information about age, size, color, origin, material, etc.” (Evans, 2008). “Certain adjectives can be used with ‘the’ as nouns to refer to groups of people in general. These are: *elderly, middle-aged, old, young, blind, dead, deaf, disabled, living, sick, homeless, hungry, poor, rich, strong, unemployed, weak*, etc. e.g. *The young have a lot of energy.* (We refer to young people in general.) but: *The young people of our town are organizing a charity concert.* (We refer to a specific group of young people)” (Evans, 2008).

Moreover, one should not forget that modern grammar books tend to present grammar rules based on the semantics used in English communication. In this case, the presentation of the rule can be directed not only from the language unit to its semantics and conditions of usage, but also from the semantics and context of usage to the language unit or its form.

“You use *should* or *ought to* when you are trying to help someone by advising them to do something. *Carbon steel knives should be wiped clean after use. You should claim your pension 3-4 months before you retire. You ought to try a different approach.* If you feel that it is important or appropriate that something is said, you indicate that you are going to say it by using *should* or *ought to*. *I should explain at this point that there are two different sorts of microscope. It should also be said that I learned a great deal from the experience. I ought to stress that this was not a trial. Perhaps I ought to conclude with a slightly more light-hearted question.*” (Collins Cobuild English Grammar. Digital edition, 2012)

This type of rule explanation helps in mistake correction and facilitates in task implementation for students learning grammar rule to correct broken patterns and mistakes.

Next, if the context of usage, if it is described in a grammar book. Then there must be an indicator of its communicative intent (considering the structure of the sentence) or of the contribution of a unit at a lower level (a grammatical form, a modal verb, etc.) contributing to the communicative value of the statement.

Communicative intention is sometimes mentioned in grammar books without describing a broader context of its usage, and the rule formulation can be directed from the grammatical unit to the communicative intention and from the intention to the language unit. Explanations of this type may be accompanied by extended comments about the semantics of the grammatical unit and/or the speaker’s intention. Comments may also concern the style of speech and frequency of occurrence of the unit to express a given meaning and/or communicative intention. For instance, “For giving permission (*from communicative intention to language units*), *can* and *may*, but not *could*, are used; *may* is more formal/polite than *can*, and much less frequent: [in a clothes shop; A is the customer] A: *Can I try a shirt on as well?* B: *You can, sir, yes, (You could, sir, yes.)* (Carter, 2013)

Acquaintance with various rules in modern English grammar textbooks arouses such interest that sometimes it manifests itself in the students’ attempts to introduce communicative components into any rules. However, a reasonable balance can be maintained if basic information is introduced and the communicative components of the meaning of grammatical units are delineated.

Learning different ways of explaining a grammatical rule is one of the objectives of a professionally oriented course on mistake correction. Suppose it is necessary to present a rule after someone has made a mistake. In that case, the teacher may assume that the student is not aware of it or it does not seem significant to him (resulting in mistakes) The means of correction necessary under such conditions are shifted to the teacher’s explanation, thus becoming the communicative center. After explaining the conditions, the teacher can take a productive pause, allowing the student to name the necessary grammatical tool under the conditions described by the teacher. For example, “*The noun “hair” is uncountable and therefore is used with the verb in ... (singular) or The adjective “hard” is monosyllabic, and the comparative degree is formed with ... (suffix/ending “er”).*”

To use such information in the rule, the teacher needs to be familiar with modern grammar books that provide information with due consideration of the meaning of the grammatical unit, the communicative intention of the speaker, and the specific context of usage. However, the language of standard textbooks on the communicative intent and context of communication with rare exceptions is very complex. Consequently, two problems may arise simultaneously regarding: 1) Adapting the grammatical rule taking into account the learning conditions and the level of the students’ understanding 2) Quantizing

the grammatical rule with the submission of relevant in terms of correlating the rule with the nature of the error.

It takes time and a significant amount of training for any student to acquire the skill of highlighting necessary fragments of the rule. For example, not every clearly and concisely formulated rule can be considered relevant for the mistake like “*A numerical expression: dozen, hundred, thousand, million and billion does not add -s, and “of” is not used*” can be considered relevant for the mistake “*There were 5 thousands people there*”, because the student did not use a preposition. So, it seems possible to remove the extra “*and “of” is not used*” quantum from the rule. If the teachers considering a mistake in “*He works at a new film now*” tell their students that “*Present Progressive forms are used for actions taking place at the moment of speaking or for temporary actions that are going on around now, but not at the actual moment of speaking*”, one cannot fail to notice lack of information quantization and insufficient relevance of part of the rule to correct this error.

The rule mentions two possible conditions for the use of progressive forms. However, the relevant condition is “*for temporary actions*”. The information that these actions do not occur directly at the moment of speaking (not at the actual moment of speaking) is not related to the student mixing up the present tense forms. The information that Present Simple is used to indicate permanent, regular actions, and Present Progressive is required to indicate temporary actions would be more significant in this context. The first part would help clarify the student the form that he should choose, and the second would introduce or consolidate ideas about the conditions in which a different tense form is needed. It is up to the teacher to use both parts of the rule or make the rule more concise based on the ability of the students to grasp the concept. These problems can be partly resolved with the help of: 1) Exercises on learning rules from authentic textbooks of varying complexity, 2) Critical discussion of aspiring teachers’ presentations aimed at correcting student mistakes and presenting corresponding rules, 3) Role-plays where the students play the roles of students clarifying their doubts and teacher explaining the rule to clarify their doubts.

The last difficulty found in the study is the ability to make the rules easy to understand and remember . Junior students have no experience in working with school children and explaining grammatical rules to them. During the role plays, they displayed confusion followed by irritation when (according to the task in the role card) some students did not understand the teacher’s explanation or were unable to correct a mistake after it had been explained. The teacher also forgot to praise the students, which uplifted the general mood of the class but did not contribute in boosting the motivation level of both students and the teacher.

It is interesting to note that the successful handling of difficulties during the role-plays boosts confidence and motivation level of the students. Therefore, role-plays for learning how to correct mistakes help in many difficulties mentioned above.

Conclusion

The analysis of the difficulties faced by prospective English teachers in a professionally oriented English grammar course aimed at correcting student mistakes and explaining the rules shows that these problems may be due to: students' ignorance of the grammatical rule; their inability to match the student’s mistake with a certain grammatical rule; Inability to grasp knowledge from the English grammar textbooks, taking into account its relevance for error correction; Inability to assess the degree of accessibility of the rule for a particular group and modify it depending on their level; Inability to quantize grammatical information; and 6) second-year students have no experience in correcting schoolchildren’s mistakes and explaining grammatical rules to them.

By analysing the peculiarities of emerging difficulties and their causes, the study concludes that it is possible to gradually overcome these difficulties within the framework of a professionally oriented English grammar course, with the help of exercises on adaptation and quantizing various grammatical rules and role-plays where the teacher responds to the students’ doubts on grammatical rules and correct their mistakes.

The success of mistake correction largely depends on the motivational level of the prospective teachers’. Simulation based activities like role plays can facilitate boosting students' motivation level and skill acquisition.

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