



The Critical Analysis Of Grammar Activities In Books By Betty S. Azar And Its Importance

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ABSTRACT

Designing a helpful textbook requires much time and a lot of knowledge from the author. This article gives the results of critical analysis of several grammar activities in the book “Understanding and Using English Grammar” written by Betty S. Azar and, at the same time, its importance in teaching English.

KEYWORDS

Product, process, skill-based activities, infinitive forms, focusing on form and meaning, pre-task, while-task, post-task stage, noticing, structuring, self-discovery, context-gap activities.

INTRODUCTION

To do an analysis of grammar activities, it was decided to extract activities from one book in order to make the work more coherent and cohesive. All the activities have been taken from the book named “Understanding and Using English Grammar” written by Azar (2017). The target audience of this book ranges from B2 to C1 level learners, and this book is

used to teach General English. Besides, all the selected activities (Product, Process and Skill) aim at teaching past simple and past continuous tense which means they are taken from the same unit and linked to one another in both teaching and analysis process.

Generally, according to Batstone (1994) there are three perspectives on teaching grammar namely product, process and skill (language learning), and they are interrelated with each other in one lesson. It means that after or before the explanation, depending whether the method is deductive or inductive, product activities come first at the beginning of a particular grammar unit; then, it is followed with process and skill-based activities.

THE MAIN PART

Talking about the first product-based activity, it follows an explicit grammar explanation about Past simple and past continuous tense making obvious that, at the beginning,

deductive method is used to introduce the topic to learners. To be more specific, in this activity, what is demanded from students is to complete sentences using the correct form of past simple tense. Here, overall seven sentences are given and infinitive forms of verbs are provided in brackets. For example,

In the second product-based activity, learners are given an exact situation as well as relevant sentence examples; they are expected to work in pairs and make up dialogues using the structure given in those examples. For instance,

Situation: You just came back from a vacation in Greece. Your friend is asking you questions.

Examples: Fly back last night?

Partner A: Did you fly back last night?

Partner B: Yes, I flew back last night.

*Both examples have been extracted from Exercises #22 & 23 from the book “Understanding and using English grammar” by Azar (2017), p 13 .

Anders (order) _____ printer ink online last Monday.

If these two activities are to be analyzed, there are several similarities and differences between them in terms of various grammatical points, such as focusing on form and meaning, noticing, structuring and self-discovery. First of all, it should be mentioned that the two product-based activities focus on both form and meaning. The reason for this is

that, in these activities, students are not taught only the rules of past simple tense but also the usage of this tense in sentence level. Next, it can be said that there are obvious differences between these two activities when it comes to self-discovery. Chan (2010) says that discovery method is used when grammar units are not taught explicitly, but rather explained with

context examples. As the first activity precedes an explanation about past simple, students have nearly no opportunity to discover used grammar in the activity; they are simply asked to fill in the gaps with correct verb forms of past simple tense. However, this changes when it comes to the second activity; here, the learner is not given any grammar rule to do the task, but sentence examples for students to understand what to use in the activity so that they can discover form and meaning on their own, not with teacher or textbook instruction/explanation.

The following point to discuss is the type of noticing in these two activities, and it is somehow similar to the comparison of self-discovery method here. Lewis (2000) describes noticing strategy as teacher's directing students' attention to particular grammar or lexical units in teaching process. Besides, Batstone (1994) classifies two types of noticing namely noticing for the learner and noticing by the learner. More precisely, noticing for the learner happens when deductive approach is used to explain the topic, and noticing by the learner means guiding language learners to understanding that topic on their own giving implicit hints or examples in context. From these definitions, it can surely be pointed out that, the first activity relates to the former type of noticing since it follows explicit information about past simple verb forms while the second activity is the latter type of noticing because there learners firstly read examples, discover declarative and interrogative forms of past simple, then uses this knowledge in further practice.

Moreover, the type of structuring is the same (structuring by the learner) in these grammar-as-product activities: according to Batstone (1994), in structuring by the learner activities,

students themselves should think what forms to use in order to make language production more clear and meaningful. This characteristic of structuring activities can easily be observed in both activities because language learners should decide what past simple form verbs to use or how to form declarative and interrogative sentences using past simple tense. Petrovitz (1997) asserts that lack of contextualization in grammar activities is the main drawback of traditional grammar teaching; however, this pitfall is not noticed in the selected activities. The advantage of the two product-based activities is that both of them are contextualized: An online order is a general context for activity 1 (Looking at grammar), and coming back from a holiday is considered as a context for the second activity (Let's talk). Nevertheless, it would be better to use inductive method/implicit teaching rather than a deductive explanation of grammar unit in activity 1. Instead, learners must be given more opportunities to do self-discovery of grammar and lexical units in this activity (Looking at grammar) so that learners get more engaged and attentive during grammar classes.

Batstone (1994) mentions that process teaching makes learners to be more engaged and active in language learning process; in this stage of the lesson, learners begin using the knowledge, gained through product-based activities, to communicate with others. The process-based activity consists of three mini activities in itself: in the 1st sub-activity (pre-task stage), students work with reading text and finding past simple verbs in the text, and this is again product-based activity. They are followed by two types of sub grammar-as-process activities to write a journal entry about the experience in a class on a first day of school

(while task stage) and, in the second part (post task stage), students are to edit their works based on the criteria related to the usage of past tenses.

*Example hints have been retrieved from the 2nd part of process activity in exercise #38 attached in appendices form.

Edit your writing. Check for the following:

- Use of past progressive for an activity in progress in the past.

Write a journal entry about your experience in a class on your first day of school.

*Example hints have been adopted from the 3rd part of process activity in exercise #38 attached in appendices form.

In these process activities, unlike product ones, student are allowed to express their knowledge and opinions freely. Regulating time pressure is the first point to highlight to analyze these process activities. Crookes (1989) states that giving students more time to prepare for the task helps them use wider range of vocabulary and grammar in their language production. Both activities have this characteristic of process activities; in these activities, students are given time to write their entry and reedit it afterwards. Batstone (1994) emphasizes the benefit of this time saying this allocated time gives learners planning time to use their knowledge. Ensuring the regulation of topic and familiarity is the next thing to be discussed. Batstone (1994) identifies two strategies to regulate topic and familiarity in process teaching such as giving learners topics familiar from their personal experiences or topic covered in previous classes. It is visible that, in these process activities, the first method is used to write an entry about the first day at school. In process teaching activities,

language learning is achieved through context-gap activities which means learners ought to use their background knowledge to express themselves. Additionally, the regulation of language use is provided in both process activities since students are expected to write a journal entry using past tenses and edit their work following the given criteria. Long (1989) says that process teaching is very advantageous for the reason of leading students to exceed their limits to use language skills in communication. This is very appropriate in these process activities as well; the reason for this is that here students not only learn the rules of past tenses or its usage in sentence level, but apply both information-gap and context-gap into practice while writing the assigned task.

After completing product and process stages, students reach communicative level of language use; in this stage, they have all necessary background knowledge and become independent learners. In the first grammar as a skill activity language learners are required to speak about their first day at school which makes the activity linked to previous language as a process activity. In the second activity,

students should analyze sentences and correct mistakes related to the usage of present and past simple tenses. Here, the 1st speaking activity is a type of grammaticization activities. The reason for this is that, from Batstone's (1994) point of view, students should formulate both form and meaning even though they are not explicitly instructed to use particular grammar unit here. In this activity, the main focus is to produce language fluently and paying attention to the application of past tenses at the same time.

The second language as a skill activity related to the reflection stage of language teaching. Batstone (1994) asserts that reflection stage helps learners show their knowledge critically comparing what is said and what should have been said. In this activity, they are not given any explanation or instruction about using certain grammar units; however, it is student's responsibility to apply his knowledge into practice to correct mistakes in analysis process.

CONCLUSION

Rhalmi (2019) says that grammar skills is very important while completing reading and listening activities since learners are mostly required to use bottom-up processing or top-down processing skills to accomplish these tasks. One can completely agree with the author, because, in this situation, they need to know grammar at intermediate level at least to do high-level tasks. The advantages of these two activities have been highlighted above

alongside its characteristics, but there are some drawbacks of these language-as-a-skill activities to be considered. For example, here, learner may shift his attention from accuracy to fluency and forget about correct usage of grammar in speech; it may happen because of stress or regulation of time in the process of speaking. As a solution, Batstone (1994) emphasizes the benefits of teacher feedback to students: after students finish speaking or writing, they should be given corrective feedback as a formative assessment.

The reason for choosing to analyze activities related to this grammar unit (Past simple and past continuous) is that teachers may have witnessed learner difficulties to differentiate past simple, past continuous and used to. Cakir (2011) says that in order to solve such problems, remedial teaching is very useful. Nevertheless, I think that it is high time to change deductive methods to inductive ones in all language classrooms. What's important here is to engage learners and give them opportunities to change input to output. Besides, based on Chan's (2010) viewpoint, in grammar activities, more attention should be given to self-discovery activities as they help learners to be more attentive and remember the usage of grammar units for a long time. Furthermore, as Batstone (1994) mentions more time should be given for preparation so as to lower stress level among students and get quality language production.

APPENDICES

EXERCISE 22 ▶ Looking at grammar. (Chart 1-4)

Complete the sentences with the correct simple past form of the verb.

An Online Order

- Anders (*order*) _____ printer ink online last Monday.
- The next morning he (*realize*) _____ he (*need*) _____ colored ink too.
- He (*try*) _____ to call the company to add more, but no one (*answer*) _____, and there (*be*) _____ no voicemail.
- Anders (*worry*) _____ that the website (*be*) _____ fake.
- He (*email*) _____ the company and (*explain*) _____ his situation.
- The manager (*respond*) _____ a few hours later and (*fix*) _____ the order quickly.
- Anders (*relax*) _____ when he (*receive*) _____ a confirmation email from the company.

EXERCISE 23 ▶ Let's talk: pairwork. (Chart 1-4)

Take turns asking and answering questions. You can answer *yes* or *no*.

SITUATION: You just came back from a vacation in Greece. Your friend is asking you questions.

Examples: fly back last night?

PARTNER A: Did you fly back last night?

PARTNER B: Yes, I flew back last night.

happy to see your cousins?

PARTNER A: Were you happy to see your cousins?

PARTNER B: Yes, I was happy to see my cousins.



PARTNER A: (<i>book open</i>) PARTNER B: (<i>book closed</i>)	PARTNER A: (<i>book closed</i>) PARTNER B: (<i>book open</i>)
1. have a great trip?	8. speak a little Greek?
2. come back feeling rested?	9. eat in typical Greek restaurants?
3. meet all your cousins?	10. lie on the beach?
4. hang out with* local people?	11. buy some Greek sandals?
5. do a lot of tourist activities?	12. bring me a souvenir?
6. excited to be there?	13. take a lot of photos?
7. spend time in museums?	14. sad to leave Greece?

**hang out with* = spend time with

*Activities for grammar as a **product** Azar, B.S (2017). Understanding and using English grammar. 5th edition. Pearson, p 13.

EXERCISE 38 ▶ Reading and writing. (Chapter 1)

Part I. Read the journal entry. Underline the 23 past tense verbs.

A Hopeful Beginning

Today was my first day at the university, and I was late for class. I didn't remember the name of the building and went to the wrong one. After about ten minutes of confusion, I finally found the right class and walked in somewhat embarrassed. A girl with a friendly smile moved her books off the chair next to her. I sat down. The professor was going over the syllabus. I didn't have a copy, but I didn't want to interrupt him. The girl next to me shared hers. The course looked interesting but difficult. I wondered if all my classes had this much work. Then the teacher announced study groups. My new friend and I were in the same group. She introduced herself during the break, and I felt very comfortable when I spoke with her. Maybe the class is going to be OK after all.

Do you know these words?

- somewhat
- embarrassed
- syllabus
- interrupt

Part II. Write a journal entry about your experience in a class on your first day of school.

1. Begin with *It was my first day at the university / in high school / in English class / etc.*
2. What was the teacher doing when you walked in? What were other students doing?
3. Did you notice anyone or anything special?
4. How did you feel?
5. What were your first impressions about the class and what were your thoughts later?

WRITING TIP

It is important to consider your first piece of writing a draft, not your finished copy. When you begin to write, jot down ideas first and then sentences. As you write your paragraph, you can always change, reorder, or delete ideas. After you finish the paragraph, edit it carefully. Correct any errors in your next draft. Then read it again and make additional changes or rewrite if necessary. You might need to do this a few more times. It may sound like a long process, but your writing will be much better.

Part III. Edit your writing. Check for the following:

1. indented paragraph
2. use of the simple past for an activity that began and ended at a particular time in the past
3. use of the past progressive for an activity in progress in the past
4. correct spelling (use a dictionary or spell-check)

*Activities for grammar as a **process** (Part II and Part III) Azar, B.S (2017). Understanding and using English grammar. 5th edition. Pearson, p 23.

Fluency Practice. Work with a partner. Take three minutes to tell your partner about your experience on the first day of school. Then describe your experience to another student in two minutes. Finally, take one minute to describe your experience to a third student. Did the final time you spoke feel more comfortable and easier than the first time?

EXERCISE 37 ▶ Check your knowledge. (Chapter 1 Review)

Correct the errors.

1. Breakfast is an important meal. I'm always eat a big breakfast.
2. While I was working in my office yesterday, my cousin stops by to visit me.
3. Yuki staided home because she caught a bad cold.
4. My brother is looks like our father, but I am resembling my mother.
5. Jun, are you listen to me? I am talk to you!
6. While I was surfing the Internet yesterday, I was finding a really interesting website.
7. Did you spoke English before you were come here?
8. I am not agree with your opinion.
9. My roommate usually watch television, listen to music, or going out in the evening.
10. Right now Sally in the kitchen eating breakfast.
11. While I'm driving home last night, I hearded a strange noise in the engine.
12. Why you talking about me? I'm not appreciate that.
13. Yesterday, while I was sitting at my computer, Shelley was suddenly coming into the room.
I wasn't knowing she was there. I was concentrate hard on my work. When she suddenly speak, I am jump. She startle me.

*Activities for grammar as a **skill** have been extracted from Azar, B.S (2017). Understanding and using English grammar. 5th edition. Pearson, pp 22-23.

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