Grammar in the Syllabus: Grammar learning activities in textbooks assigned for the first year speaking and listening course at a Japanese University.

シラバスにおける文法：ある日本の大学の1回生向けスピーキング／
リスニング講座用指定教科書における文法学習アクティビティ

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　本研究では、教科書分析の手法により、ある日本の大学の1回生向け英語リスニング／スピーキング講座のシラバスにおける文法要素を調査した。初級、中級、上級向けの教科書の文法アクティビティについて、まず、文法を学ぶアクティビティを識別し、記号化体系によりコード化した。教えられる文法項目、学習者が行うことになっている課題の種別、文法を教える上での焦点、アクティビティが対話を含んでいるか、また、アクティビティの種別を表すのによく使われる用語について調査した。注目すべき発見としては、構文の構成ルールに細かく焦点を当てる傾向がある、ごく少数の教科書にしか、文法を学習するアクティビティが含まれていなかった。

Introduction

The explicit teaching of grammar and its role in the curriculum has long been a controversial issue in language education. Its popularity has waxed and waned with educational fashion. In his introduction to the book *Grammar and the Language Teacher,* Alan Tonkyn wrote about a revival in the popularity of grammar teaching, pointing to the newspaper headline "Grammar is back!" to illustrate this (Bygate, Tonkyn, & Williams, 1994).

It is certainly true that the pendulum has swung back towards explicit grammar instruction amongst researchers. Schmidt (1990) has argued that noticing the features of a grammar item must precede its acquisition, while others (see Ellis, 1993) have even tried to reinstate the structural syllabus, albeit one that makes use of intake facilitation and consciousness raising tasks that do not aim at total mastery of a structure. Most recent research has provided support for the idea of at least a weak interface view, that explicit grammar instruction is beneficial to students, even if it does not lead to immediate acquisition of the feature (Norris &

Ortega, 2008; Spada & Tomita, 2010).

While the usefulness of grammar teaching has received plenty of attention from SLA researchers there has been far less research into the role that grammar instruction is presently playing in educational institutions. Without this kind of research, it is difficult to tell whether grammar is back or even whether it ever went away in the first place. This study seeks to investigate what elements of grammar are being taught and also how they are being taught.

The present study examines the grammar element of the first year speaking and listening course at a large Japanese private university. The university's English program mentions five competencies that it aims to develop; socio-personal competence, cognitive academic competence, communication competence, linguistic competence and mediation competence. Grammar instruction could be expected to fall under the category of linguistic competency. However, this is what Nunan called the curriculum as "should be" (Nunan, 2017). The actual curriculum confronts the teacher as a choice of one of the books on the lists of books compiled by the text-book committee and deemed appropriate for different levels. The course, as completed by students depends on the teacher's choice of text-book and how it is used and adapted by the teacher.

An investigation of the grammar elements included in the course needs to start with tasks included in the textbooks. The study used text-book analysis (Littlejohn, 1998) to examine the grammar content of the books available to teachers at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. It examined tasks included in the books that aim to develop the students understanding and control of the English grammar.

Method

The researchers performed textbook-analysis to determine the nature of grammar instruction in English classes. The study adopted a broad-definition of grammar, including not just syntax, but tasks aimed at promoting the use and accuracy of semi-lexical closed-class words such as pronouns, prepositions and determiners. Grammar was regarded as a unity of structure and its signification.

Materials

The survey examined all thirty-four of the texts on the university's textbook list for the English 1 course. This is a required first-year English course. All three levels of classes were

examined, beginner (11), intermediate (16) and advanced (7). Details for individual textbooks can be found in Appendix A.

Procedure

The researchers examined the textbooks and identified grammar learning activities. Next, the researchers analyzed the grammar activities and coded them according to their target grammar and task type. Coding will be explained further in the next section. The number of pages in the different texts was also noted to enable the calculation of rough indices of the "density" of the grammar activities in the textbooks.

Coding

Grammar sections were broken down into individual activities as described in Littlejohn (1998). If a task required a different activity from students, it was considered to be a separate task, even if it was part of a longer activity chain in the text. As well as identifying the target grammar three main aspects of the activity were examined. These were task, focus and interaction.

Task was defined as the type of activity that the students were required to perform. The activity could be coded as reception, production or non-production. Reception required no student activity other than reading or listening to examples of the grammar or a grammar explanation. A grammar explanation in L1 or L2 would be an example of this kind of activity. On the other hand, production activities required the student to produce grammaticalized utterances or written material in English. Production activities were further divided into spoken and written production. Either of which could be classified as closed (only one correct response permitted) or open, where the learner has the freedom to respond in different ways. Non-production activities were activities that required some response from students short of grammaticalized production. Examples could be underlining instances of present tense in a text or selecting the correct response from a list of choices.

The second aspect of the activities examined by the researchers was the focus of the grammar activity. An activity could focus purely on the "Form" of the grammar item (e.g. how to form a particular verb-tense or basic rules about when it can and can't be used). Alternatively, it could focus on "Form, Function", what speech acts you can use the structure or structures to perform (e.g. using modals for polite requests). Finally, the term "Form, Notional" was used to classify activities that attempt to give the learner an understanding of the

abstract meaning of the grammatical structure. (e.g. an interpretation task aimed at showing a learner that progressive aspect signifies an action/process that has started but has not yet finished at a point in time). A further distinction was also made between "Form, Notional" activities that examine a single structure and those which compare the meaning of two different structures, "Form, Notional" (comparison).

The last aspect of the activities examined was interaction. This category simply looks at whether the students work with other students on the activity. The learner can be working alone or working with others in pairs or groups.

In addition to these three aspects the researchers also noted the common terms used to describe the activity in the language teaching literature (e.g. consciousness raising task, gap-fill, grammar practice activity). However, there was no attempt made to create a strict definition of these activities or a full typology. However, these descriptions are useful for providing additional information on activity types and details are provided in Appendix C below.

After the data was coded and compiled, a rough index of the "density" of grammar activities was obtained by dividing the number of activities by the number of pages. This was done to allow for a comparison of density of grammar activities at different levels, and in different texts. However, this provides only a very approximate comparison, as page size, type-size and formatting, differ between different texts.

Results

Of a total of 34 textbooks at advanced, intermediate, and beginner levels, 21 contain no substantial grammar element, defined as five or less grammar activities. To be more specific, four of seven advanced level, twelve of sixteen intermediate level, and five of eleven beginner level textbooks have five or under grammar learning activities. (See table 1 below)

Table 1.
Texts, activity and pages

Level	Text-books	Texts without grammar element	Total pages	Grammar activities	Activities/total pages
Beginner	11	5	1129	236	0.21
Intermediate	16	12	1726	155	0.09
Advanced	7	4	1154	151	0.13
Total	34	51	4009	542	0.14

The table also indicates that the density of grammar activities is highest in the beginner level

books and lowest in the textbooks on the intermediate level list.

Target grammar item lists for advanced, intermediate and beginner levels are shown in Appendix B. As can be seen most activities at the beginner and intermediate level focus on simple past and present verb tenses and progressive aspect, plus the auxiliary verb systems, comparative adjectives and other basic items of English Grammar that the students would already have been exposed to at junior high school level. Only the advanced texts appear to have substantially more variation and depart from the basics. However, there are important differences in the type of activities that are preferred at different levels.

Table 2 below shows the counts for the different type of activities the learners are expected to perform. As can be seen from the table the bulk of activities at all levels involve no actual production of the grammar (Reception or Non-Production activities). These types of activities make up 59% of the activities overall. Interestingly the beginner texts have the lowest level, because of a relatively high percentage of closed written production activities.

Table 2
Task Type by activity level

Level	Recep.	Non Prod.	Written Prod. C.	Written Prod. O	Spoken Prod. C.	Spoken Prod. O.	Total
Beg.	49	73	95	5	6	8	236
Inter.	39	64	13	14	8	17	155
Adv.	41	52	10	15	8	25	151
Total	129	189	118	34	22	50	542

There are more examples of an increase in spoken production activities and more use of open ended activities with textbooks as the level of the textbooks increases. This can be seen by the chart below. It should be noted that the course aims to develop speaking and listening skills, so there is a mismatch between this course aim and the manner in which students are
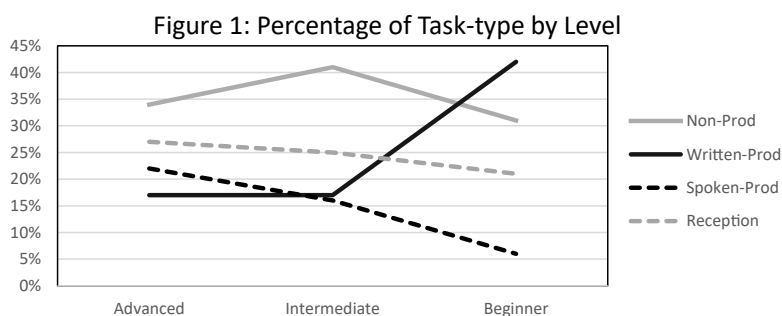

Figure 1: Percentage of Task-type by Level

Figure 1: Graph of the percentage of each task type for different levels.

expected to produce the grammar.

Table 3 below shows the focus of the grammar activity. The figures show that the focus on form alone is overwhelming, making up nearly 75% of the total activities. It is nearly 95% of the total activities at beginner level. With intermediate having the lowest percentage of activities focusing on form (57%).

Table 3
Focus of activity by level

Level	Form	Form, Function	Form, Not. (comp)	Form/Not.	Total
Beginner	222	6	6	2	236
Intermediate	89	41	9	2	155
Advanced	92	50	17	6	152
Total	403	97	32	10	542

Activities focusing on form/function mapping were reasonably common at both intermediate and advanced levels. The intermediate level had the highest percentage of this kind of activity (35%). Examples of activities focusing on the notional meaning of the structure or comparison of the meaning of structures were relatively rare, occurring most frequently at the advanced level.

Table 4 shows the type of interaction required of students in order to complete the task. As can be seen a large majority of the grammar learning activities, 420 out of 542 (77%) involved no interaction. As the figures show pair, and group work activities were more common in the higher-level texts. Group or pair work made up 39% of activities in advanced compared to only 7% at beginner level texts. It should be noted however that it is relatively easy for teachers to adapt by adding an interactive element to the activities.

Table 4
Types of interaction required by level

Level	None	Pair	Group	Total
Beginner	220	12	4	236
Intermediate	108	41	6	155
Advanced	92	50	9	152
Total	420	103	19	542

Discussion

It is impossible to draw general conclusions about grammar teaching in higher education or even higher education in Japan. This is a study of a single course at one university. Far more empirical research would be needed before we could draw broader conclusions. A further caveat needs to be added that this research throws light upon the choices open to teachers but not the course as actually experienced by students.

Teachers do adapt textbooks and add their own materials to supplement them. They may provide grammar instruction to students in the form of corrective feedback, an example of Long's focus on form, rather than the focus on forms (Long, 1991) that this study primarily examines. In order to get a more complete picture, this research needs to be supplemented by an examination of which books were chosen by teachers and whether they actually did supplement the texts with additional grammar learning activities as well as their general attitude towards grammar instruction. It would also be useful to have access to the criteria used by faculty in choosing the texts.

In addition to the speaking course examined in this study, students also take a reading and writing course. The present study did not examine the grammar content of the books on the reading and writing course. This course is supplemented by online grammar learning activities, with students receiving 10% of their grade for completion rates of activities on this part of the course. It's possible that the present study underestimates the amount of grammar instruction students experience at the university. A more complete study would look at both courses and ideally the compulsory second year courses at the university too. It would be a relatively easy to extend the present research by conducting a similar analysis of the textbooks for the reading and writing courses.

On the other hand, the textbooks surveyed in this study, in the experience of the authors, are a fairly typical set of texts available for use by teachers at Japanese universities. While the beginner level texts tend to include a number of texts produced by Japanese publishers, containing L1 explanations of grammar and other items, probably reflecting the larger number of Japanese faculty teaching at this level, the intermediate and advanced level texts tend to be those promoted by international ELT publishing companies aiming at university level students.

A number of observations arising from this study are worth noting. Firstly, despite considerable agreement amongst researchers that the explicit teaching of grammar does lead to faster acquisition of structures (see introduction) it is only a minority of the texts that have explicit grammar teaching content. Most of the textbooks with grammar learning activities are orga-

nized around thematic units with an item of grammar selected from theme-based texts being examined in more detail. In some of the textbooks there is an attempt to sequence the activities either on a scale based on perceived difficulty or frequency of the item, but even in these cases a grammatical syllabus does not appear to be the main organizing principle of the texts.

At least in the intermediate and advanced level textbooks the activity sequences appear to follow a standard presentation, practice, production paradigm (PPP). These start with a reception activity such as a grammar explanation in L1 or L2 or even simple examples of the structure, move through non-production activities and closed production activities and end with more open-ended written or spoken production. This approach to instruction has enjoyed popularity and criticism over the years and has long been the staple of ELT textbooks and is presently enjoying a revival (Anderson, 2017). The criticism of this approach has been that while it may be appropriate for structures that can be explained in terms of simple rules or that are not limited by developmental constraints, it cannot be universally applied. In particular it is the idea that production in the form of practice of correct forms necessarily leads to acquisition that has been criticized (Ellis, 1994).

The text book analysis did show some evidence of the types of approaches that have been proposed as alternatives to practice and the PPP model, such as consciousness raising and interpretation activities that involve: "(1) noticing the presence of a specific feature in the input and (2) comprehending the meaning of the feature." (Ellis, 1994, p. 645) However, these types of activities were relatively rare and limited to a small number of texts, probably indicating that publishers are not about to abandon PPP anytime soon.

A final point should probably be made about the results for "focus". It was pointed out in the results section that there were relatively few examples of the "notional" category, examining the semantic meaning (signification) of the grammar structure. The reasons for this are beyond the scope of this paper and are probably to be found in the histories of both linguistic accounts of grammar and the history of language teaching as well as the fact that many of the big publishers are publishing texts for the world market, and not for individual countries.

It should be borne in mind that if the grammars of the L1 and L2 are relatively similar then much of the grammar can be taught without referring to the meaning of the structure. To give an example, by telling students that "this is how the past tense is formed in …. (L2)" While there will be differences in usage of the past tense, this can probably be dealt with by usage examples and "rules" on when and when not to use the tense. If necessary these can be developed further with some activities at the advanced level that examine other aspects of the semantics of the simple past tense, for example its use in English to show remoteness as well

as past time.

The problem is when we come to the learning of languages that have very different systems of grammar to English, Japanese being a good example. Many areas of English grammar that Japanese students find problematic, such as the English noun phrase, including articles/determiners, the definite/indefinite distinction, number in English nouns etc. cannot be easily dealt with in this way. There is, at the very least, an argument for more grammar learning activities that examine the semantics of the grammar item.

Because this kind of material is of necessity going to be language specific it is probably not going to be provided by the major ELT publishers. It is disappointing the books developed by Japanese publishers that were examined did not include much of this kind of grammar learning activity either. The only alternative that would appear to be open to teachers would be to supplement the texts, where appropriate, with their own interpretation activities aimed at developing an awareness of semantics of the structure.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Summary Details of Textbooks Analyzed

Text-book	Level	Pages	No. Grammar Activities	Grammar Activity/ Pages	% No production activities	% Written production activities	% Spoken production activities	Focus: Form %	Interaction: None %
Academic Encounters 1 Listening and Speaking	Beg.	182	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
English First, Starter	Beg.	91	47	0.516	100	0	0	100	100
English Listening and Speaking Patterns 2	Beg.	90	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Enjoy Your Trip	Beg.	67	15	0.224	100	0	0	87	100
Functional English for Communication	Beg.	97	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Globe Trotters	Beg.	111	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Hello, New York	Beg.	94	44	0.468	66	34	0	100	100
Let's Read Aloud and Learn English	Beg.	112	58	0.518	7	93	0	100	100
Let's Talk with Friends Around the World!	Beg.	90	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Smart Choice Level1	Beg.	137	49	0.358	37	45	18	100	78
Time Zone Combo Combo Split 2B (Text Only)	Beg.	64	23	0.359	39	39	22	48	78
Active Skills for Communication 1	Int.	128	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Communicate in English with Devil Wears Prada	Int.	139	24	0.173	100	0	0	75	100
Contemporary Topics Introductory	Int.	102	2	0.020	0	100	0	100	0
Four Weddings and a Funeral総合英語教材	Int.	134	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Global Activator	Int.	91	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Impact Issues 2	Int.	95	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Inspire 2	Int.	128	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
NorthStar Listening and Speaking Level 2	Int.	215	29	0.135	62	7	31	40	59

Grammar in the Syllabus（Cole・Huang）

Text-book	Level	Pages	No. Grammar Activities	Grammar Activity/ Pages	% No production activities	% Written production activities	% Spoken production activities	Focus: Form %	Interaction: None %
Notting Hill映画総合教材	Int.	126	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Pathways Listening Speaking and Critical Thinking Foundations	Int.	178	53	0.298	53	28	19	74	58
Pros and Cons	Int.	91	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Q Skills for Success Level 1:	Int.	194	44	0.227	68	18	14	36	75
Welcome to BBC on DVD ドキュメンタリーの世界へようこそ	Int.	92	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
What's on Japan 9	Int.	90	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
World Wide English On DVD Volume 1 Revised Edition	Int.	91	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
映像で学ぶABCニュースの英語18	Int.	99	3	0.030	100	0	0	100	100
Contemporary topics 1	Adv.	134	5	0.037	20	80	0	100	0
Global Connections	Adv.	135	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Lecture Ready 2	Adv.	132	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Pathways 3	Adv.	226	69	0.305	58	13	29	86	58
Q Skills for success: Level 3.	Adv.	202	33	0.163	57	24	18	30	55
Real Listening & Speaking 3	Adv.	99	0	0.000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Unlock 3 Listening & Speaking	Adv.	222	44	0.198	75	9	16	41	77

Appendix B: Grammar Items by Text Level

Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Adjectives and adverbs	Adjectives	Adjective clauses
Adverbs of Frequency	Auxiliary verbs	Adjectives with enough, not enough, and too
Auxiliary verbs	Because	
Be	Because and so	Auxiliary verbs do, be, have
Be like/look like	Causative verbs	Changing time expressions in reported speech
Can/Can't	Comparatives	
Comparatives	Conjunctions 'and' & 'but'	Comparative and superlative
Comparatives with adjectives	Descriptive adjectives	Comparatives with adjectives
Conjunctions	Future time (going to)	Comparatives; The -er, the -er
Countable and uncountable nouns	General word order	Conditional
Future time	Gerund	Dependent prepositions
Future time (going to)	Gerunds as subjects or objects	Enough, not enough, and too + nouns
Gerund	Imperative of Be + adjective	Future time
Have someone do	Like to, want to, need to	Future time with adverb clauses
Have, has to v must	Modals for advice and necessity	General word order
Imperatives	Modals for politeness	Gerunds and infinitives as the objects of verbs
Infinitives	Modals for possibility	
Interrogatives	Participles	Imperatives (for persuasion)
Modals	Passive	Indefinite pronouns
Much, Many, Lots of	Past (irregular)	Indefinite pronouns and pronoun usage
Negatives and questions	Past perfect	Indirect questions
No v Not	Past perfect	Making comparisons with as ... as
Passive	Past simple	Modals for advice
Past progressive and past simple	Past simple v simple present to be	Modals for opinions
Past tense	Past simple, regular and irregular verbs	Modals obligations & suggestions
Past tense (be)	Past tense	Modals that express attitude
Past tense (regular verbs)	Past tense questions	Negative questions
Prepositions	Present Continuous	Passive
Present and past	Present Continuous (Questions)	Past perfect
Present Continuous	Present perfect	Past simple and present perfect
Present Perfect	Present simple	Past tense (regular v irregular)
Present perfect verb, present progressive Prepositional of place	Present simple questions	Phrases with that
	Present simple statements	Prefer and rather
Present simple	Present simple v Simple past	Quantifiers with count/non-count
Present tense (be)	Present simple verbs in narratives	Quantifiers with specific and general nouns
Present tense (have)	Present simple, past simple	Real conditionals
Present tense (regular verbs)	Relative pronouns	Relative clauses
Progressive Aspect	Should/shouldn't, It's + adjective + infinitive	Reported speech
Pronouns	So and such with adjectives	Sentence types - declarative, interrogatory, imperative, and exclamatory
Questions with be	Subjunctive mood	
Shall	The simple present	Separable and inseparable phrasal verbs
Should	There is/There are/There were/There was	So + adjective + that
Should + give advice	Used to	Tag questions
Some and any	Various	The past perfect tense
Statements with be	Wh. Questions	The past unreal conditional
There is /are (questions)	Wh. questions simple present	The simple past vs. the present perfect
There is /are some/any	Will	The simple past with the past continuous tense
There is/There are	Will/going to	
Verb to be		Used to + verb vs. be used to + noun
Verbs		Using the past continuous tense
Wh. Questions		
Would like v want		

Appendix C: **Activity Types (Common Terms) by Level**

Beginner		Intermediate		Advanced	
Activity Type	No.	Activity Type	No.	Activity Type	No.
Choice question	45	Choice question	11	Choice question	4
Gap-fill	22	Consciousness raising	2	Consciousness raising	8
Gap-fill (options)	6	Gap-fill (no options)	13	Correction of text	1
Grammar explanation (L1)	32	Gap-fill (options)	17	Gap-fill (no options)	7
Grammar explanation (L2)	17	Grammar explanation (L1)	15	Gap-fill (options)	12
Grammar practice	11	Grammar explanation (L2)	26	Grammar explanation (L2)	38
Matching	19	Grammar practice	29	Grammar practice	40
Ordering	28	Information exchange	1	Grammar practice + read aloud	3
Prompt-response	1	Matching (text to text)	4	Matching (text picture)	1
Question/answer	1	Noticing	13	Matching (text to text)	1
Read aloud	1	Ordering	9	Noticing	15
Reading, written sentences	1	Other	1	Noticing, Read aloud	1
Rewrite (correction)	1	Other (memorizing)	1	Ordering	4
Sentence completion (ordering)	19	Production from prompts	2	Other (True for you transformation)	1
Sentence construction	1	Read aloud	6	grammaticalize from prompts	1
Sentence writing	1	Read conversation	1	transformation of text)	2
Transformation	12	Sentence completion	2	Read aloud	7
Translation	15	Write from prompt	1	Sentence completion	6
True or False Question	1	Writing from visual prompt	1		
sentence writing from prompt	2				