ACTIVE GRAMMAR
A blended learning case study in Business English grammar

Diane Ruppert

Development Project Report
March 2008

JYVÄSKYLÄ UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
Teacher Education College

JYVÄSKYLÄ UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

DESCRIPTION

Date

_____

Abstract

The subject of this paper is to examine a blended learning approach to English grammar in an in-company Business English course The pedagogical aim of this report was to find an approach to Business English grammar that would be both communicative and constructive. This study looked at such questions as: How to move ahead with oral communication skills during the contact lessons when the students need to review grammar principles? How to meet the needs of various levels of students and offer instruction in the vast field of English grammar? How to contextualize grammar exercises to meet the professional vocabulary needs of IT professionals?

The theoretical background of this paper looks at a brief history of grammar teaching and defines blended learning. The case study looks at 3 groups who were involved in a new way of studying business grammar. They participated in a 7-step approach that involved writing, peer review, needs definition and online search/exercices. The research material consisted of written feedback forms.

The results of the study showed that the majority of the students reacted favorably to this form of grammar study. They saw it as a new approach where the student had to take the initiative and was able to customize her/his studies. Areas to be improved involved dedicating more time to grammar study, locating more Finnish language resources, streamlining the grammar site list and adding printed material.

Miscellaneous

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

During my years as a freelance teacher in Finland, I have had the privilege of working with a wide variety of adults in educational institutions and workplaces. It has been very rewarding to apply my teaching experience to the theoretical models offered during the pedagogical studies at the Jyväskylä University of Applied Science. The development project for these studies offers an opportunity to concentrate on one aspect of teaching in detail. It was important for me, once again, to combine classroom practice with theory and in that way develop pedagogical innovations.

For this study, I chose to develop my teaching within corporations. My pedagogical aim was to find an approach that would be both communicative and constructive. Students at this level see the need and benefit of developing their language skills. It is important to involve them in the process of choosing direction and topics. By developing teaching practices related to English grammar, the students take on an active role and this will hopefully affect their often negative attitude towards studying grammar. When the students are involved in deciding what and how to study, they may become more committed and motivated to learn.

There is a heavy emphasis on oral communication in the work place. This is also the main stress in language instruction and it assumes that the course participants have a strong grammatical background. This is not always the case and poses a challenge to the teacher. How to move ahead with oral communication skills during the contact lessons when the students need to review grammar principles? How to meet the needs of various levels of students and offer instruction in the vast field of English grammar? How to contextualize grammar exercises to meet the professional vocabulary needs of IT professionals?

The subject of this paper is to examine a blended learning approach to English grammar in an in-company Business English course. This is accomplished by first taking a look at the theoretical background of the study. The case study is then described in detail. Finally,

conclusions are made as to the development and applicability of this approach to further training.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 A brief history of grammar teaching

The importance and means of grammar teaching has divided scholars and teachers alike over the ages. The social functions of grammar have emphasized various aspects at various times, i.e. Formalists (Chomsky) stressed structural description, Functionalists (Halliday) saw grammar as the design of texts while advocates of Conversation grammar (Sack, Schegloff) were concerned with interaction and rhetoric. (Kauppinen, 2008)

The trends have gone from a rigid study of terms and structures to the absence of the whole concept of grammar in the classroom. Patterson (1999) divides grammar into theoretical and applied. Theoretical refers to grammars used by linguists. Applied grammar can be furthered divided into Descriptive and Prescriptive. Descriptive Grammars attempt to describe the linguistic process that a user employs. It does not judge but rather explains. Prescriptive Grammars describe rules, present labels and offer a "correct" way to speak and write. Most students have been exposed to this in their school years. Other names for this are Pedagogical Grammars, Traditional Grammars and School Grammars. Grammar has been taught as an isolated element of language arts programs.

Due to the correctness approach, this kind of teaching has also included the element of power. Teachers knew the "right" answers and it was the students' job to memorize these structures. Researchers began to doubt the necessity of labels and recognized the need to incorporate grammar into contexts, ex. writing. Through contextualizing grammar instruction, students could achieve reading and writing fluency. Current trends in language teaching today support the notion that students acquire linguistic ability through social interaction and dialogue. The goal of teachers is to facilitate learning through meaningful classroom activities that foster this growth. (Patterson, 1999) This communicatively-based approach to grammar is more meaning-focused than structure-focused and leans more towards a learner centered approach than a subject oriented one. In accordance with this

viewpoint, grammatical rules are introduced as the need arises in students' communication. Grammar then becomes more content-based, meaningful and arises from the context. (Hassan, 2001)

2.2 Blended learning

The term *blended learning* is a current topic in education today. It often refers to the combination of contact lessons with online study. It does not necessarily have to be limited to these two types of instruction. Heinze and Procter (2004) offer a more encompassing definition:

> *Blended learning is learning that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, and founded on transparent communication amongst all parties involved with a course.*

In this definition it can be seen that blended learning involves a variety of teaching models and styles of learning. In this sense it is not new. In the past the various modes of learning were not so technical or electronic. Nowadays there are more options available. An important element of blended learning is that learning is not a single event but rather a continuous process. (Singh,2003)

In this case study, English grammar is approached from many different viewpoints. The most important points are that the teaching/study methods need to be communicative, contextualized and diverse enough to meet the various needs of the student. This was accomplished by self-reflection, individual work, pair work and on-line information inquiry and exercises.

The concentration on teachers integrating the resources from the Internet into their contact teaching is more emphasized than purely online teaching. Within these resources there are two main types of materials: information-based and teaching resources. The emphasis on teaching resources is directed towards those sites that encourage the student to work on their own, explore, discover and decide what is best for them. (Ho Mei Lin, 1997) Thus the constructivist approach is evident. Learning to learn and empowering

the students is the main point. Greater ownership of activities and own learning will help develop language skills. When selecting appropriate websites, the following factors should be considered: quality of feedback, challenge, range of stimuli and motivational feedback. Ho Mei Lin states that we can say that we have effectively used information technology when students become actively engages in discovering information for themselves, solve problems and learn on their own. These ideas also encompass the trends toward life-long learning.

Blended learning provides the teacher with a wider variety of resources and means to facilitate student learning. It also aids in the continuous updating of teacher knowledge as electronic sources are constantly changing and thus the teacher must be up to date on what is available and appropriate.

A brief look at the history of grammar teaching and an awareness of blended learning offer a platform from which to plan innovative measures in the classroom. The following chapters describe how theory was put into practice and how this was received by the students.

3 CASE STUDY

3.1 The setting, students and course specifics

The educational environment for this study was an information technology firm in Central Finland. This employer arranges language training for those employees whose position demands business communication skills in English. International contacts in this firm have dramatically increased due to off shore cooperation and the transfer of production to foreign countries.

There were 3 separate groups in this study. The students ranged in age from 20-60 with the majority being in their 40's. They have similar educational backgrounds and job functions. Most of them have a leadership position of some sort, i.e. Project Manager. Most of the students have at least a high school diploma which means that they have studied English for a number of years and have a basic command of English grammatical

structures. Many of the students have described their earlier English studies as being traditional in style which means a lot of concentration on the structure of the language but very little on oral communication. There seems to have been a very serious approach in their earlier studies. The teacher was the source of all information and grammatical correctness was very important. Grammar was seen as something to be mastered and not directly linked to its use in communication. It may be due to this strict background that many of my students seemed unsure about grammatical points, even though in my estimation their language was quite fluent. In general, it was clear that the students found grammar to be difficult and important but that the course should concentrate on oral skills and somehow "in between" deal with grammar.

The three courses were run simultaneously during the autumn of 2007. Each group had two-hour sessions weekly for a total of 20 hours. There were 8 students in each group although this number fluctuated due to busy work schedules. The groups were arranged by job function as opposed to English ability. This posed a challenge as within the same group there were students as low as 3- and as high as 5- (Evaluated on a scale of 1-6) The employer gave some direction as to the contents of the course but in the end the group members were able to influence what the main areas of concentration would be. Presentations, Meetings and Telephoning were the most dominant topics while grammar was mentioned but not stressed.

3.2 The Challenge

The emphasis of the three courses in this study was on the development of oral skills but the need to review grammar was still evident. Face-to-face contact hours were limited and it was imperative to concentrate on spoken communication skills during these lessons. The challenge was to find a route of instruction that would serve the various grammatical needs students have. The opportunity to work on these skills face-to-face was limited so the need for an alternative study method arose. Web-based learning provides an opportunity to find a vast amount of material that the students can use to customize their own studies. This material is available constantly and thus fits the busy schedules of working students. One of the main reasons for web-based learning is that the students can find and receive material and exercises that match their needs. The students I work

with have unlimited access to the Internet and can use it quite efficiently. Access to technology is often one of the negative aspects brought up against web-based learning. This was not an issue with the groups in this study. So to sum up, the goal was to find a new approach to grammar study. Giving the time restrictions it was evident that we could only get the 'ball rolling' and it was hoped that the students would keep up the momentum themselves – life long learning.

Thus the challenges for this study can be listed in the following way:

-Students need/want to work on English grammar yet the course is supposed to be concentrating on spoken language skills.

-There are limited contact hours.

-Each member has individual needs concerning grammar.

-It is challenging for the teacher to be an expert in all aspects of grammar

-Life long learning should be encouraged

-Material that covers all the necessary grammar points in detail is difficult to find and expensive.

-Grammar study should be contextualized

-Grammar exercises concerning the highly specialized field of the students is not available.

3.3 Proposals and Expectations – a 7-step approach

In order to meet the above mentioned challenges, the following 7-step approach was developed.

3.31 Students write

Step 1. Students write a short text about their work using professional vocabulary

Description:

I chose a very general topic for our first lesson as I had not met the participants before and the specific direction of the course was not clear yet. I introduced the work of Mike Nelson at the University of Turku. In brief, he has researched what words are most commonly used in Business English (http://users.utu.fi/micnel/BEC/becposall.htm) (see Appendix 1). The assignment for the next lesson was to choose 10 of these business words and write a short paragraph or 10 individual sentences concerning the student's work. They sent me their text by email before the next class.

Expectation:

I wanted the students to be able to write about their own work and in that way customize the professional vocabulary list. I hoped this personalization would increase motivation and commitment to their studies. Nelson's list of Business English words has been researched and shown to be common and thus the students might see the necessity to learn them and be able to effectively use them to describe their own work. Grammar exercises about the students' particular field do not exist so when the students write about their own work we can analyze grammar structures in context. When the students write their texts as self-study exercises there is more time to concentrate on oral skills in the classroom. As time is of importance for this student group, a short paragraph or 10 sentences should not be too challenging for a group at this level. I have also found that a clear, short assignment with a deadline before the next class keeps the students thinking about the topic between lessons and adds commitment to attend the next lesson as they get feedback on their work. The employer expects the students to develop their skills outside the classroom as well.

3.32 Teacher underlines

Step 2. The teacher underlines parts of the text that could be written in a clearer manner.

Description:

I printed out the emails and underlined parts of the students' text that were not fluent. This may be because of spelling, grammar, sentence structure or unclear meaning. I didn't give any comments other than an underline.

Expectation:

I wanted to avoid the finality of marking students' papers with a red pen. I wanted to approach the topic by showing them what areas they could develop. I used a lead pencil to show the possibility to change and adjust. I did not grade or evaluate their work as later on some of the underlines proved to be correct. A short paragraph per student is not overwhelming for a teacher to review.

3.33 Pair work

Step 3. Students work in pairs and try to help each other correct the underlined parts of their texts.

Description:

During the next contact lesson, I put them in pairs (paired with someone who had about the same number of underlines) and asked them to work together to figure out why I underlined some parts of their texts. The students discussed possible solutions together.

Expectation:

This was one way of making grammar 'verbal'. The students' are familiar with each other's topics so that they understand the subject and could possibly learn from the discussion. I wanted to add this element so that the students could see that they are not the only ones making mistakes. I believe it is also rewarding for students to be able to help each other out and create a positive group spirit. They could also see that the teacher is not the only "authority" in the classroom. The pondering phase of the assignment keeps the students guessing and may increase learning more than if the right answer was written

right on the students paper. I was a bit concerned as to how the students would react to showing their "mistakes" to others. Are the results of an assignment personal? Is it right for the teacher to ask them to share with others?

3.34 Teacher consults

Step 4. Teacher consults with small groups about the changes made.

Description:
The students were given about 10 minutes to discuss their texts and then I went around to facilitate learning by checking their answers and offering advice. I stressed that the underlines were not necessarily mistakes. Those parts of the text just raised a question mark in my mind.

Expectation:
I hoped this consulting about the texts would avoid the strictly right/wrong approach of the authoritative teacher. This might also show how important the understanding of the context has on the fluency of a text.

3.35 Find red thread

Step 5. Students look at the corrections made and decide on a few areas of grammar they need to work on.

Description:
The students had to look at their underlines and try to find a 'red thread' - a grammatical topic that arose often. They listed one or two areas that they felt they needed to work on (ex. prepositions, articles).

Expectation:

I wanted to put the responsibility and direction of learning in the students' hand. They made the corrections themselves and then analyzed their mistakes. I think they might be more committed to learning if they choose the direction themselves. This was once again an attempt to avoid having the teacher say "you need to work on this". They chose their own words, wrote their own text, analyzed their own mistakes and decided which way they needed to go to improve. Hopefully this will empower them to develop.

3.36 Virtual help

Step 6. The teacher offers a list of websites that offer instruction/exercises in English grammar. Each student visits a few sites concerning their particular area, does a few exercises and writes a new short text using their grammar topic in practice. The text is sent to the teacher as before.

Description:

The students now had their direction and it was time to use online sites to help find answers/explanations as well as exercises to work on these areas of grammar. I handed out a packet of internet English grammar links that I have found useful. I chose 5 different web pages as sites are popping up and shutting down all the time. The sites ranged from light/graphic to highly academic and from beginners to advanced:

> University of Victoria, English language centre study zone
> BBC Skillswise
> Business Grammar Lessons
> OWL at Purdue
> Grammar Slammer

As a self-study exercise the students looked at these websites and used their new found knowledge to write another short text. This time the goal of the assignment was to use this grammar point in practice.

Expectation:

The wide variety of websites was an attempt to cater to different types of learning styles. Some students want thorough explanation of theory and some want short explanations and then right to exercise practice. The sites also offered a wide range of grammatical topics that no single site could cover. There was also a variety of exercises from fill in the blank to write your own sentence. The sites were mainly concerning general English so I wanted the students' own texts to be a way to draw in their professional field and thus contextualize their writing practice.

3.37 Cycle continues

Step 7. The teacher reviews the email, underlines the text, students work in pairs, etc. The cycle begins again.

Description:

They sent the sentences to me, I underlined them, gave it back to them during the next lesson, worked in pairs and it was the opening activity for our second lesson.

Expectation:

I wanted them to see the routine of writing, checking, finding problem areas, getting help, practicing, writing, etc. By going through the cycle one more time I hoped that they could possibly find a means to continue this kind of study on their own. I told them they could continue this cycle but that we wouldn't take a lot of class time for it.

3.4 Results

There were 23 students altogether in the 3 groups who completed the Business English course. The students were asked to fill out a feedback form (See Appendix 2) at the end of the course. The return rate of this questionnaire was 18/23 or 78%. The three groups

went through this 7-step cycle two times as a group and some continued on their own after that. The following text will describe both the teacher's and the students' comments on how effective this 7-step approach was.

Step 1. Students write a short text about their work using professional vocabulary.

Result:
Some students took the easiest way out and wrote sure sentences that did not challenge their skills. They wrote general business sentences instead of trying to describe their work in particular. I did not tell them beforehand that they would share their texts with others and some of the texts were maybe a little too personal. A ready made grammar exercise would avoid this by allowing the teacher to select the level of exercises. The length of the exercise was appropriate as it did not take too long for the students to complete. Almost all of the students completed the assignment which I think helped them commit to the course and take it seriously.

Step 2. The teacher underlines parts of the text that could be written in a clearer manner.

Result:
This proved to be a quick means to give some kind of feedback. It would have taken much more time if the teacher should have written corrections on the paper.

Step 3. Students work in pairs and try to help each other correct the underlined parts of their texts.

Result:
Before this exercise, I asked the students if they would have anything against sharing their work with others. No one responded negatively or at least didn't dare respond negatively. It was a fortunate situation that within the group

there were pairs with the same level of grammar. It might be problematic to pair up students from very different levels. There was a little bit of apprehension in the air in the beginning but that disappeared quickly. There seemed to be a spirit of "we are all in this together" and they actively helped each other.

The first question on the feedback form was:

1. How did you feel about sharing your written work/underlines with your fellow classmates? (see figure 1)

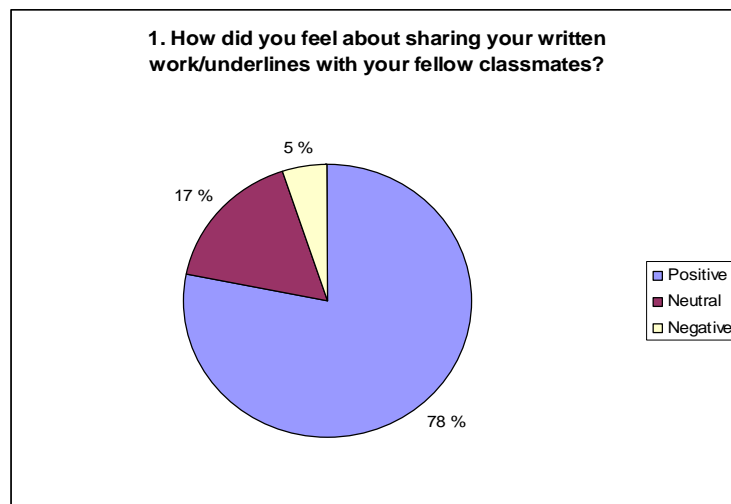I categorized the 18 responses as either positive, neutral or negative (see Appendix 3).

Figure 1. Responses to sharing work

Students' comments:

positive 78%: *the students are at the same level anyhow, see a broader perspective of activity, it was nice to see other's work, more effective, fictional stories anyhow, interesting to see that classmates had difficulties too.*

neutral 17%: *I was afraid at first what my classmates would think but I soon saw it doesn't matter, didn't find it beneficial to go through text because we can only guess at the right grammar.*

negative1%: *It was a bit problematic, inevitably texts are compared and you feel really dumb.*

The overwhelming majority of responses were positive in nature. There was only one completely negative response, but it was so against what I had hoped for this activity that it makes me consider redesigning this part of the activity. If anyone feels as strongly as this respondent did than maybe the activity is not appropriate.

The second question on the feedback form was (see Appendix 3):
2. Do you think that talking about your text/underlines with classmates was an effective way to discuss grammar issues?
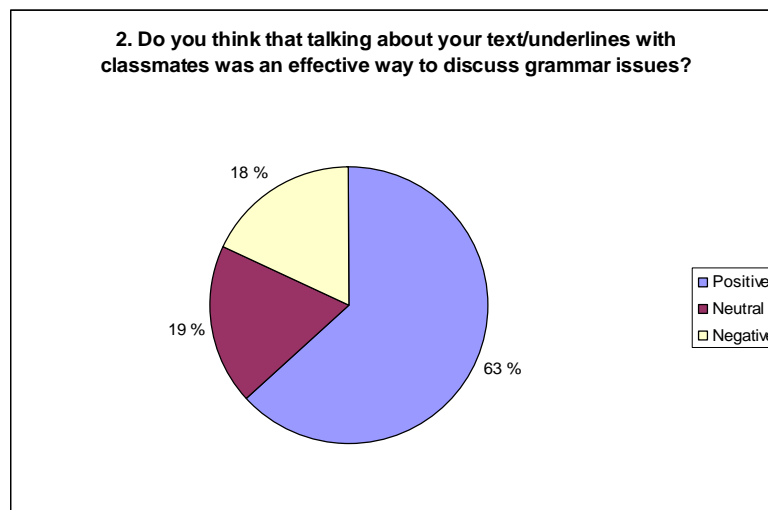

Figure 2. Responses to pair discussion

The students' comments:

positive 63%: *It makes you think and talk, more effective than doing it alone, got feedback from classmate, different and interesting, remember things better when you discuss, writing and going through a text helps to remember and is better than grammar memorization.*

neutral 19%: *not the best way, good addition and way to handle grammar but not as the only way, not so effective*

negative 18%: *not effective as the same things are difficult for all, partner was not interested to go through phrases.*

These results (see figure 2)show also the lesser degree of control the teacher has. If someone does not take the writing assignment seriously or is not interested to ponder mistakes, then his/her partner also suffers.

Step 4. Teacher consults with small groups about the changes made.
(For description and expectation see page 10.)

Result:
Working together, the students' solved the majority of the underlines themselves. I think this gave them increased confidence that they do have a solid knowledge of grammar. Some of the underlined areas proved to be correct. I was ignorant about the students' professional vocabulary and this made the students feel good - they were wiser than the teacher!

Step 5. Students look at the corrections made and decide on a few areas of grammar they need to work on.
(For description and expectation see page 10.)

Result:
Students seemed to find their 'red thread' quite effortlessly. There were two common areas that caused difficulties for many students: prepositions and articles. As one student suggested, it might be helpful to give a list of grammar

terms in both English and Finnish at this point. Some students might find it difficult to pinpoint what their red thread is in English.

Step 6. The teacher offers a list of websites that offer instruction/exercises in English grammar. They range from light/general to academic exercises. Each student visits a few sites concerning their particular area, does a few exercises and writes a new short text using their grammar topic in practice. The text is sent to the teacher as before.

 (For description and expectation see page 11.)

Result:

Once again there is a feeling of lack of control on the part of the teacher. Even though the websites have been carefully chosen, it doesn't mean that the sites are up and running when the students visit them. There are so many things that can go wrong when working with computers and Internet.

Question 3 on the feedback form (see Appendix 3):

3. Did the internet sites offer you an effective way to find answers/advice/explanations about your areas of grammar?
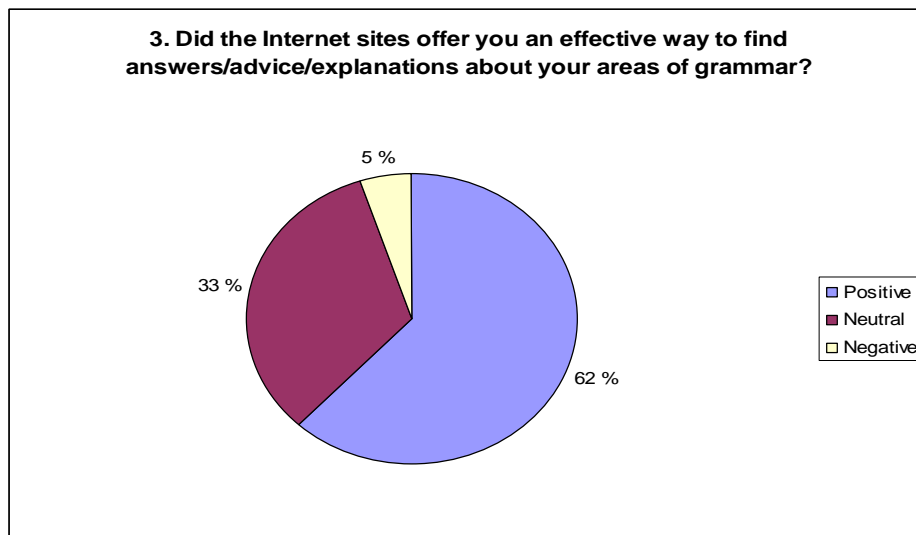
Figure 3. Responses to internet sites

Students' comments:

positive 62%: *Yes and I still use them, I didn't know there was so much free material on the net, found these sites very helpful, interesting.*

neutral 33%: *Didn't have a lot of time to look at these sites, takes a lot of time to be effective, the level of the sites varied a lot, have to first find suitable sites that are working, some sites were confusing, helped with basic questions but not specific ones.*

negative 5%: These sites were not an effective way of learning.

Question 4 on the feedback form (see Appendix 3):

4. Did the online exercises offer an effective way to practice using these grammar concepts?
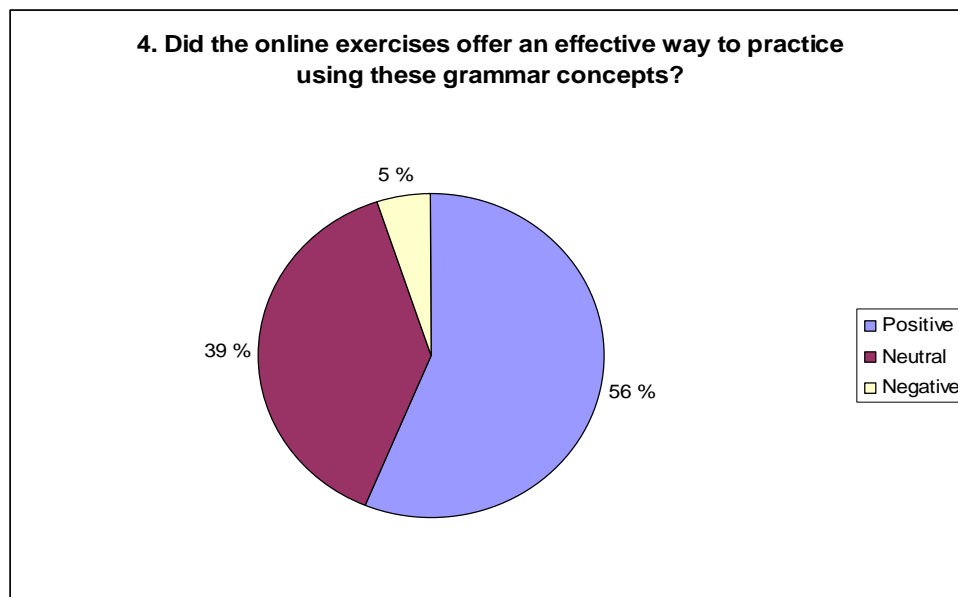

Figure 4. Responses to online exercises

Students' comments:

positive 56 %: *Is effective especially when the response is immediate, appropriate exercises, up to own activity.*

neutral 39%: *Not a lot of time to do exercises, not easy to find specific answers, didn't get any explanation what was wrong with answer, seemed too easy, when you found the right page, need to be much more exercises.*

negative 5%: *I didn't like them very much.*

Time was an important factor to begin with and it shows up here again. The Internet sites do not offer a quick and easy solution. In order to be effective, the student needs to take time to find appropriate and effective material.

Step 7. The teacher reviews the email, underlines the text, students work in pairs… The cycle begins again.

(For description and expectation see page 12.)

Result:

Some continued the cycle throughout the course. It seemed to open up their eyes to their own areas of development and how to use the internet as a resource. It has also given them a source of information. They sent me new links to sites they found. It seems to have filled a gap they needed to work on and has also showed them that the ball is in their court. They have also seen that other students have problems and that they can help each other. It has made grammar a bit more "communal".

Question 5 on the feedback form was (see Appendix 3):

5. Do you feel this 7-step process is an effective way to improve your English grammar?

5. Do you feel this 7-step process is an effective way to improve your English grammar?

6 %

50 %

44 %

Positive
Neutral
Negative
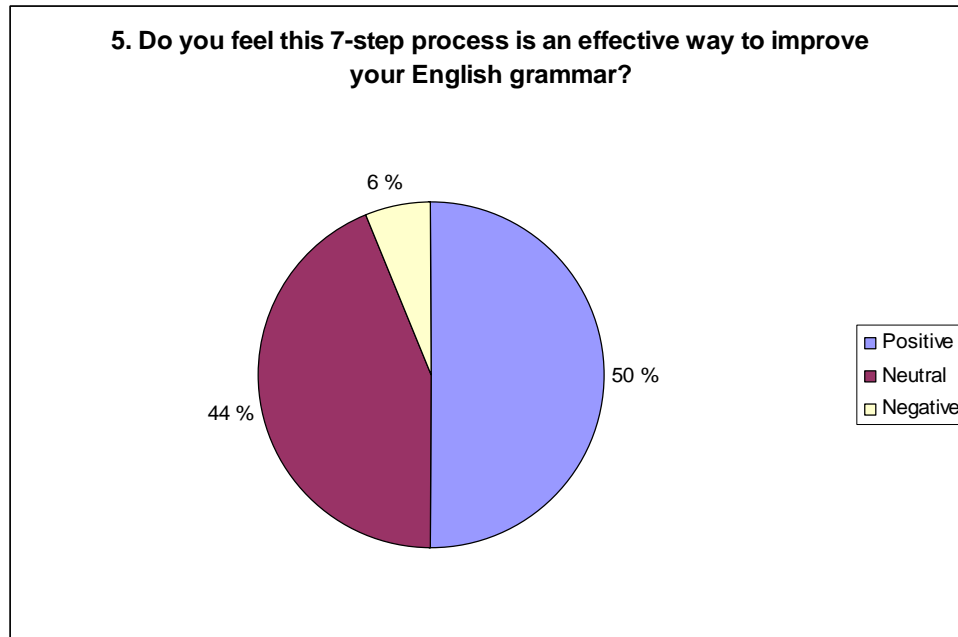
Figure 5. Responses to overall effectiveness

Students' comments:

positive 50%:   *Much better than the traditional way, the effectiveness increases the more cycles you do, clear manner of proceeding*

neutral 44%:   *It helps when studied beforehand, it activates current knowledge but needs more time to improve, I pay attention to thins but my grammar has not improved, at least it gives direction*

negative 6 %:   *It was too short, I should have more time*

4 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

When looking at the statistics of the feedback above, it shows that the majority of the students reacted favorably to this form of grammar study. The students listed the positive aspects of this 7-step method as (see Appendix 3):

Good, fun, activating, diverse, communicative, interesting, fresh (new), well organized. It was beneficial to get feedback. Learning happened without almost noticing. There was the possibility to customize one's studies. Learning improved when students take the initiative themselves. There was a good atmosphere within the group. The level of motivation stays higher as opposed to traditional grammar. It is possible to refer back to the internet material as opposed to a teacher's lecture - if you miss class that day the information is not retrievable.

The students also gave feedback on what could be developed with this grammar process (see Appendix 3).

There is not time enough to concentrate on specific areas. There should be printed material as well as the websites. The web pages (information and exercises) could be categorized in more detail. More communicative exercises.

In order to develop this approach, the issues of time limitations and web material must be dealt with.

Question of time

One of the most reoccurring comments in the feedback was the lack of time to concentrate on grammar. It could be beneficial to have the students write short texts as their homework after every lesson. In that way the approach and websites would become familiar and a routine would be created to cut down on the time necessary to complete the task.

Website review

The fact that anyone can publish on the WWW is both a blessing and a curse. There is no guarantee that the material will be updated and available. This demands work on the part of the teacher to maintain and constantly review a functioning list of sites. The students should be involved in this process as well. A juried list of English grammar web pages could be established. The following information could be collected about each site:

> Example of a review outline of www pages concerning English grammar:
>
> name:
>
> website:
>
> author/creator:
>
> neutrality:
>
> real time:
>
> contents:
>
> approach: highly academic/light:
>
> format and technical functioning:
>
> exercises: yes/no answers or offering advice:

Another issue to be dealt with is the language of the websites. A clear fault in this study is the lack of material in Finnish. All of the websites offered were in English. The students expressed a desire to be able to read about difficult grammatical concepts in their own language.

With such a vast amount of web sites available there could be some "hidden agendas" behind the sites, i.e. trying to sell or market various educational materials. There is also the question as to whether having the students buy grammar text books and work books would serve the same purpose. What are the consequences of not purchasing high quality material published in Finland? Will that resource not be available anymore if everyone turns to the web for material?

This kind of English language study requires maturity and self motivation. A lot of responsibility is left up to the student and a certain level of English and work experience is assumed. In-company language training seems to be an appropriate learning environment for this kind of grammar approach.

Professional development of the teacher

The planning and execution of lessons is demanding work. It is quite easy to fall into a routine of similar lesson plans and familiar teaching material. It is imperative for educators to step outside this safe environment and try to develop teaching according to the needs of the students and the educational environment. This study was an attempt to do just that.

My aim was to develop a more communicative and constructive approach to English grammar. I think I was successful in implementing a novel approach that had the students developing their skills in a new way. There are areas that need to be adjusted and improved so the study will continue. This development project supported my professional growth in striving to see pedagogical practices from a new perspective. I was open with the students that this was a new attempt and they were willing to experiment and give me feedback. As the saying goes, *Nothing ventured, nothing gained*, both the educator and students moved ahead in their various roles.

As a facilitator of learning, it is my responsibility to create an environment conducive to academic development. In order to be successful in this, the needs and levels of the students must be kept in mind. Blended learning is a way to offer a variety of learning options to students. Adult students often have the life experiences and maturity to take responsibility for their studies. In that way blended learning can provide a useful and appropriate learning approach that includes both freedom and accountability in learning. A vast amount of possibilities does not necessarily ensure a positive outcome. One of the main responsibilities of facilitators in this kind of learning environment is to screen, review and offer paths of learning that will constructively help the student. This study is one step in that direction.

REFERENCES

Hassan, B. 2001. New trends in teaching grammar in the secondary school: A review article. Referred to on February 4, 2008. Http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/17/28/cd.pdf

Heinze, A. and Procter, C. 2004. Reflections on the use of Blended learning. Extract from Education in a Changing Environment Conference. 13-14 September 2004. Referred to on February 4, 2008. Http://www.ece.salford.ac.uk/proceedings/papers/ah_04.rtf.

Ho Mei Lin, C. 1997. Teacher's Tips: Online Grammar Teaching and Learning. The Internet TESL Journal. Referred to on August 22,2006 http://iteslj.org/Articles/Lin-OnlineGrammar.html.

Kauppinen, A. 2008. Professor, University of Jyväskylä, Department of Languages. Seminar (Pedagoginen kielioppi kielten kohtauspaikkana) of January 11, 2008.

Nelson, M. 2007.Mike Nelson's Business English Lexis Site. Referred to on February 10th, 2008. http://users.utu.fi/micnel/BEC/keywordsindex.htm

Patterson, N. 1999. The Role of Grammar in the Language Arts Curriculum. Referred to on January 18, 2008. Http://www.msu.edu/user/patter90/grammar.htm.

Singh, H. 2003. Building Effective Blended Learning Programs. Educational Technology, vol.43, no.6 p.51-54.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. BEC Positive Keyword Grammatical Categories

BEC POSITIVE KEYWORD GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES

NOUN	VERB	ADJECTIVE	NOUN/VERB	NOUN/ADJ	VERB/ADJ	NOUN/VB/ADJ	-LY ADVERBS
business	sell	financial	market	executive	direct	firm	sincerely
company	include	global	fax	standard		level	basically
customer	regard	international	price	commercial		last	currently
product	receive	corporate	bank	quality		net	obviously
sale	provide	digital	service	potential		tender	primarily
management	operate	new	stock	current		forward	internally
billion	send	strategic	order	core		average	fully
contractor	please	technical	contract	premium		content	previously
manager	manage	high	mail	objective			faithfully
seller	require	mobile	share	individual			typically
investment	develop	internal	cost	annual			additionally
internet	advise	competitive	date	prior			significantly
performance	deliver	big	profit	chief			effectively
year	continue	best	register	professional			sharply
million	agree	significant	project	gross			potentially
buyer	discuss	successful	rate	wireless			
industry	excite	low	credit	specialist			
supplier	generate	available	budget	key			
technology	confirm	monthly	copy	major			
distributor	enclose	senior	account	chrome			
delivery	invest	regulatory	cash	overall			
company's	underlie	further	group	dear			
agreement	consolidate	organizational	offer	sole			
growth	combine	quarterly	network	chemical			
director	tend	personal	tel	maximum			
information	restructure	large	term	bulk			
property	underwrite	independent	review	multinational			
shareholder	complicates	relevant	target	marine			
investor	expect	organisational	increase	graphic			
employee	certify	external	invoice				
PC	compete	promotional	tax				
COM	merge	applicable	trade				
payment	announce	ongoing	telephone				
office	achieve	automotive	engineer				
system	relate	appropriate	meeting				
expense	improve	environmental	finance				
strategy	notify	responsible	focus				
data	maintain	outstanding	purchase				
sector	integrate	specific	team				
allies	establish	statutory	report				
premises	motivate	industrial	package				
web	involve	operational	export				

Appendix 2. English Grammar Study Feedback Form - blank

<u>English grammar study feedback</u>

During this course we briefly covered English grammar study. I chose a new method of study for this course. As a part of my pedagogical studies at the Jyväskylä Polytechnic, I would like to compare/contrast my goals for this activity with your feedback. I would be very grateful if you could answer the following questions. Please feel free to answer in Finnish. All identities of respondents and their employer will remain confidential.

1. How did you feel about sharing your written work/underlines with your fellow classmates?

2. Do you think that talking about your text/underlines with classmates was an effective way to discuss grammar issues?

3. Did the internet sites offer you an effective way to find answers/advice/explanations about your areas of grammar?

4. Did the online exercises offer an effective way to practice using these grammar concepts?

5. Do you feel this 7-step process is an effective way to improve your English grammar?

Positive aspects of this grammar method:

Areas to be developed:

Thank you for your feedback!

Appendix 3. English Grammar Study Feedback Form - filled

Student feedback concerning English grammar study

Students were allowed to answer in either Finnish or English. The author placed the responses in order of positive to negative.

1. How did you feel about sharing your written work/underlines with your fellow classmates?

-It is very good. Doesn't matter to me, I'd like to learn and own mistakes are the best way.

-OK, opettavaistakin tavallaan

-I think it was effective to share work/underlines with classmates. Mistakes in a work are often common.

-OK. good. I felt comfortable to show my texts with colleagues. We all make mistakes and even many in a day.

-Ok! It was interesting to notice that the mate(s) had difficulties in areas I didn't, and vv.

-It was OK. They were fictional stories anyway.

-It wasn't bad at all. I think it was even more effective.

-Oli mukava nähdä toisen kirjoitus ja ei haitannut vaikka toinen luki oman tekstin.

-Hyvä tapa koska tulee laajempi näkemys.

-Se oli ihan OK, oli tunne että ryhmässä on kuitenkin aika lailla saman tasoissa opiskelijoita.

-It was OK – A good idea!

-OK

-Ok, mikäpä siinä

-It was OK

-En ollut paikalla. Uskoisin että koska ryhmässä on hyvä henki eikä kilpailuasetelma (koska meitä ei arvostella), yhdessä käsitteleminen käy hyvin.

-Minua ei harmittanut näyttää virheitä, mutta aluksi epäilytti, mitä työtoveri ajattelee sisällöstä!Pian kuitenkin huomasin ettei sillä väliä. Kaikki ottivat asian opiskelun kannalta.

-It was OK for me, but I did not find it beneficial to go the text through with my pair (colleague) as both can only guess the right grammar. It would have been useful if the most erroneous phrases were studied with you anonymously.

-Hieman ongelmallinen, tule väkisin verranneeksi muiden tekstiin ja tuntee olevansa todella "tollo".

2. Do you think that talking about your text/underlines with classmates was an effective way to discuss grammar issues?

Students were allowed to answer in either Finnish or English. The author placed the responses in order of positive to negative.

- Definitely!

- Yes, I think so. It makes you think and talk.

- Yes, I think it was an effective way of working.

- Yes, it was more effective that doing it alone.

- Yes

- Yes

- Yes

- Samalla sai puheharjoitusta, palaute tuli myös toiselta kurssilaiselta.

- Ainakin erilainen ja kiinnostavampi kuin periteinen lähestymistapa. Kyllä, sillä tavalla asiat jäivät paremmin mieleen kun niistä keskustellaan.

- Ainakin kirjoittaminen ja läpikäynti on mielekäämpi tapa kuin kieliopin, ulkoaopettelu. Asioita jää paremmin mieleen.

- Yes, but may be not the best way

- Hyvä lisä ja keino käsitellä kielioppia, mutta ei ainoana keinona riitävä

- Pakottaa ensin itse mietimään ratkaisuja jolloin samalla oppi syvällisemmin. Eli aluksi ei välltämättä tehokas mutta lopputulos oli hyvä.

- Ei ehkä kovin tehokas tapa, koska yleensä samat asiat vaikeita.

- Ei kovin tehokas, sillä useimmat ongelmat osasin ratkaista itse – kun ne oli minulle alleviivaamalla osoitettu – vaikeita ei osannut työkaverikaan. Mutta keskustelua tuli, se oli hyödyllistä. Olisi ollut hyvä, jos meille olisi annettu jo siinä vaiheessa sanasto, jossa olisi ollut suomi-englanti kieliopillisista käsitteistä, mm. monikko, yksikkö, aikamuoto, vertailu, pilkku, piste, puolipiste, jne.

- Not quite. See my previous answer. Or perhaps it heavily depended of my pair and his interest to go through the phrases.

3. Did the internet sites offer you an effective way to find answers/advice/explanations about your areas of grammar?

Students were allowed to answer in either Finnish or English. The author placed the responses in order of positive to negative.

- Yes, really!

- Kyllä, olen käyttänyt niitä edelleen.

- Kyllä. En tiennyt että netistä löytyy noin paljon ilmaista materaalia.

- I found those sites very helpful.

- Yes, and interesting

- Yes. of course

- Yes

- Yes

- Melko hyvin

- Sivut hyviä. En vain ole käyttänyt paljoakaan aikaa niiden tutustuminen.

- Minulla oli aika vähän aikaa kokeilla näitä, mutta vaikuttivät oikein hyviltä.

- Internet sisältää paljon ja lopulta sivuja löytyikin, mutta tama tapa vaati enemmän aikaa kuin nyt käytettävissä oli (ollakseen tehokas)

- I think the sites were good, though the level varied a lot. But much better than the ___ grammar.

- I don't know. It surely helps to find out some questions. I'd to _____ for my old grammar.

- Yes, and no. You'll have to first find sites that are suitable for you and that are working.

- I didn't use much time in "surfing" there but it is good to know those sites for the future needs.

- osa sivustoista oli sekavia, perusasioihin apua mutta ei erityiskysymyksiin.

- I tried briefly these internet sites. These sites were not an effective way of learning.

4. Did the online exercises offer an effective way to practice using these grammar concepts?

Students were allowed to answer in either Finnish or English. The author placed the responses in order of positive to negative.

- Yes

- Yes

- Yes

- Kyllä!

- Hyvin

- Yes, it is an effective way. Especially when the response or feedback is immediate.

- Harjoitukset olivat sopivia esim. perpositioihin.

- Ainakaan sellaiset sivut jotka näyttivät kohdat joihin oli vastannut väärin, niin kauan kun ne oli korjttu oikeiksi.

- OK, omasta aktiivisuudesta kiini

- Actually, I did not have time to do many of these exercises. Yes they were good for this course.

- Yes, although it was not very easy to find answers to SPECIFIC questions ("should I use this or this with this...")

- Some of the sites were fine, but they are not effective if you don't get any explanation what went wrong.

- Tehtävät, joita kokeilin tuntuivat helpolta siihen verrattuna, mitten samoja asioita osaa käyttää omassa tekstissä. Varmaan hyödyllisia, jos niitä tekisi enemmän.

- Kyllä, kunhan oli oikealla sivulla.

- Maybe

- Ok, maybe?

- Harjoituksia pitäisi olla paljon enemmän.

- I didn't like them very much

5. Do you feel this 7-step process is an effective way to improve your English grammar?

Students were allowed to answer in either Finnish or English. The author placed the responses in order of positive to negative.

- Kyllä, paljon parempi kuin perinteinen tapa.

- Yes- Kyllä, vaikkakin kielioppi on vaikeaa. Kun opiskeluajoista on kauan, eikä noita asioita ole aktiivisesti ajatellut. Vain käyttänyt kieltä.

- Yes

- Yes

- Yes

- Kyllä

- Tehokkuus lisääntyy, jos on useampi kierros

- Selkeä etenemistapa, ok

- Yes, when studied beforehand (instead of trying to find help when the problem is at hand)

- On se tehokas aktivoimaan ja olevaa osaamista, parantaminen vaatii enemmän aikaa.

- It is an effective way but it should be used with much more time and lessons.

-Osaan kiinnittää huomiota asioihin, joissa teen helposti virheitä. Voi olla, ettei kielioppini vielä paljon ole parantunut.

-Maybe

-I am not sure?

- Mielenkiintoinen tapa. Ehkä tähän käytetty aika oli liian lyhyt asioiden oppimiseen. Se antoi kuitenkin käsityksen mitä asioita pitaisi opetella ja mistä tietoa saa.

- It was too short – I should have more time

Positive aspects of this grammar method:

- Kielioppi harjoitukset ja käsittelytavat olivat mielestäni hyviä, hauskoja ja aktivoivia, mitä saisi olla vaan enemmän.

- Hauskempaa näin monimuotoisena kuin että vain käytaisiin harjoituksia läpi opettajan johdolla.

- Its always positive to look forward new methods.

- Many type of practices.

- Speaking, communication, feedback. You will find the areas that especially need exercising.

- You can study at your own speed and sccording to your own schedule.

- Feedback, many chances to try again (no pen prints)

- Uusi tapa, joten tuntui mukavalta.

- Korosta omanaloitteisuutta ja oppiminen paranee

- There was a good feeling

- Uskoakseni tama pita mielenkiinnon paremmin yllä kuin koulumaisempi opiskelu.

- Palaute omaan tekstiin

- Oli helppo huomata mikä asia tarvitsee harjoitusta. Voi myös opiskella itsenäisesti myöhemmin.

- One at least is that I can spend as much time as I want to understand what was/is the idea. Compare to class learning, if you miss something is is forever gone.

- Oppiminen tapahtuu lähes huomaamattu. Useita kielioppiasioitu tulee esille samaan aikaan – mielekkäämpää.

- Mielenkiintoinen ja tuore, kannattaa kehittää. Hyvin jäsennelty

Areas to be developed:

- On paljon ilmaisuja, joissa vaikeuksia. Olisi ollut hyvä, jos oisi ollut aikaa kirjoittaa ne ja saada niihin valaistusta. Muttä löydän ne kyllä Internetistä ja kieleoppi-kirjastani (ja idiomi-sanakirjasta)!

- Talking and speaking more. Communication are important.

- I am quite lazy to test sites. so I need to find a suitable site quite quickly.

- search word indexes maybe…

- More time

- WWW-sivuista voisi kärsiä pois huonoimmat.

- Nettitehtäviä voisi kohdentaa tai luokitella tarkemmin. Tietysti itsekin olisi voinut katsoa paremmin useanlaisia tehtäviä.

- Nettisivustoon lisäksi kirjallista materialia.

- Aikaa enemmän harjoitukseen.

- Aikaa ei ole käytettävissä yhteen osa-alueeseen kovinkaan plajon, kun tuntejä on kuitenkin rajallinen määrä.