

Adjective or Adverb?

Teaching Grammar with the PACE Model

ANNIKA GROENEVELD

At the international American School of The Hague (ASH) where I teach, students hail from disparate educational backgrounds and language teaching systems. As a result, they arrive with varying degrees of grammar instruction. A general assumption among language teachers that this hindered the students' ability to learn another language was the impetus for my initial research. When the results of a short study confirmed this hypothesis, the next part of my research was to improve this knowledge by means of an intervention. A pre-and post-test would establish whether the students' knowledge of grammatical terminology had improved. In the intervention stage, I designed a lesson series based on the PACE model. I chose this method because it combines both a communicative and cognitive approach to language instruction. It also introduces a variation on an inductive method of teaching which encourages students to think at a metacognitive level.

Historically, grammar has been, and continues to be, a controversial topic in language learning. There are those in favour of grammar and those against. Most recently, we find a shift towards a middle ground where

researchers argue for a combination of communicative learning and developing students' grammatical knowledge. Haight, Herron and Cole (2007) postulate: 'The history of language learning has oscillated between form-focused instruction, emphasizing accuracy, and meaning-focused instruction, emphasizing context and communication. In general, research suggests that focusing on form in a communicative language classroom is a more effective technique for teaching grammar than focusing on form alone or focusing purely on communication'.

Based on this dichotomy, methods for teaching grammar can roughly be divided into two categories: 'On one end of the spectrum, there are those who argue that deductive teaching, which involves stating the rule and providing explanations before offering illustrations, is the most effective way to introduce grammatical patterns in the classroom. On the other end are grouped those who reject deduction totally, advocating instead induction through comprehensible input' (Zéphir, 2000).

The problem inherent in the deductive approach is that 'critics argue that it emphasizes form at the expense of meaning and that it does not provide comprehensible, mean-

ing-bearing input.' (Paesani, 2005). However, the problem with the inductive approach is that 'research has shown that some learners do not attend to or 'induce' the teacher's preselected grammatical point on the basis of input alone' (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2010).

In discovering that both the deductive and inductive way of teaching grammar have their disadvantages, theory has moved one step further and the focus now rests on form through meaning. As stated by Zéphir (2000): 'Lee and Van Patten recommend that grammar be presented through 'structured input activities' in which 'particular features' of language are concentrated or 'privileged' in a structured set of input utterances or sentences. In these input utterances, learners attend to grammatical items while focusing on meaning'.

PACE model

Adair-Hauck and Donato have formalised this way of grammar teaching by introducing the PACE model which comprises the following four steps:

- P – Presentation of meaningful language in a thematic and interactive way.
- A – The teacher directs the students' Attention to some aspect of the language used during the presentation phase.
- C – Students and teacher Co-construct an explanation during this step, after their attention has been focused on the form.
- E – They engage in Extension activities that provide them with the opportunity to use the new structure in creative ways (Zéphir, 2000).

In short, there are two key features in this method. Firstly, in the Presentation stage, the focus is on presenting concepts that are embedded in meaningful language: 'In con-

trast, the model we propose in this chapter views grammar teaching as a focus on a well-chosen form of language after meaning of this form has been established in interesting and compelling contexts, such as stories, folktales, and legends' (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2010).

Secondly, in the Co-construction stage, the method advocates a dialogue between teacher and student, about grammar rules. 'Finally, through dialog with the teacher and each other, learners develop grammatical concepts through problem-solving activity where they are asked to reflect upon form and the relationship of forms to meaning that have been established in the context of cultural stories' (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2010). Whilst this is, to a certain extent, an inductive approach to teaching grammar, it does involve guidance from the teacher. This takes place in the form of a discussion between student and teacher on the grammar rule for a certain concept.

Furthermore, the PACE model is based on the premise that one needs to first establish declarative knowledge (knowing about a language) before developing procedural knowledge (knowing how to apply language). Its aim is to encourage 'use of higher-level thinking skills and language before moving to procedural skills' (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2010). This was in line with the focal point of my research project: students were tested on their ability to recognise, for instance, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb, but not tested on their ability to apply these grammar concepts. Therefore, whenever the term 'grammatical knowledge' is used, it refers to declarative knowledge.

Pre-and post-test

From my initial research into the students' knowledge of grammar, I established that they struggled with seven concepts, notably:

agreement, demonstrative pronoun, present tense¹, superlative, conjugation, possessive pronoun and direct object. As several months had elapsed since this outcome was determined, I decided to re-test these seven concepts prior to implementing the PACE lesson series (the reader is referred to the Appendix for some examples of questions from the Dutch and French student tests).

The pre-test, post-test and PACE lesson series were administered to 34 students – aged from 15-17 – in two classes: High School French 2 (which I taught) and High School Dutch 2 (which a colleague taught). All had received between 1.5 to 2 years of language instruction. Although these classes were learning two different languages, I had found in the initial research that, to a certain degree, they shared a common grammar curriculum.

The initial research – which spanned four different language classes - was conducted in English. Time constraints made preparing tests in four different languages impossible. But when it came to implementation of the PACE method, creating a test and a lesson series in both Dutch and French was possible because this only involved two languages. However, the answers, in which the students showed their recognition of the concepts, were in English. As stated by Fellowes (2007): ‘In order for students to be able to discuss specific grammatical concepts and language use within a text, it is advantageous to provide them with a standard grammar vocabulary. The language for talking about, and describing language is referred to as metalanguage’. Based on this premise, ‘grammatical terminology’ refers to the standard grammar vocabulary used to describe the language concepts.

Due to additional time constraints, I selected only four of the seven initial concepts to re-teach using the PACE method as these were the ones that had obtained the lowest average score in the pre-test. As is evident from Table 1, the four concepts that

the students struggled with most were:

- Demonstrative pronoun (mean 38.3%)
- Direct object (mean 54.5%)
- Superlative (mean 51.5%)
- Agreement (mean 39.6%)

Lesson Series according to the PACE model

The four concepts, illustrated in Table 1, were subsequently presented to both classes in a series of six lessons. We chose to start with a relatively easy concept, namely the demonstrative pronoun. We then focused on the direct object, as prior knowledge of this concept facilitated understanding of our next concept: verb agreement. The grammar classes concluded in the fourth lesson with the simpler concept of the superlative. Each of the four lessons adopted all four PACE stages. To ensure retention of the concepts, we then revised all four concepts again in the two remaining classes, before administering the post-test.

For the (P) Presentation stage of both language classes, I wrote an anecdotal version of *Alice in Wonderland* incorporating the demonstrative pronoun. A picture prompt with questions was used to illustrate the direct object, eliciting answers using this concept. A short mystery story and a video extract from *Sesame Street* were employed to introduce the concept of agreement, while music videos were used to teach the superlative. We then discussed the content in the extracts without, at this stage, focusing on the grammar.

On the whole, the students’ reaction to this presentation stage was enthusiastic and there was a high level of participation. As my colleague and I became more at ease with this method, we started having increasingly in-depth discussions with the students in the respective target languages. One of the challenges at this stage, however, was that

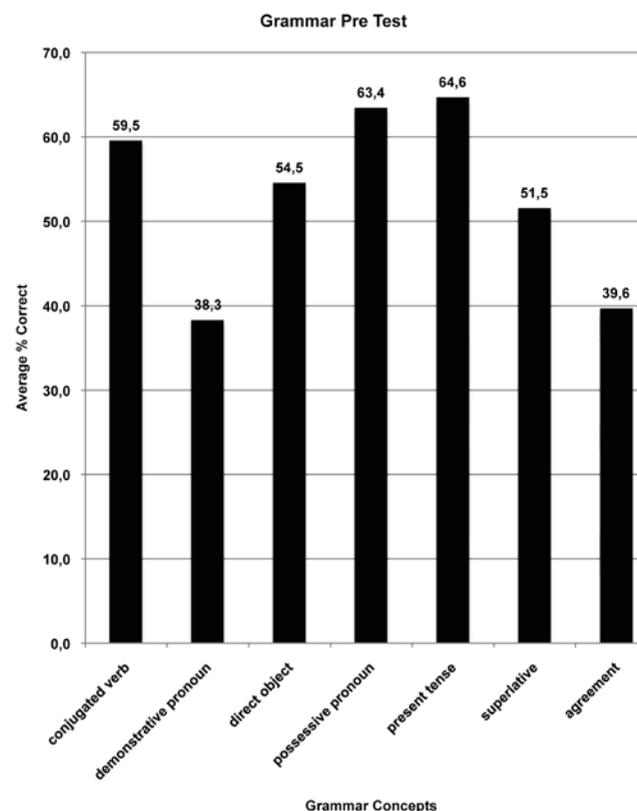


Table 1. Results of the Grammar Pre-Test

each of the methods used in the presentation stage (fairytale, picture prompt, written text, video clip, music videos), required a different set of teaching skills. Furthermore, to fully influence the students’ understanding of the concept at this stage, the PACE model advocates more exposure over a longer period. That said, a fair degree of understanding was obtained despite time constraints. This may have been due to the fact that the students were already familiar with the concepts, to varying degrees, and not encountering them for the first time.

The (A) Attention stage of both classes was initiated by a question that focused the attention of the students on the form. As the students were already familiar with the con-

cepts – our aim being to revise and increase deeper understanding – we assumed that the students would be capable of recognising the concepts if we used the English names for them. We asked them to underline or circle the concepts from a variety of exercises.

The French class struggled most with the concept of agreement as there were two – albeit similar – concepts they were asked to recognise rather than one (the adjective agreement and verb agreement). Additionally, not all students knew what the concept of demonstrative pronoun or superlative meant, but through working together, they were able to achieve a greater understanding. The direct object and agreement were the concepts that students from the Dutch class were the least

familiar with. In both instances, this lack of knowledge may have been due to less exposure to these concepts than the others – or it may have been some time since they were first taught.

In the next stage, (C) Co-construction, the students co-constructed the concept rule. The major difference with the purely inductive approach is that the students were given some form of scaffolding to help them structure the rule, such as clues being offered or us purposely drawing attention to differences in the concepts (i.e. masculine/feminine or plural/singular). As stated by Adair-Hauck and Donato (2000): ‘Teachers need to be aware that the help they provide is graduated and may range from brief hints about the target form to explicit instruction if needed.’

As we both became more familiar with this way of working, it was easier to adapt to students’ needs. Some concepts demanded more attention than others. In French, for instance, most help was required for the superlative. To make this concept clear, I needed to compare the superlative with the adjective and the comparative. Despite this, not only was a deeper sense of understanding of the individual concepts achieved, but also an awareness of the affinity between grammar concepts. This was especially obvious in the Dutch class when students came up with the word ‘dependence’ for the concept of agreement; while in the French class, the students became aware that there was a correlation between the verb agreement and adjective agreement and the direct object and the concept of agreement, in general.

The final stage, (E) Extension, was divided into two different sets of exercises. The first was administered directly at the end of the lesson in which the concept was revised. To help students improve their recognition skills, they were asked to make sentences illustrating the concept, exchange them with another student, and then underline the

word(s) that demonstrated a particular concept. A second extension exercise inspired the students to use meaningful language based on the content or form exposed in the presentation: ‘The extension activity phase closes the circle of the PACE lesson and puts the ‘whole’ back into story-based language teaching’ (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2010). In other words, the exercises should be linked to the presentation stage rather than being a series of disconnected practice sentences.

In the second set of extension exercises, the students practised recognising the concepts through online exercises. In essence, these exercises did not fit in the extension stage of the PACE model as they were not connected to the presentation stage. However, I decided to include them in order to give the students a chance – within the time available for this research – to practise working with the concepts before taking the post-test.

Results

A post-test at the conclusion of the intervention ascertained whether the students’ knowledge of these grammar concepts had improved². As Table 2 illustrates, there was a significant improvement in the understanding of these four concepts:

- Demonstrative pronoun increased from mean 38.3% to 82.50% – (a 44.2% improvement)
- Direct object increased from mean 54.5% to 78.63% – (a 24.13% improvement)
- Superlative increased from mean 51.5% to 99.25% – (a 47.75% improvement)
- Agreement increased from mean 39.6% to 87.13% – (a 47.53% improvement)

Relatively speaking, of the four concepts the direct object underwent the smallest improvement. Possibly, student understanding of this concept prior to the intervention was at a

higher level than the other three concepts and, therefore, the post-intervention result is less impressive. However, there remains a significant difference in percentile improvement between the direct object and the other three concepts. This could probably be explained by a number of reasons. It is the most difficult concept of the four; the direct object can be easily confused with the indirect object; and there are quite a few exceptions to the rule for this concept. In the PACE model, the focus is

on the general rule, not the exceptions.

Interestingly, the knowledge of the other concepts – the three not included in the intervention – had also undergone an improvement, albeit to a significantly lesser degree:

- Conjugated verb increased from mean 59.5% to 72.38% – (a 12.88% improvement)
- Possessive pronoun increased from mean 63.4% to 70.75% – (a 7.35% improvement)
- Present tense increased from mean 64.6% to 70.88% – (a 6.28% improvement)

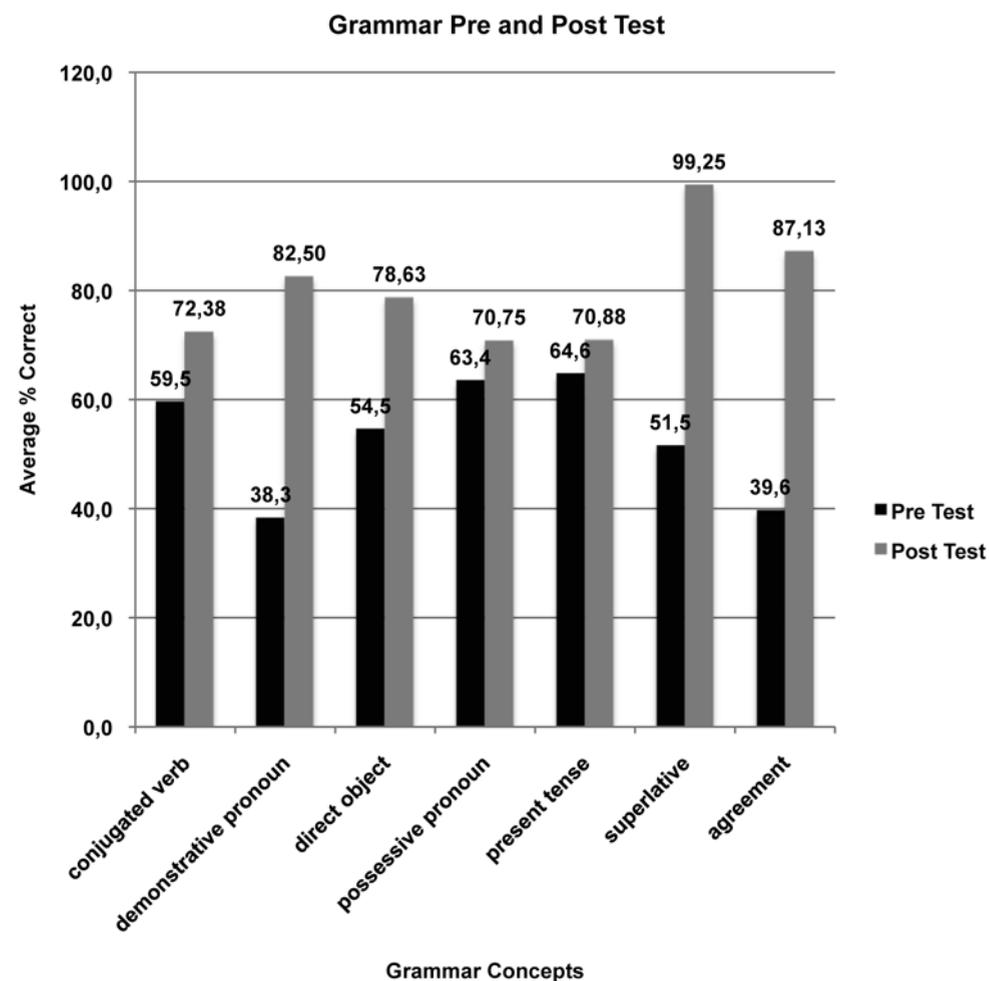


Table 2: Results of the Grammar Pre- and Post-Test.

Whilst evaluating these improved results for both the taught and non-taught concepts, we must not forget that the students were taking the test for a second time – the pre- and post-test were identical – and this will have had a slight effect on the results. Another factor that needs to be taken into account is that the students will have undergone a certain degree of autonomous development in the three weeks between the pre- and the post-test. It is not unthinkable, however, that the slight improvement of the three non-taught concepts is linked to the significant improvement of the four taught concepts. This is a plausible theory if we consider the aim of the PACE method: to instill deeper thinking patterns in students' grammar learning. As we had been working on the students' metacognitive skills, it would be conceivable that their deeper understanding of the four taught concepts influenced their comprehension of the three non-taught concepts. In all likelihood, if we then focused on the remaining three of the initial seven concepts, they should also improve to a similar degree.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to improve the students' knowledge of grammatical terminology. However, whilst the positive outcome cannot be attributed solely to the PACE model³, the advantages of this method manifested themselves during the research process, namely the Presentation stage and Co-construction stage.

The Presentation stage – in which meaning precedes form – emphasises the communicative approach to grammar teaching. Grammar is offered in the form of meaningful language: first comes the meaning, then the grammar.

The Co-construction stage – which engag-

es students' deeper thinking skills – stresses the cognitive approach. Its greatest innovation is that it introduces a dialogic approach to grammar teaching. Through dialogue, students are encouraged to view the concepts they are learning holistically as part of a larger grammar spectrum in which they are interlaced and interdependent.

In fact, the PACE model compels students to look at the bigger picture where grammar is viewed as part of a language, not as an isolated factor. This is perhaps its overall benefit: it advocates grammar as a means to an end, a tool necessary to learn how to communicate more fluently.

As an added advantage, this method of teaching grammar is not only effective but also enjoyable for both teachers and students. The impact felt by the latter in particular was reflected in an informal evaluation conducted at the end of the research. One student commented that it helped him to 'be more fluent than parroting examples', while another explained that he could now 'make sense out of a language instead of just memorizing certain rules'. However, the students' experience of using the PACE model was perhaps best summed up in the words of one pupil who wrote: 'I can understand why I am writing what I am writing.'

NOTES

1. It was surprising that students scored below average on recognition of the present tense. Of the two questions on this grammatical concept, one could be read as possibly being in the future tense (given the wording of the sentence). In fact, the majority of the students gave that answer. However, the verb that was underlined in the question was a present tense verb – and it is within reason to expect students to be able to identify this as a present tense verb used in a possible future tense context.

2. The mean for the pre-test was 53.1% with a standard deviation of 9.26%. The post-test had a mean of 80.2% with a standard deviation of 9.06%. There was a 27.1 point, or 51% increase in the mean, between the pre- and post-test, however the spread of the data was very similar.
3. As the research was not designed to prove whether the PACE model was the only tool that could achieve positive results, it did not involve a control group.

Literature

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ANNIKA GROENEVELD recently graduated cum laude with a Masters in Education from the Hogeschool van Amsterdam. She is currently employed as a French teacher at the American School of the Hague, and a Teacher Trainer in both the French and English departments of the Hogeschool van Amsterdam. She won the first prize of the Gerard Westhoffscriptieprijs for her master thesis *Adjective or Adverb? Grammatical Terminology in the Foreign Language Classroom*. (Groeneveld, 2010). E-mail: <agroeneveld@ash.nl> or <a.groeneveld@hva.nl>.

APPENDIX

Dutch Grammatical Terminology Test – some examples of questions

1. Kylie en haar broer gaan op bezoek bij hun familie in de Verenigde Staten. The underlined word is:
 - a. a possessive pronoun
 - b. a demonstrative pronoun
 - c. a personal pronoun
 - d. an article

2. Jan heeft een groot paard. The relationship between the underlined words is:
 - a. a plural
 - b. a conjugation
 - c. an agreement
 - d. a tense

3. Deze schoenen zijn de mooiste in de winkel. The underlined word is:
 - a. a noun
 - b. a comparative
 - c. a verb
 - d. a superlative

French Grammatical Terminology Test – some examples of questions

4. Ces amis sont américains. The underlined word is:
 - a. a personal pronoun
 - b. a possessive pronoun
 - c. a demonstrative pronoun
 - d. an article

5. Est-ce que tu as fait tes devoirs? The underlined word is:
 - a. a demonstrative pronoun
 - b. a possessive pronoun
 - c. an article
 - d. a personal pronoun

6. La fille est petite. The relationship between the underlined words is:
 - a. an agreement
 - b. a plural
 - c. a tense
 - d. a conjugation

Samen lezen? Leuk!

De invloed van samenwerkend leren in het leesstrategieonderwijs op de motivatie en de resultaten voor leesvaardigheid voor het vak Frans

CORINA PELGRIM

Dit artikel is een verslag van een onderzoek dat gemaakt is ten behoeve van de eerstegraads opleiding tot leraar van de Radboud Universiteit. Onderzocht is of het toepassen van samenwerkend leren in het leesstrategieonderwijs de motivatie van de leerlingen vergroot voor het vak Frans in het algemeen en het leesstrategieonderwijs in het bijzonder. Ook is onderzocht of het samenwerkend leren de resultaten van de leerlingen heeft verbeterd.

Hoe motiveer ik mijn leerlingen voor het leesonderwijs? En hoe wek ik hun interesse voor leesstrategieën? Naast de wens om leerlingen te boeien bij leesvaardigheid, waren ook de tegenvallende resultaten van de centrale examens Frans een reden om het leesonderwijs in de eindexamenklassen havo en vwo van mijn middelbare school eens onder de loep te nemen.

Sinds drie jaar werk ik op de particuliere middelbare school Parkendaal Lyceum met vestigingen in Arnhem en Apeldoorn. De schoolpopulatie is er om meer dan één reden afwijkend van een reguliere school. Veel leerlingen in de eindexamenklassen komen pas in een laat stadium en voor een korte periode naar de school. Het gaat hoofdzakelijk om leerlingen van de bovenbouw van havo en vwo die voor een of twee jaar naar een parti-

culiere school komen om hier hun diploma te behalen. In de meeste gevallen gaat het om leerlingen die komen voor het zogenaamde tweedekansonderwijs: zij zijn om diverse redenen uitgevallen in het reguliere onderwijs en hopen op deze school alsnog hun diploma te kunnen halen. Hun kansen worden zeker vergroot als de school kan bijdragen aan een stimulerende leeromgeving waarbij leerlingen weer betrokken worden bij hun eigen leerproces en bovendien weer vertrouwen krijgen in eigen kunnen.

Een probleem waar niet alleen ik maar ook mijn collega-docenten van het moderne vreemdetalenonderwijs mee geconfronteerd werden op onze school, waren de lage scores die deze leerlingen halen voor leesvaardigheid. Omdat het eindcijfer van de leerling voor vijftig procent wordt bepaald door het Centraal Examen en dus door het niveau van de leesvaardigheid, was de wens al gauw geboren om te onderzoeken hoe de scores van deze vaardigheid verbeterd konden worden.

Onderzoeksopzet

De drie grote pijlers van mijn onderzoek zijn: leesstrategieën, motivatie en samenwerkend