What do teachers need to know about grammar?
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Sue Edwards
sue.edwards@wintec.ac.nz

Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec), Hamilton

Overview
- Previous research in this area
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusions and Further Research

Which teachers?

Mainstream primary school teachers in New Zealand

Why?
- There are more ELLs in NZ primary schools than in secondary schools
- ELLs spend most of their time in the mainstream classroom

Defining terms
- Which teachers?
- What is grammar?
- What does it mean to ‘know about’ grammar?
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What is grammar?

Swan (2005, p. 3)

“…even if you feel you know pretty well what grammar is, you might not find it easy to define.”

Definitions of grammar

Swan (2005, p. 7)

“…grammar is essentially a limited set of devices for expressing certain kinds of necessary meaning that cannot be conveyed by referential vocabulary alone.”

Thornbury (1999, p. 2)

“Grammar is conventionally seen as the study of the syntax and morphology of sentences…”

Morphology

“The system of rules that cover the formation of words.”

(Thornbury, 1999, p. 2)

Syntax

“The system of rules that cover the order of words in a sentence.” (Thornbury, 1999, p. 2)
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Grammar in context

- “Teacher knowledge about language can be supplemented with information from grammar texts which promote learning and teaching at whole text level, rather than isolated sentences and words which are divorced from curriculum-related texts” (ELIP, p. 5).

- “All texts promote a focus on word, sentence and whole text analysis.” (ELIP, p. 4)

What does it mean to ‘know’ something?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To know THAT</th>
<th>To know HOW</th>
<th>To know WHEN and WHY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shulman (1987)</td>
<td>Content knowledge</td>
<td>General pedagogical knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What knowledge should teachers have?

Have content and pedagogical content knowledge for supporting English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners to succeed in the curriculum.

(NZ Graduating Teacher Standards, 2007).
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Proposed framework for mainstream teachers’ grammatical knowledge (Myhill, Jones & Watson, 2013, p. 80)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical Content knowledge (declarative)</th>
<th>Metalinguistic pedagogical content knowledge</th>
<th>Grammatical pedagogical content knowledge (procedural)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ explicit knowledge of grammar in terms of morphology and syntax. It is declarative knowledge, which is conscious and can be articulated, and uses the metalanguage of grammatical terminology.</td>
<td>Teachers’ knowledge about how to teach language in order to address learners’ needs.</td>
<td>Teachers’ knowledge about how and when to teach grammar in order to address learners’ language needs. This includes procedural knowledge of the inter-relationship between grammatical constructions and how texts work to shape meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What do teachers need to know about grammar?

What grammatical content knowledge are mainstream primary teachers in New Zealand expected to possess, in order to effectively utilise Ministry of Education resources for supporting ELLs?

Previous studies of teacher Knowledge about Grammar (KAG)

- Jones & Chen (2012)
- Myhill, Jones & Watson (2013);

- How prepared are teachers to enact the (new) curriculum in terms of their knowledge of grammar and their related teaching practices?

- How does teachers’ grammatical knowledge impact on the teaching of writing?

Teacher KAG: New Zealand

Overview of implicit and explicit references to grammar in:
- The NZ Curriculum (English) (2007)
- The Literacy Learning Progressions (2010)
- The English Language Learning Progressions (2008)

- Study of teacher KAG (42 primary teachers)
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The current study

Scope of investigation

Findings

Scope: I looked at...

(MOE, 2008) ☐ ELLP: English Language Learning Progressions

(MOE, 2008) ☐ ELIP: English Language Intensive Programme (Primary_)

(MOE, 2009) ☐ SELLIPS: Supporting English Language Learning in Primary Schools

Scope: I looked for…any reference to:

Word Classes
- e.g. nouns, verbs, adjectives

Word structure
- e.g. plurals, comparative adjectives, verb tenses

Phrases
- e.g. noun phrases, adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases

Sentence (and clause) structure
- e.g. compound sentences, question formation, relative clauses

Findings

Number and density of grammatical references
- ➔ How often are grammatical words referred to?

Number of different grammatical items
- ➔ How much do I need to know?

Frequency of reference to grammatical items
- ➔ Which bits of grammar are most important?
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Number of grammatical items: ELLP (2008)

Number of grammatical items: ELIP (2008)

Number of grammatical items: SELLIPS (2009)

Density of grammatical items

DENSITY:
ELIP – 11.4
ELLP – 5.4
SELLIPS – 1.9
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No. of different grammatical items: ELLP

- Sentences
- Phrases
- Word structure
- Word classes

No. of different grammatical items: ELIP

- Sentences
- Phrases
- Word structure
- Word classes

No. of different grammatical items: SELLIPS

- Sentences
- Phrases
- Word structure
- Word classes

Most frequently used grammatical items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>ELLP</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>ELIP</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>SELLIPS</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>nouns</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>nouns</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>noun phrases</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>simple sentences</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>adjectives</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>nouns</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>phrases</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>pronouns</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>adjectives</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>verbs</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>action verbs</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>verbs</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>compound sentences</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>adverbial phrases</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>adverbial phrases</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>noun phrases</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>wh’ questions</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>modals</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>verb phrases</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>articles</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>adverbs</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>complex sentences</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>present tense</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>conjunctions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>articles</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>prepositions</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>simple sentences</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>pronouns</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>definite articles</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>pronouns</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

- There are differing amounts and density of grammatical terminology in the three documents.
- The ELIP document contains more terminology and has the highest density of terminology.
- The SELLIPS documents have the least amount and density of terminology.
- Grammatical terminology related to word classes and sentences is the most frequently occurring.
- Grammatical terminology related to word structure and phrases is the least frequently occurring.
- Certain grammatical items appear more frequently than others.

Lack of information in documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example/s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELLP (n=18)</td>
<td>A group of words functioning as an adverb in a sentence</td>
<td>e.g. I’m going to the shop to buy a drink.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELLIPS (n=19)</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>e.g. The small snail crawls onto the leaf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELIP (n=61)</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>e.g. on the beach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is an adverbial phrase?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Definition and examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELLP (MOE, 2008)</td>
<td>A group of words functioning as an adverb in a sentence e.g. I’m going to the shop to buy a drink.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Language (MOE, 1996)</td>
<td>Just as an adjective can have accompanying modifiers, so an adverb can also e.g. She smiled at him very sweetly indeed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Grammar Companion for Primary teachers</td>
<td>Adverbial phrases are expressed by a group of words generally beginning with a preposition e.g. near the house.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where do teachers go to increase GCK?

- ELLP – contains a glossary – 33 items of syntax & morphology
- SELLIPS – ‘refer to Exploring Language (1996)’ (p. 6)
- ELIP – ‘a select list of helpful grammar texts can be found on ESOL Online’ (p. 5)
- Are these adequate? Do they contain the same information?
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Use of different terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELIP</th>
<th>ELLP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possessive pronouns</strong>&lt;br&gt;e.g. my name, your name (Foundation, Oral Interaction, p. 2b)</td>
<td><strong>Possessive adjective</strong>: a word that occurs before a noun and indicates the possession of this noun – “his”, “her”, “their”, “your”, “our” (Years 1-4, Glossary, p. 68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of <strong>detailed noun groups</strong> to build up the description, e.g. front right hand corner (Stage 2 Writing, p. 19c)</td>
<td>The writer uses some <strong>expanded noun phrases</strong> – big strong hen; the old cane; little chicks. (Years 1-4, p. 61)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further research

- Confirm levels of teacher GCK
- How much PGCK do teachers have?
- How can teachers develop their GCK and also their PGCK?
- Provide more materials or ways for teachers’ to develop knowledge of grammatical terms (in context)
- Develop a common understanding among teachers of grammatical terms

Something to aim for?

- **Teachers who are**: “successful in integrating grammar into a content-based instructional framework”
- **Teachers who know**:
  - “how to mine a content-area text for potential grammatical and lexico-grammatical items to teach; how to explain and practise structures within the rich context in which they were found; how to achieve a proper balance between letting content or letting student error patterns drive the selection of grammar structures to be taught” (Petraki & Hill, 2010, p.249).

Selected references