HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE GRAMMAR

- a Study of Opinions on Using Fiction in Grammar Teaching

Li-Sandra Sandell
ABSTRACT

Li-Sandra Sandell

Harry Potter and the Order of the Grammar
- a study of opinions on using literature in grammar teaching

Pages: 26
Appendices: 3

The aim of this essay is to investigate teachers’, students’ and researchers’ opinions on the idea of using literature to motivate students into learning grammar. How is and how could authentic texts be used in grammar teaching?

My research is based on a questionnaire given to 23 students at an upper secondary school after participating in a lesson constructed to try out the essay thesis. The essay is also based on literature on the subject and three personal interviews.

The students were very positive towards the idea and stated that it would feel more real to be taught grammar from real texts. The teachers did not want to teach grammar sections as before. Instead they choose to use a more individual response strategy which they feel gives better results. The idea of giving individual response as a way of grammar teaching is also advocated in the background. The idea of using real texts instead of a textbook is given both positive and negative credit.

Search words: grammar, literature, textbook, course book, pedagogy, attitudes,
# Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1

2 AIM ...................................................................................................................................... 2

3 METHOD .............................................................................................................................. 3

3.1 STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE .......................................................................................... 3

3.2 TEACHERS ...................................................................................................................... 4

3.3 LITERATURE .................................................................................................................. 4

4 BACKGROUND .................................................................................................................. 4

4.1 GRAMMAR ...................................................................................................................... 4

4.2 HISTORY OF GRAMMAR TEACHING ......................................................................... 5

4.3 VIEWS OF USING COURSE BOOKS .............................................................................. 6

4.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT .................................................................................. 8

4.5 SCHOOL DOCUMENTS AND OPINIONS ...................................................................... 11

4.6 MOTIVATION ................................................................................................................ 12

5 ANALYSIS .......................................................................................................................... 12

5.1 STUDENTS’ QUESTIONNAIRE ....................................................................................... 13

5.1.1 Students’ Attitudes towards the Subject ................................................................ 13

5.1.2 Students’ Attitudes towards the Essay’s Thesis ....................................................... 14

5.1.3 Students’ Attitudes towards the Lesson .................................................................. 15

5.2 THE TEACHER INTERVIEWS ....................................................................................... 16

5.2.1 How they Work with Grammar and Literature Today ............................................. 16

5.2.2 Thoughts on using Literature in Grammar Teaching ............................................. 18

5.2.3 Has there been any Change in Attitudes towards Grammar? ................................. 19

5.3 SUMMARY .................................................................................................................... 19

6 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION ....................................................................................... 20

7 WORKS CITED .................................................................................................................. 23

7.1 LITERATURE .................................................................................................................. 23

7.2 OTHER SOURCES ......................................................................................................... 24

7.2.1 www sources ......................................................................................................... 24

7.2.2 Interviews ............................................................................................................. 24

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – The Lesson

Appendix 2 – The Student Questionnaire

Appendix 3 – The Teacher’s Questions
I Introduction

The importance of grammar teaching has always been debated. Today one of the popular ways is the use of context based learning examples. But what are they? Would grammar actually be acquired more easily when taught from real texts instead of a workbook – maybe from a real novel? My idea in this essay is the possibility of using a novel as a coursebook. Maybe it could even function as an overall coursebook for every subject. The novel in mind is *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* which I feel contains springboards to everything students need to learn: moral, values, science, geography, philosophy, history and maybe math – and definitely several areas within language teaching. The teaching possibilities of Harry Potter are interminable. A language teacher could work with characters, scenes, plots, vocabulary, collocations, word classes, pragmatics, and so on. There are already several teacher-guides for literature available, but grammar exercises are the one thing I find missing.

I have heard arguments from students, and also felt myself, that grammar examples are fabricated and that grammar exercises do not suit real life text and speech. Therefore I would wish for more authentic exercises to be present. I believe it is a major motivation point for learners: to feel the need to learn grammar and the necessity for it in real life. At my university we used a grammar book where examples were drawn from a corpora and I felt that grammar came more alive and real when we could study it from authentic text samples thus “how forms and meanings are actually used” (Biber et al). Then the question arises: why not teach grammar from real text with our learners? We could teach them grammar from popular fiction that the students know of and, hopefully, want to read. It must be just as easy to use already-made teaching exercises in grammar on real fiction as it is to use the old workbooks. The exercises just need to be constructed by someone.

One who has done this, to help educators without a great deal of time to enrich their teaching by using fantasy literature is Dr. Phyllis J. Perry, doctor in education. She has developed a book for teachers with various language exercises, summaries and teacher’s guide to different popular works (2003). Here Harry Potter is presented alongside works such as *The Hobbit*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; and newer works such as *The Amber Spyglass*. It does not, however, include pure grammar exercises, it is more about words and phrases.
Harry Potter has been called a phenomenon and a world wide success (Gupta 2003). During the 90s Jane Kathleen Rowling wrote the first outlines and manuscripts about the boy who has enchanted the world. In terms of genre the novels are a mix between fantasy novel and boarding school novel. Rowling describes the magical world in a very credible way and writes in a humorous way (Nationalencyklopedin, www source).

During the time used to consider the essay topic it has occurred to me that it might be just as tiresome for students to read one Harry Potter book for a whole year as workbook and therefore I will aim at showing the appropriacy of using various real texts and authentic examples in grammar education. This essay could then apply to all examples of real texts and fiction which are of interest to the students. The investigation’s main focus will be on what opinions teachers have about teaching and student’s attitudes towards being taught grammar from authentic texts. The investigation will focus on upper secondary levels but the literature also applies to secondary school, or lower, if it is adjusted.

2 Aim

In this essay I wish to take a closer look at the response from students and their attitudes towards applying the teaching of grammar to real fiction, such as novels, poems, articles, information etc. I also want to investigate what some teachers think of the idea of involving grammar activities in their literature and reading. My hypothesis is that it is more motivating for students to learn grammar from real fiction than from a general workbook.

My questions run as follows:

1) What are students’ attitudes towards being taught grammar from real texts?
2) How do teachers respond to using literature in grammar teaching?
3) What does different language pedagogy say on the subject?

I want to point out that my intention in this essay will not be to give any account of or draw any conclusion from the debate of whether we should teach grammar or not. Even when I do refer to opinions from different sides it is only to widen and to support my question: the attitudes towards using fiction in grammar teaching instead of a regular workbook.
3 Method

To investigate the opinions on using literature in grammar teaching I have chosen to focus on three elements: students, teachers and literature on the subject matter.

3.1 Student Questionnaire

To be able to answer the question about students’ opinions concerning being taught from texts I have decided to try my theory out in school. At an upper secondary school I was given the opportunity to teach an aspect about grammar from the Harry Potter novel the class was working with. My lesson will be revision and discussion about language building, syntax and also bring up the concept of context with examples from four chapters of homework in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. The students will also be asked to participate in the study through filling out a questionnaire about their opinions on grammar, attitudes towards the subject in general and about the lesson.

Robert Burns (2000) accounts for several methods in drawing statements and opinions in attitude surveys of which I have chosen the Likert method for the main part of the student’s questionnaire. The Likert method is well-known to most people who have filled in a survey. Its aim is for the participants to mark on a scale their degree of agreement concerning a given statement/a given opinion (559). About validation and the advantages with the Likert method, Burns states:

“the fact that this method produces more homogeneous scales and increases the probability that a unitary attitude is being measured, and therefore that validity (construct and concurrent) and reliability are reasonably high.” (560)

The greatest disadvantage of this method is the one Burns states as “the total score of an individual has little clear meaning, since many patterns of response to the various items may produce the same score” (560). Thus Burns credits survey research with being one of the few ways of gathering information on attitudes and having good validation when survey statistics are being scrutinized (568).

I have created a grammar revision lesson about syntax using chapter 8 – 11 in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* which I will conduct at an upper secondary school. The lesson is 60 minutes plus time for filling in the questionnaire. For a longer description of the lesson’s outcome see appendix 1, and the questionnaire is appendix 2.
3.2 Teachers

To investigate what opinions teachers might have on the subject I will conduct three interviews of which one is with the above mentioned students’ teacher. The advantages of this technique are flexibility and the fact that a larger number of reactions and responses from each interviewee can be obtained. One disadvantage for me however, is my partiality to the subject matter and its possibility of biasing the interview which is described as possible threat to the research (Burns 582-583). Since I am both very fond of the book in question and very positive to the subject I will conduct interviews about, I am afraid that it may affect the interviewees. To view the questions, see appendix 3.

3.3 Literature

In the background I investigate what different theories, doctors, teachers and researchers have expressed on the matter. I will look at literature by, for instance, Penny Ur, teacher and teacher-trainer and the author of several books on teaching, Scott Thornbury, writer of several ELT books and articles, and Marianne Celce-Murcia who has written several contributions in the debate on Universal Grammar and teaching.

4 Background.

I will now present different views of grammar teaching, its history and the prevailing teaching ideas.

4.1 Grammar

What is grammar and why should we learn it? The importance of grammar and how to teach it have been disputed for a long time. In How to Teach Grammar (1999), Thornbury describes grammar as the study of how we use sounds and words to create sentences and to communicate with each other. Grammar seeks to explain why some utterances are acceptable while some are not (Thornbury 1-4). The word grammar aims at the system of rules that a language user has acquired and that governs their language use. The word also includes the line of research that looks at the grammatical rules in human language, but also as the word for a particular language’s grammatical system (Nationalencyklopedin, www source). Thornbury states:

“Grammar, after all, is a description of the regularities in a language, and knowledge of these regularities provides the learner with the means to generate a potentially enormous number of original sentences.” (15)
He continues by describing this function as a way to help students linguistically expressing what they wish to express – not just the basic phrases that they are taught in class or from a phrase-guide. Grammar teaching helps to avoid ambiguity in communication and also to enhance the attention a learner pays to the language they meet. It also increases their awareness and grammatical skills. Thornbury also describes the problem of learner expectation. Students and learners have ideas about what language teaching should be like and what it should consist of. If an educator ignores the students’ wishes for these traditional grammar activities s/he might frustrate the students by not meeting their expectations (15-17). Some arguments against grammar, mentioned by Thornbury, are our innate capability to acquire the grammar we need, and the general rule that we learn best by doing and trying ourselves (18).

### 4.2 History of Grammar Teaching

The prevailing way of teaching grammar has changed frequently, and has done so over the centuries. Several ideas have been scrutinized and debated. Thornbury ascribes grammar as being one of the few subjects that everyone has a strong opinion about. School boards, students and society have their own opinion on the subject matter. Thornbury states that no other issue has engaged theorists and practitioners more than this debate (14).

During the latter part of the Middle Ages (A.D. 1100-1400) a movement appeared called “scholasticism”. It was an intellectual style where people were supposed to study texts and with their own logic work out all necessary grammar subconsciously, which took about 100 years before a movement against the scholasticism surfaced. The humanist movement wanted to “revive the studies of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy” (Mulroy 50).

In 1622 the schoolmaster and textbook writer Joseph Webbe was one of the first to question the importance of grammar teaching claiming that students acquire language through different communication activities (Thornbury 14).
During the late 19th century and early 20th century John Dewey, founder of progressive education (Mulroy 62-63) and founder of reform pedagogies upbringing theories (Nationalencyklopedin, www source) developed his notions of teaching. He wrote, in his work *Democracy and Education* published in 1916, that teachers should seek a balance between formal and informal knowledge (Mulroy). Dewey’s opinion was that students should learn by problem solving and their own actions, “learning by doing”. He also advocated that texts and assignments for students should be based on their own interests (Nationalencyklopedin, www source). Mulroy’s own opinion is that “the ideal approach to education is one that alternates in a rational way between progressive and traditional approaches” (63). Throughout the late 20th century, grammar teaching has been put aside. David Mulroy claims that the decline of grammar knowledge among students, even as a first language, has been decreasing since the 1960’s. This lack of knowledge affects not just the comprehension of the own target language but also has impact on the possibility to learn a second language successfully (xi).

4.3 Views of Using Course Books

Ur also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of using a coursebook with several arguments from both sides (184-185).

**Positive effects** according to Ur are that: the course book provides a secure frame for both teacher and students which makes them feel that they know what they are to do and infuses a sense of achievement when working with coursebooks and finishing section after section. A coursebook often follows the syllabus and official governmental documents and is also a way for insecure or inexperienced teachers to achieve guidance and support. Students without a coursebook become more teacher-dependent. Ur’s own opinion on this matter is that a course book is preferable. It helps to time and regulate lessons and the material gives her a jumping-board for own ideas, materials and topics to use in the class. Ur also claims that in those classes that she has tried to work without a course book the students have complained about a feeling of lack of purpose and that their learning has not been taken seriously when not providing them a course book (193).

O’Neill writes in *ELT Journal* (1982) about the question of using textbooks and he is strongly in favour of using it. Even though O’Neill acknowledges the fact that students are unique and different from each other is mostly a question of interest and learning style. What they need to learn is very often the same and there is a risk that we let the differences cloud the similarities. The core of what the students’ need to learn is often captured by textbooks, claims O’Neill, but also emphasizes the importance of teachers’ activities when applying a textbook:
“Since language is an instrument for generating what people need and want to say spontaneously, a great deal must depend on spontaneous, creative interaction in the classroom. Textbooks can help to bring this about, and a great deal in their design can be improved in order to do this. If that creative interaction does not occur, textbooks are simply pages of dead, inert written symbols and teaching is no more than a symbolic ritual, devoid of any real significance for what is going on outside the classroom.” (111)

O’Neill also brings up two very important advantages of using a textbook: it gives a great deal of value for money and it also makes it very easy for a student who might have missed a lesson to catch up.

Some of Ur’s drawbacks with using a textbook are: Every learner is different from the next and should not be expected to acquire the same knowledge from general textbooks. Both acquisition and personal interests are different from their peers. The set structure in a coursebook may prevent a teacher’s creativity and/or willingness to vary his/hers methods of teaching and lead to boredom among the students. Ur expresses the lack of exercises of grammatical meaning in course books (76). She goes on to state that grammar is seen as a part of good language knowledge but its place in foreign language teaching is not self-evident. Ur says that a great deal of grammar might be intuitive, as in our mother tongue, but emphasizes that it might be good to focus on the differences in grammar, syntax, etc between the first language and the target language (76-77). According to Cook, in *Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar* (1994) pedagogical teaching approaches have tried to a find balance between the communicative approach, learning a 2nd language by communicating with others, and a more individual approach, learning by reflecting and turning into yourself (44).

According to Harmer, in *How to Teach English* (2004), textbooks are only collections of material. However well planned and intended they are both students and teachers should view them with “healthy scepticism”. He claims textbooks should be used with reason to avoid being the risk of controlling teachers and students. When they are used they give a sense of reassurance when making it possible for a student to both look forward in the book in anticipation or for planning ahead and to look back with a feeling of achievement (117).
Harmer describes that a large number of teachers do not to use the textbook entirely but selects texts and exercises from it or alternating the content order (111-112). Harmer continues by providing ideas of how to work with one’s own text material and how to adapt the textbook. The same kind of activities can be used but altered to fit a new text. A new game or exercise can be used on a text from the course book (112-115). Harmer also discusses the necessity of a textbook and states several risks with a textbook such as stagnation of ideas, creativity and the possible lack of student (and teacher) interest in the texts and exercises. Harmer concludes that a textbook could be omitted completely, and even be of advantage to the students, “if, and only if,” the teacher has enough experience and time to create a durable scheme of topics and exercises, or if the teacher has a wide bank of material at hand. Harmer’s opinion is that if such a decision is made it has to be in agreement with the students (117).

In Nilsson (2005) four teachers have been interviewed on the subject of using a textbook or not. Their answers cohere well with the above presented opinions on the use of textbooks. They stated it to be a security for the students and creating a sense of achievement, which they measured against the risk of monotonous lessons and that the decision of what the teacher should do is decided by the textbook author (13-16).

4.4 The Importance of Context

In Thornbury (1999) one chapter is dedicated to approaches on teaching grammar through text and he describes the context advocate’s idea that language is “context-sensitive”, which means that it is not possible to interpret fully if we are not given the right context for an utterance. The usage of examples is not fully appropriate for learners without context. The full meaning of their claim is shown in Thornbury’s example where one disadvantage with fabricated texts is that:

“… the decontextualising of grammar often results in practice exercises that are of doubtful value. For example:
1. Choose the correct form of the verb:
a Do you work/Are you working every weekend?
b ‘Cigarette?’ ‘No thanks, I’m not smoking/I don’t smoke.’
c ‘What do you eat/are you eating?’ ‘Cake.’” (71)
This exercise clearly demonstrates the point made by the proponents for context related examples. Whatever example the students pick it is actually grammatically correct. Therefore these exercises lack both an obvious right answer and wrong answer. It is more about what choice is suitable – which is context based! Some advantages of the context approach are that the students can see how an item, a word, a phrase or a word class, functions in real life communication. One major point is that if we always teach grammar from one-sentence examples, they might only be able to apply the grammar and produce single one-sentences in their own communication (71-73).

Cook (1994) states that the use of real massive text is claimed to support L2 teaching and acquiring. By exposing the learners to several texts, with not too many new or too difficult features, learners may subconsciously acquire new knowledge which differs from and develops the knowledge they have from their Universal Grammar (42-43) (a theory about how children can acquire grammar with innate knowledge, which Noam Chomsky was an advocate and developer of). Cook claims that with a UG approach to language teaching the learners are able to structure knowledge in their minds from language evidence to which they are exposed (44). It might also be good to focus on syntax in L2 acquisition since word order might be both ambiguous and obscure. Current theories on UG, on the other hand, minimise the syntax acquisition while maximising the work and acquisition of vocabulary items (43), while Cook claims that learners need to attain knowledge of how different lexical items are actually used in a grammatical structure. Cook feels that learners need to know more than “syntax, function and meaning” (44) of a phrase but to know each word and its requirements in use. She calls this approach within UG’s teaching and learning a “syntactic view of vocabulary” (44). To point out its importance she mentions a work by Gross from 1990 in which he managed to find in the French language 12,000 simple verbs of which no two could be used in exactly the same way in sentences. Also Ur concludes that it is not helpful to the students just to know how to change a word grammatically if they do not know how it affects the meaning of the word (76).
Thornbury mentions UG in his section focused on ‘against grammar’ and explains the notion that our innate acquisition of grammar is far more developed than our learned mental grammar will ever be. UG advocates claim that a grammar derived from textbooks will never evolve into a “mental grammar” (19). Celce-Murcia in *New Perspectives on Grammar Teaching in Second Language Classrooms* (2002), argues why a context-used approach is pedagogically superior to a decontextualized examples consisting of single sentences (100). To be able to do more than understand and reproduce short sentences learners need to know more about the context, such as place, participants and the purpose of the utterance. In contrast to Chomsky’s Universal Grammar, Celce-Murcia refers to Och, who claims that the language we acquire is constrained by social and cultural expectations. Och considers that languages are formed by the experiences of our surroundings rather than by an innate and abstract universal mechanism (119-120). According to Celce-Murcia, Och sides with the ‘language socialization hypothesis’ and believes that the acquisition of a first or second language derives from meaningful experiences with language in a context. Language needs not be thoroughly scrutinized to work as a resource, only to be observed in the action by the learner. Also Celce-Murcia adheres to this socialized view of language learning, since so few grammatical rules can be applied without reference to context. Using a language means to grammatically, consciously or unconsciously, choose words appropriate to the context.

Celce-Murcia continues that learners need to have knowledge of formal options and master them to make this choice and pick the right circumstance to use a specific word. She claims further that examples taken out of context are of less value than those which have stayed in context (121-122). One problem with the grammar in some books is that it does not show how grammar actually functions in communication and discourse. Even the dictionaries available in print or on the internet provide a simplified lexical explanation which facilitates a generalized knowledge of word usage (123). Celce-Murcia exemplifies and concludes that when it comes to real issues, for example, a student’s choice between the two tags: ‘So do I’ or ‘I do too’, textbooks generally give them equal status and let the learners choose which one to use. In the real world and in real context, which suddenly is completely excluded, it is not feasible to substitute one of the tags above for the other. This, explains Celce-Murcia, is why it is so crucial to teach with a context and real discourse samples to show what explicit meaning underlies each tag (126). She states that different corpora investigations are very helpful to teachers in explaining the actual usage (when and where) of different linguistic features (127-130).
4.5 School Documents and Opinions

The Swedish Board of Education has determined the goals that upper secondary students should have attained at the end of a course. For English A, B, and C there is no demand of any grammar knowledge. However, they do demand different communicative skills such as oral presentations, participation in discussions and being able to express themselves in writing with various demands of level (Skolverket, www source).

Nyström, in *Fiction in the Teaching of English* (2001), finds that it was most common to use fiction and books as silent readers or to connect with a theme (15). She did not, however, ask them particularly about usage in grammar teaching but did on the other hand leave an open question about fiction’s other usage areas. Some teachers actually used real texts as a source for new words, to widen the students’ vocabulary. Nyström concludes later on that the two major reasons for not using fiction in English teaching is the teachers’ opinions that it is too time consuming and too difficult for the students (23).

In Sylvén (2004) the effect of teaching all subjects in English has been researched and compared to regular programmes. Sylvén states that the students’ use of and contact with the target language are important to their improvement. Students who have been a part of an extensive reading programme also show more willingness towards reading in English outside of school. Therefore, they improve their skills more than those who do not come in contact with the language to the same extent. The students that reached the highest levels of correct answers, and improvements, in Sylvén’s extensive tests surf the internet regularly, played computer games, or read English texts (mostly fiction or articles) on their own, and felt confident about speaking English (204). The students that improved their test results the most were not the students being taught every subject in English but those taught in the regular way. Sylvén therefore concludes that learners who are exposed to language outside school and particularly those who read texts on their own achieve the highest test scores whether they are given all their education in English or in Swedish (224). She also states that the main reason for schools to teach in English is the current popularity concerning communication. This popularity is also mentioned by Rod Ellis, (2002), who accounts for the decrease in grammar teaching, due to the claims that grammar teaching is not related to its acquisition (17).
Ellis does not want old fashioned grammar teaching in school again but he does emphasize its importance and proposes that grammar should be included in the curriculum. He sees its potential maximised when used together with the communicative exercises in school and claims that it should only be taught to learners who already have a lexical base and who could learn through communication. Grammar should be taught separately except when taught through feedback. Ellis wants teachers to focus on those grammatical features known to cause problems, and also states that grammar awareness is important for the development of explicit knowledge (18-32). In Ur’s examples of activities for raising awareness text sources such as various articles and novels are given (84).

4.6 Motivation

Motivation is a very important subject for every teacher. According to Ur, who describes the impact motivation will have on a learner’s acquisition of knowledge, the students’ attitudes are often crucial for development. Ur refers to several studies that have shown that motivation has a strong relationship with the performance of each language learner. She does, however, problemize this a little when asking whether it is successful achievement that fosters motivation or if it is motivation that leads to success. Ur states that teachers should focus on creating motivation and strategies to increase success in language acquisition among students (274-275). Ur says that the work to find interesting material for the students is the most noticeable in motivation (280).

In Sylvén’s study the students taught in English were more positive towards English and their own performance. Sylvén concludes that their motivation is higher, but whether or not it is due to their achievement or something else needs further study (234).

Almkvist (2003) performed a survey which 58 Swedish students answered a questionnaire about their attitudes towards grammar. 88 percent claim they find grammar important but almost 45 percent state that it is difficult and 36 percent say that grammar complicates learning. Noteworthy is that 64 percent actually feel that grammar facilitates learning (13-16).

5 Analysis

As I mentioned earlier I wanted to probe the attitudes towards using literature in grammar teaching, in the belief that it would be more motivating to learn when grammar is presented in real life material – not just fixed examples in a textbook.
5.1 Students’ Questionnaire

The questionnaire can be found in appendix 1. I have divided the questions into three parts in my analysis. In the interpretation of the chosen figure 2.5 or 3.5 respectively they have been interpreted as 2 and 4 while I have counted unambiguous markings of the figure of 3 as 3. This is due to the fact that the figure of 3 is clearly stated to mean “either or”, and in the cases where students have chosen to state their opinion as more or less towards one direction it is no longer either or. 23 students participated and chose a figure between 5 and 1 to match their attitude towards a statement where 5 meant “agrees completely” and 1 meant “of opposite opinion”. Three open questions could also be answered.

5.1.1 Students’ Attitudes towards the Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think English is fun</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that English is important</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think English is easy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think grammar is fun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think grammar is important</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think grammar is easy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No students find English unimportant nor grammar totally unimportant. 17 out of 23 actually think grammar is important. It is, however, less than the numbers of students that find English as a whole important to learn. It is notable that 19 students do not find grammar fun but nevertheless important. These findings seem to be the same as Almkvist found with 88 percent stating grammar is important versus my 73 percent, and 45 percent answering that grammar is difficult compared with my 39 percent.

These questions might seem unimportant but are good to have seen to “diagnose” the students’ attitudes towards the subject. It would be very interesting to find out if these answers correlated to what kind of grammar teaching each student have been exposed to, but that would require a more longitudinal study. To connect Harmer’s claim that teachers stagnate in their teaching when relying on the textbook would certainly be interesting in connection with these questions.
### 5.1.2 Students’ Attitudes towards the Essay’s Thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We read a lot in English in school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think we read to small amount of real texts in school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read a lot in English in my spare time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn a lot of new words via the texts that I read</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look up words that I do not know that I have seen/heard/read in my spare time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn grammar while reading in English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have a lot of grammar in school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apparently the students are of the opinion that they do read a great deal in English but obviously not enough since nearly half the participants also think they read too small amount of authentic texts in school. Nevertheless, the expression ‘real texts’ is rather unfortunate since it may elicit the notion of ‘real texts’ as only non-fiction texts and therefore stands in contrast to the questions about their attitude towards fiction.

There is a mutual agreement about the possibility of learning new words through fiction. However only a handful actually looks up words they have met in their spare time. When it comes to the questions about the possibility of learning grammar from literature the opinions differ widely. Only 8 students believe they do while 6 reject the same idea.

It is stated by several authors that students’ motivation is crucial to their acquisition. This strangely enough seems to be the other way around when we look at Sylvén’s thesis which showed that her participants who generally had few positive feelings towards English and their own performance also made the same progress in percentage on Sylvén’s follow-up tests. But, she also showed that those who scored the highest points, in all test-groups were those who were exposed to English outside school, in the form of games, novels or TV-programmes. Only two students who took my questionnaire answered that they read much during their spare time but many of them agree that they learn new words through the texts they read.
Several of the students answered in the open questions that they found using real texts more motivating, just as one of the teachers expressed in her interview. A third of the students expressed notions concerning the importance of enjoying the text they were to work with. Another positive thing, according to one student, is that everyone has a chance to read the text if it is given as a homework in advance. One of O’Neill’s benefits of using a textbook is that it gives the students a chance to catch up or to read ahead. A few students did actually pinpoint the issue of motivation – they find it more enjoyable to learn grammar when they can see sentences in context and in its entirety. Several also express the importance of alternation of material and exercises, something that I from the beginning did not wish because it excludes the possibility of using Harry Potter as the only textbook they use in every subject, which was my starting point – but not my theory.

5.1.3 Students’ Attitudes towards the Lesson

I believe that the very essence of my lesson: raising awareness of how language is built when, or by, reading an ordinary text and noticing the language beneath words’ implication was understood. For a longer account of the lesson see appendix 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About the lesson</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think the exercises were good</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it was difficult to understand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it was good without a coursebook</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather have used a coursebook</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The grammar exercises of the coursebook are good</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to work with grammar again without a coursebook</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A significant part of the participants think that the exercises were good, but also a third found the lesson difficult to understand. The main point is, however, that a majority favours the idea of not using a coursebook. The attitudes towards the coursebook, on the contrary, vary considerably. Nearly as many students in this class find the grammar exercises of the coursebook good, as find them not good, while the last third answered “either or”. The last question is very interesting in that almost half the students do not care whether they use a coursebook or not. A considerable group however gave a positive answer concerning working without a coursebook again.
5.2 The Teacher Interviews

I carried out three interviews with teachers at an upper secondary school. The number of years that they have been working as teachers spans between 10 and 23 years. All of them have worked in secondary school and are now working at upper secondary school. The fact that they work close together might influence the result, and be a possible threat to the variety of attitudes towards using literature in grammar teaching. In appendix 3 the full sheet of questions can be found.

5.2.1 How they Work with Grammar and Literature Today

All three teachers state that they work with grammar only now and then, in small chunks and that it gives better effect to work with grammar on an individual basis – from the students’ own material. The students write and get feedback and correction from the teacher. It can work as base for rewriting, correcting and or other activities for improvement. This personal response really pinpoints what each student needs to work with. One teacher says that she has taught grammar lessons, and gone through so many exercises and rules without it being applied to their internal grammar or in their free production later. This agrees very well with Ellis’ wish for teachers to use individual grammatical response which these teachers all seem to use.

None of the teachers work only with the textbook, but all base a great deal of their teaching on it. All three teachers work in a thematic way with the textbook and also add their own material to the theme. This is the same way they often work with literature in the classroom. If one novel is read, articles, short stories or likewise material are added to widen the subject, but also creative tasks are added, such as creating a collage, writing or oral group presentations.

The amount of authentic texts used in the classrooms depends on what course the students are taking and at their level. It ranges from 1-3 novels/course with the addition of miscellaneous texts of different categories as articles, web pages and advertisements. Sources that Ur claimed raised language/grammar awareness. One teacher works with grammatical items using the Ikea catalogue in the target language and gets the students to compare it with their home language catalogue. One teacher states that it is very important to have a mixture of text sources, to vary between added material and a textbook. Otherwise the students will be exhausted by the never-ending amount of material and as Ur and Thornbury state, the feeling of not progressing.

They both agree the textbook is good because it provides a framework and shows, by getting closer to the end, progress towards a goal which conveys security for the students. One teacher says that a textbook is a good indication of what kind of material and exercises are suitable for teaching different language aspects.
Several authors have been presented proclaiming the importance of context based learning situations in the debate of using a textbook or not, since the books normally do not give grammar examples in context. If we actually want to teach the grammar of a sentence we need a context to avoid just testing the students’ ability to choose the suitable answer. Celce-Murcia argues that a context-based approach is pedagogically superior to decontextual examples consisting of single sentences. According to Thornbury and Celce-Murcia, the risk of using short single sentences in grammar teaching is that we only teach the students to produce single short sentences and stress the possibility of communication looking like that. Students should to a much greater extent, or whenever possible, face real, complex productions. It would be suitable for both deductive and inductive approaches.

Cook writes about the subconscious acquisition of features from texts and the importance of focusing on syntax to learn syntactical rules and collocation in order to creatively producing unambiguous varied language. Also Ur mentions the possibility of grammar being intuitive and thus wants to focus on differences in grammar and syntax in different languages, to raise the learners’ awareness. This is how some of the interviewees worked when presenting a shorter text to the students. Also Ellis wants the teachers to focus on grammar that is known to cause problems and teaching through feedback. Ur wants the teachers to find a balance between the communicative and the individual approach. This also agrees with the way the interviewed teachers actually work and is supported by the UG notion that grammar derived from a textbook never will evolve into a mental grammar. This problem is exactly what the different teachers experienced with the traditional, textbook and grammar oriented way of working.

In Nyström’s study several teachers mentioned literature and working with it as too time consuming, whilst my interviewees said that they read several novels and texts in every course and that they liked to make their own exercises, individualizing their teaching so it better targeted the students. It might be the case, that this individual and creative way of working is more widespread and maybe possible in upper secondary school? The textbook, on the other hand, can be used in many different ways. Ur prefers it, Harmer and O’Neill claim it to be a collection of texts available for the teachers and only suggested material. Harmer also claims that it should only be avoided completely if the teacher in question has enough experience, exercises and extracts to fulfil the task while O’Neill claims that teachers have to stay creative and inventive when using a textbook.
5.2.2 Thoughts on using Literature in Grammar Teaching

The answers to the question of whether the teachers would consider teaching grammar from literature and its pros and cons, seem to differ more than those accounted for above. One teacher says she would absolutely be open to it, one says that she does not like to dissect literature but prefers to use the students’ own material as a source of grammar errors, while the third teacher says that she does use non-textbook text sources when working with grammar since she uses the students’ own written material and gives individual grammatical response. The problem with this first question seems to be that the answers depends on the teachers’ interpretation of the question.

The teachers see several advantages of using other sources. For instance teachers can alter the degree of difficulty to suit a class or smaller groups of students who make the same mistakes. It is more fun for the students if they work not only with the textbook, and it becomes more real. The teacher can check what they want to test their students on if they do the exercises themselves. It is more useful for the students to see grammar in action when it is not artificially constructed. Two of the teachers see no disadvantages with using their own material whilst one says it is very time-consuming and hard work because it has to be very good. A teacher has to be careful not to undertake too much work. This teacher is however very positive and has mentioned many advantages of using her own material.

Opinions differ whether the three teachers would use more non-textbook material if exercises to it already were created. One would, one might while one says no because she already makes some material of her own. The teacher who answered that she might also says that she does not believe so much in exercises – she has taught that way for a long time and it has not been very successful so she prefers this new way of individual grammatical response, when the students actually can scrutinize their own mistakes and understand them instead of filling in exercise after exercise and then not applying it to their writing. So once again the answers seem to depend on the interpretation of the question.
5.2.3 Has there been any Change in Attitudes towards Grammar?

Here we have total agreement. One teacher says that the word grammar is nearly regarded as a bad word today. All three of them taught a great deal of grammar earlier, especially when they started in their profession. One teacher says that a specific grammar method had to be followed. Today they do more interactive grammatical exercises where it is up to the students to figure things out and to ask questions. Two of them state that the national exams do not care if the students are able to use any correct grammar at all – they just need to be understood. The role of grammar has apparently changed, both according to researchers and teachers. The lack of grammar criteria in the school documents also reveals the view of grammar today. On the other hand, successful communicative activities require appropriate knowledge of grammar.

The board of education does not stress or even mention the importance of grammar in their documents. This goes hand in hand with the feeling of the teachers surrounding the lack of grammar criteria on the national tests. They all focus on communication and the ability to be understood. The demands for passing such a test are therefore seen as quite low.

One teacher says that the emphasis today is on communication and the communicative skills of the students. Students are now trained more in communication instead of grammar. The method of teaching grammar has been changed a great deal and the teachers have also found their earlier strategies not so useful and altered them at the same time as the view of grammar changed among researchers.

Grammar has always been a controversy. Webbe dared to question the importance of grammar once more during 17th century, claiming that a communicative approach would give better results and Dewey, in the beginning of the 20th century, founded learning-by-doing and advocated interest based exercises and texts. The communicative approach has become such a craze that grammar once more has been put aside, according to Ellis while Mulroy claims it has been expelled from classrooms.

5.3 Summary

In this analysis I have tried to show how the view of grammar has changed throughout history and how grammar is viewed today. Cook and others embrace the idea of contextual grammar teaching, if there is any at all. Celce-Murcia lets the importance of really understanding a lexical item surface and claims that more grammatical focus should be placed on words, collocations and their role in discourse. Cook agrees and advocates a “syntactic view of vocabulary” in order to truly teach students the target language.
There are also authors who do defend the right to use a textbook. O’Neill and Ur brings up several good arguments such as its value for money, no text can suit every learner but these consist of something that all learners need, and a security for them. The learners in my study however do not seem to care whether they are taught grammar from fiction or from a textbook. A majority preferred to use real material and several of them found it more interesting and real, and nearly two thirds thought it was good exercises. Noteworthy is that the idea of grammar being intercepted through language exposure – which is the prevailing notion today – it is only a minority of students in this class that believes reading improves neither grammar nor vocabulary.

The interviewees have kept up with development, probably being progressive, when deviating from usual textbook grammar teaching and applying a more individual response.

6 Conclusion and Discussion

After this investigation I can conclude that there are several researchers, teachers and students that are positive towards using real fiction in grammar teaching.

The students’ attitudes towards being taught grammar from real texts are positive. However they do not believe they learn grammar by just reading, and according to Thornbury, Ur and the interviewed teachers, the students’ expectations of grammar exercises need to be faced to prevent a feeling of not learning any grammar. Several of the students wrote that they found it more motivating being taught grammar from an authentic text sample. It was very clear in the questionnaire that a majority favour the idea of not using a course book in grammar teaching.

The interviewed teachers expressed very positive opinions surrounding the use of real texts in grammar teaching. They preferred to use their students’ own written material to give individual grammar response. They used authentic material when they wanted to pin-point some special grammatical feature, or let the students learn by drawing conclusions. Their students’ expectations on grammar teaching seem rather different to how the teachers actually work, but they tried to meet their demand too. But otherwise they all mostly used an individual response approach to teach grammar.
Also the UG approach and various ideas of grammar teaching such as learning-by-doing seem to have been incorporated by teachers but its potential seems not to have been mediated to the students. I wonder if the students only believe teachers do communicative drills with them because that is what is most important? I also wonder if the students’ lack of knowledge of how these exercises are meant to teach them both grammar and vocabulary by doing only reflects teachers’ incomprehension of the communicative approach’s potential and core idea? Since researchers today seem to agree that grammar is taught when using a language and through exposure to texts, it might be time to inform the students – it might stop their eagerness for old fashioned grammar teaching.

By examining real texts and corpora, grammatical knowledge and awareness can be acquired. Working with real texts creates variation but so does a textbook, according to O’Neill who demands creativity from the teacher in the proper use of a textbook. The texts might be good, and might attract interest from some students but the importance of teaching grammar through context is not accomplished. Focus should be placed more on actually understanding a lexical item and knowing how to use it in discourse – that is an important part of indirect grammar.

The advocates of context based learning claim the importance of using real texts in grammar teaching. Maybe we should listen to the students who asked for variation. The focus on communication at the expense of grammar ought to be taken very seriously since communicative skills are what school focuses on and we might end up with interlocutors with worse and worse grammar. One solution to this problem is to use text and communication to raise awareness among learners, something that is suggested by both researchers and the teachers.

When I now, afterwards, reconsider the investigation there might be a few things I would do differently if I were to proceed investigating this topic. A wider investigation would be very interesting to do, but also a student questionnaire where an explanation of the notion of “real texts” was present, because the lack of it might have influenced the result. I also would have asked a range of teachers from different stages, and experience, to participate. I would also wish for the possibility to correlate the students’ earlier exposure to English and what kind of teaching they have experienced to the questions. This is, however, a very important field to continue investigating since grammar and syntax are crucial in the global communications which await our learners. I do feel, that I have well accounted for the answers to my questions: the students’ attitudes on being taught grammar from real texts, teachers’ responses to doing it, and researchers’ various opinions on the subject matter.
So, how will grammar teaching evolve in the future? Maybe individual response will become more widespread as the main tool in grammar teaching. Maybe more teachers dare to let go of the course book and bring their own collected material of authentic texts into the classroom. Hopefully more importance will be attached to the use of authentic samples in grammar teaching.
7 Works Cited

7.1 Literature

Almkvist, Anna. “It Seems to be Important – Otherwise We wouldn’t have to Learn it” A study of students’ attitudes towards grammar. Högskolan för Lärande och Kommunikation: Jönköping, 2003.

Biber, et al.


Rowling, Jane Kathleen. “Harry Potter and the sc”


### 7.2 Other sources

#### 7.2.1 www sources


<http://www.ne.se/jsp/search/article.jsp?i_art_id=487757&i_word=Rowling> [2006-11-09]


#### 7.2.2 Interviews

Interviews with three teachers in the upper secondary school. Between 061122-061212.

Questionnaire, answered by 23 students in upper secondary school. 061122.
The lesson plan.

I have planned a revision moment for upper secondary students which I am going to start by putting on an overhead sheet with this text on:

“from whispers he followed Harry the moment left dormitory his next day”

- Ask students to figure out the meaning of the sentence.
- Ask students to figure out the next meaning which is rearranged into word classes.
- Ask why word order is important. What clause elements do they remember?
- Compare two sentences and let students take out their clause elements, compare clause elements in different context.
- Discuss difference between subject and agent and take out all subjects from a passage.

The conclusion and conveyed message I hope will be that words need to follow a specific order for us to understand who is doing what and why they are doing it and that these orders are different in different languages.

The outcome.

The lesson went very well. When the students in the beginning were asked to make sense of the sentence presented in random word order I got several answers. I wrote the first three on the board: “He followed Harry the next day.../ Harry followed the whispers.../ Harry left the dormitory...” They all followed the SVO (subject-verb-object) order and I accounted for SVO which might explain why their sentences were created in the “same way” without meaning the same thing. I presented the importance of word order and began a discussion on the word order of different languages. They started asking questions about how usual SVO constructions are in the English language which revealed an interest in what I was actually doing and where I was going.
We discussed the importance of syntax and then revisited their knowledge of different clause elements and their use. One problem when I wrote their clause elements on the board was that the students had another name for direct and indirect object in Swedish than I am used to and prepared for. They did not bring up adverbials in the list. They worked in pairs to take out clause elements from the two sentences when we corrected it together and they noticed that they must have missed one clause element. I marked the adverbials out and someone new directly that they were adverbials and that was added to the list on the board.

The lesson ended with a competition on who was able to find the correct number of subjects in a passage in chapter 11. Unfortunately, one of the two who had the right number did not take part in the exercise and guessed. My impression of the lesson as a whole is that the students appreciated the variation, but it was too long. The students grinned and bore it and participated very well.
This is an investigation which will be a part of my degree project at the University of Education and Communication in Jönköping. Participation is voluntarily, if you do not wish to participate so just leave the questionnaire undone.

Fill in your answer or mark with an x at the line of the alternative appropriate for you.

You are
Born in the year: _______________________
Boy: _______   Girl: _______

Below you will find several statements. Put an x at the scale below the figure that suits your attitude towards the statement best. 5 means that you Agree completely, 4 means that you Agree partly, 3 means Either or, 2 means Do not agree completely, and 1 means I believe the opposite.

I think English is fun

I think that English is important

I think English is easy

We read a lot in English in school

I think we read too few real texts in school

I read a lot in English in my spare time

I learn a lot of new words via the texts that I read

I look up words that I do not know that I have seen/heard/read at my spare time

I learn grammar while reading in English

I think grammar is fun

Sandell
I think grammar is important

I think grammar is easy

We have a great deal of grammar in school

---

Var god vänd!

The exercises we just did with syntax are a part of grammar teaching, but instead of a coursebook we used the literature that you were working with in school.

I think the exercises were good

I think it was difficult to understand

I think it was good without a coursebook

I would rather have used a coursebook

The grammar exercises of the coursebook are good

I would like to work with grammar again without a coursebook

---

In my opinion, advantages of using literature in grammar teaching are:

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Sandell
In my opinion, disadvantages of using literature in grammar teaching are:

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

My opinion on the lesson in syntax:

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your participation!!

Li-Sandra Sandell
The teacher’s interview questions

1. How long have you worked as a teacher?
2. How do you teach grammar?
3. Do you use a course book with texts and grammatical exercises?
4. How often do your students read texts collected from real fiction, but not cut passages in a course book?
5. What type of texts do you use in your teaching?
6. How do you work with them?
7. Would you consider teaching grammar without a course book with your students and instead using texts that the class already is working with?
8. Can you see any advantages or disadvantages with using your own exercises?
9. Would you be more inclined to do grammar exercises connected to the literature if you did not have to do them yourself?
10. Have you noticed if anything surrounding “teaching grammar” has changed since you started your profession?