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A Blog-Integrated Grammar Instruction Approach: Structure – Andragogy – Blog (SAB)

Dilbilgisi Öğretimine Yapı- Andragoji -Blog Temelli Bir Yaklaşım

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Abstract

Although history of grammar instruction dates back far in time, it is only since the sixties that we see various methods through which this subject is taught. What was done took place as an in-class activity with almost no tasks performed out of class except for assignments. Thus, this descriptive case study aims to add one new dimension to the already existing methodology introducing a blog-integrated approach emphasizing individual-generated learning. Unlike its predecessors, the approach requires individuals to select texts, analyze targeted structural points in authentic texts, and produce similar structures through modelling, all performed on weblogs, with full participation and collaboration of learners embracing the notion of "self-directed" learning.
Although the designed approach aims to teach and reinforce English grammar to English learners, it does not limit itself to this field. All subjects, requiring activation of latent knowledge can certainly benefit from it, notably the L2 domain.

Keywords: Grammar teaching, Blog, Authentic texts

Özet

Dilbilgisi öğretiminde 1960'lardan itibaren çeşitli yöntemlerin araştırma konusu olduğu bilinmektedir. Sınıf içinde yapılmakta olan dilbilgisi çalışmalarının sınıfın dışında gerçekleştirilemediği yadsınamaz bir gerçek olmuştur. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma, birey tarafından gerçekleşecek öğrenmeyi vurgulayan bir blog entegre yaklaşımını mevcut metodolojiye ekleyerek yeni bir boyut kazandırmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu özyönelimli öğrenme temelli yaklaşım, weblog düzlemini baz alarak, bireylerin metinleri seçmesini, otantik metinlerde hedeflenen yapısal noktaları analiz etmelerini ve hedef yapıları gündelik hayatta kullanabilmelerini gerektirmektedir. Tasarlanmış bu yaklaşım her ne kadar İngilizce dilbilgisini öğrenenleri hedef alsa da, bu yaklaşım bu saha ile sınırlanmamaktadır. İkinci veya yabancı dil öğrenen bireyler bu yaklaşımdan yararlanabileceklerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngilizce dilbilgisi öğrenimi, Blog, Özgün Metin

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Introduction

There has been an increasing emphasis on classroom-oriented research that examines process by instructed language learners. The role that instructors play in this process is of great significance (e.g.Nunan & Miller 1995, Doughty & Williams 1998, Sharwood Smith, 1993). The question whether and how to include grammar in second language (L2) instruction has been one of the most highly discussed topics in the field. Having a look at the background of grammar teaching methods and models, there seems to be no best single model or method applicable to all diverse situations instructors can encounter while they cater the service for learners of different preferences and styles. Thus, the result is that they usually end up with a blended approach based on learners' profiles.

Audolingualism, rooted in Behaviourism, arose in the wake of World War II when development of spoken fluency was a necessity. This method emerged as a reaction to the Grammar Translation Method where the focus was only on comprehension and recognition of structures yet, not on production. In the 1960s, communicative needs of learners began to be heeded, and in line with this inclination, grammar teaching was reorganized in a situational rather than a structural syllabus.

With his publication, *Syntactic Structures,* Chomsky (1965) viewed language as a generative process based on syntax existing innately in the human brain. With the development of the Chomskian approach, deductive learning of grammar and explicit instruction in grammar teaching became prominent. A deductive approach often goes with a lesson structured as *Presentation, Practice, Production* (PPP) sequence (Ellis, 1994). In PPP model, the instructor first presents the target language and gives learners the opportunity to practice it via controlled activities. At the final stage of the lesson, learners are given the opportunity to practice the language in freer activities, which generally results in unsatisfied learners who are able to produce correct forms on classroom tasks, yet consistently, produce grammatically inappropriate language in a real-life context. However, in the 1970s, a new type of an L2 method –*Communicative* – emerged with an aim to create and encourage meaningful communication and interaction within context. With the development of this method, grammar instruction came on stage with a different perspective, named *focus on form* with the aim to emphasize the need for communicative input in grammar teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

In the 1990s, grammar instruction was viewed as a product of consciousness raising (Sharwood Smith, 1993), which strongly entailed raising awareness of grammatical structures in the learner. The psycholinguistic foundations for this view involved both explicit and implicit knowledge of targeted structures, the implicit focusing on use of language with meaning-focused communication while the explicit one is based on form-focused instruction. In line with this development, Celce-Murcia (2002) underlined the importance of semantics, lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, phonetics and sociocultural features in teaching grammar within a meaningful context. Celce-Murcia (2002), in this respect, argues that the differing interpretations of one surface utterance mean that knowing the literal and decontextualized meaning of an utterance is one part of

the grammar, and the other being contextualized (pragmatic) knowledge of the utterance. Therefore, exposing language learners to authentic materials on various subjects can help to better understand the discourse of a target language as well as its culture. Similarly, authentic language uses, structures and meanings in discourse in a text carries a significant role in grammar instruction underlining the contextualized, meaningful, and authentic grammar instruction rooted in how language is used in real life.

Since integration of *form* and *meaning* is becoming increasingly important in current research (Seedhouse, 1997; Nunan, 1998; Dalili, 2011), in the face of a growing desire for using authentic materials, it is essential that instructors, apart from adhering to the syllabus, incorporate authentic sources into courses. Nunan and Miller (1995) define authentic materials as those which were not created or edited for use in the language classroom, but as those which are kept original with no interference as they are presented to native speakers without modification to suit the needs of language learners. They are used to imply the language produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience, conveying a real message and a purpose (e.g. Porter & Roberts, 1981; Nunan, 1989; Özkan, 2015). This means that almost all everyday objects in the target language could be considered as authentic materials which can be exploited in a fashion of self-directed and autonomous learning.

Since the participants of this study are adult ELT students, we will try to utilize the principles incorporated in *Andragogy* (which indeed may also be utilized while dealing with young learners) aiding the participants to become more self-reliant in directing and assuming responsibility of their own learning. As a field of study, English grammar was targeted because studies carried out with a perspective of technology incorporation, namely blogs, are extremely rare, and thus we aimed to fill this gap in literature.

Andragogy in an ELT Context

Considering 'adult education', it is important to define the term adult. Since there are many social, biological and behavioural definitions, it is hard to figure out a definition that can be used for educational purposes. Knowles (1980) defines the term as "a person who behaves like an adult, also someone whose self-image is that of an adult". Knowles states that adult behaviour is that which the culture regards as being assigned to adults. An adult's role may be a parent, a bread winner, a citizen or a spouse. As for adult learners, they are supposed to make their own choices, yet may not always be independent in a classroom setting, particularly when approaching a new structure or a skill. Depending on the society in which they live, they may entirely depend on the instructor for direction. Andragogy, here, may serve as an important approach for encouraging learners, adult or young, to become independent and self-directed in an L2 structure class rather than depend on external factors to direct their learning. For Knowles (1980, p.43), andragogy was premised on five crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners:

- Self-concept: As individuals mature, their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being.
- Experience: As individuals mature, they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
- Readiness to learn: As individuals mature, their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles.
- Orientation to learning: As individuals mature, their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness.
- Motivation to learn: As individuals mature, the motivation to learn is internal.

Andragogy assumes that the point at which individuals achieve a self-concept of essential self-direction is the point at which they psychologically become adults. Here at this point, individuals develop a deep psychological need to be perceived by others as being self-directing. Thus, when they find themselves in a situation in which they are not allowed to be self-directing, they experience a tension between that situation and their self-concept. Their reaction is bound to be tainted with resentment and resistance (Knowles, 1975).

Andragogy is an informal education type, and adults are trained through self-directed learning. As it significantly contributes to adult education, it is highly probable that the contribution can be carried over to language education. Providing an experiential learning platform, it enables learners to practice and learn from their own experiences. Learners' needs are determined through needs analysis and a *learning contract* is often prepared, and often includes: (a) specific learning objectives to be accomplished, (b) resources and strategies for accomplishing such objectives, (c) evidence indicating the extent to which objectives are accomplished, (d) how this evidence will be judged or validated, and (e) the target date for attaining each objective, which all can be realized on a blogging platform.

Due to a growing interest in technology in recent years, in order to better serve L2 learners, blogs, as a technological tool, are embedded in L2 classrooms to provide an incentive for self-directed (Andragogy) learning. Learner blogs, a widely utilized technological tool, require considerable time and effort by the instructor to set up and moderate. All is done to encourage learners to create their own personal online space. Learners can also be motivated to write frequently about what interests them, and can post comments on other learners' blogs. There are numerous reasons as to why one may choose to use weblogs with learners. One common reason is providing a real audience for writing. Usually, the instructor is the only person who reads learners' writing, and the focus of this reading may mostly be on form, and not on content. Thus, through weblogs, learners can find themselves writing for a real audience that, apart from the instructor, may include their peers as well as other learners from different groups (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006). Additionally, blogs provide extra reading practice

for students who wish to share journals that can be read by peers, guiding them to online resources appropriate for their levels, increasing a sense of community in class, encouraging even shy learners to participate, stimulating out-of-class discussion and a process-writing approach, storing an online portfolio of learners' written work, and helping build a closer relationship between learners in large classes (Kaye, 2006; Özkan, 2011).

Towards a Blog-Integrated Approach in English Grammar Instruction

With the incorporation of technology into Andragogy in English grammar classes, we, thus, present a five-staged grammar instruction approach which may notably be applicable in pre-service teacher education grammar courses. The approach (Figure 1) has five steps: (1) *input*, which consists of structure, topic and authentic texts; (2) *process*, in which formal Andragogy in class and non-formal Andragogy outside class take place; (3) *assessment,* where both formative and summative types of evaluation are enacted; (4) *feedback,* which is provided by the course instructor in a tutorial form following midterm and final exams by peers through weblogs, and the self which involves reflection on course procedural experience, and (5) *output*, in which learning manifests itself at recognition and/or production levels.

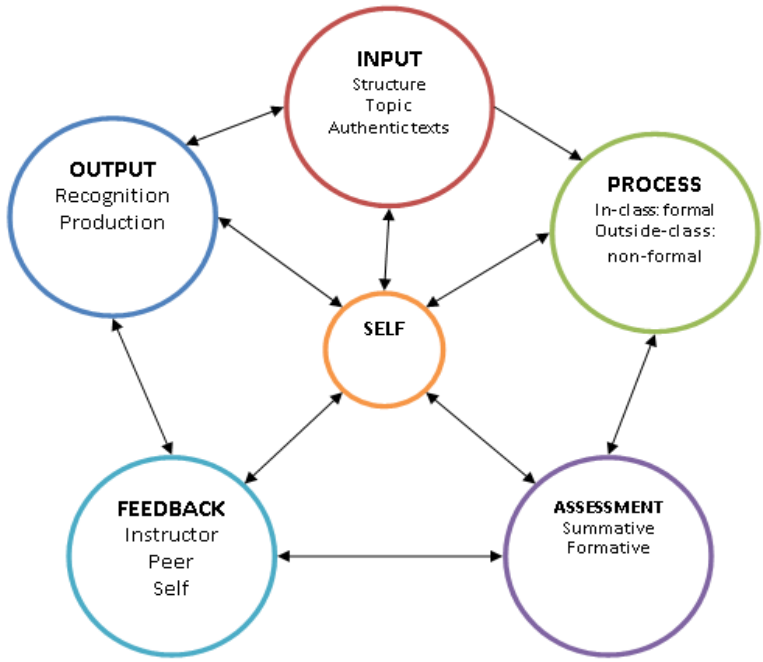


Figure 1. The SAB Approach (Structure-Andragogy-Blog)

Steps in the Structure-Andragogy-Blog (SAB) Approach

The first step, *Input*, in the approach is mostly realized by the course instructor. Referring to the course syllabus generated by both the instructor and participants of the course, the instructor deals with the specific targeted language element in authentic texts selected by learners for the week in question. It is important for conducting needs analysis and asking for learners' choices in topic determination to contribute to the process of language learning during the 14-week English grammar course. In this case, structures such as noun, verb, adjective, adverb, appositive and absolute phrases are each dealt with in topics negotiated with learners at the beginning of the term (see Appendix). By enabling adult learners to be involved in the process of topic and text selection in line with the syllabus designed by both the instructor and learners, mostly referring to British and American news sources for structural analysis, we thus aimed to adhere to the principle of Andragogy. As illustrated in the syllabus, one whole week of instructional input in class is dedicated to one particular structural point in English. At the very initial stage of this approach, a teacher-centred approach is highly preferred when targeted structures are presented 3 hours a week in class, where exposure to face-face interaction is enabled. The instructor's role here is very important since the framework presented will be embraced by learners for the rest of the process while dealing with structural points occurring in self-selected authentic texts. Based on these texts, the instructor tries to raise consciousness about the targeted structure mostly via textual enhancement and modelling. The instructor, at this stage, observes each learner very attentively in order to make sure that the class all understand that day's structural point. Until the targeted structure has fully been comprehended, the instructor and the learners discuss about the point and try to complete suggested activities or exercises in an assigned class textbook. Pair-work is recommended through completion of textbook exercises to share knowledge among peers.

The second step is where a two-sided (in-class/outside-class) *process* takes place. Based on the Andragogy approach in adult education, the process is an amalgamation of both teacher and learner centeredness. While the teacher is mostly on stage in in-class procedure, the learners are utterly responsible for outside-class tasks including recognition and production activities. Emphasizing self-directed learning, the instructor creates weblogs to function as a platform to extend instruction and learning to an outside-class setting. This is where we see the SAB approach facilitating language use via weblogs and keep participation and motivation throughout the term. The instructor's role here is to raise adult learners' awareness of structures and make them personalize such structures in an outside-class context. All is done in an outside-class setting on a weblog platform, which provides an ideal opportunity for self-directed learning enriched by more general dimensions such as social, emotional, cognitive competences, democracy, and collaboration. As for blog entry procedure, following each in-class session, learners are expected to post their blog tasks until the end of the

each week. The tasks include both *recognition* and *production* parts. In the former, learners are to find an authentic text based on that week's topic and highlighting the targeted structures, carrying out a phrase and function analysis in the authentic text (Figure 4). In the latter, learners are expected to produce parallel language to reinforce targeted structures of the first part. Each learner's weblog may serve as an online language portfolio and record of their language performance to assess and compare with further learning process. In a term, learners are expected to post 14 weblogs based on each week's content. The final weblog includes reflection of the whole term. Learners are asked to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of their weblogs and explain the *outside-class process* in detail (Figure 2).

The third step, *assessment*, incorporates formative and summative types of evaluation, both being highly interrelated in assessing learners. *Formative assessment* in this approach includes learners' active participation (10% of overall performance) in in-class sessions regarding recruitment of texts and performing structural analysis on such texts, and participation in outside-class (30% of overall performance) setting, where a whole-term weblog performance including at least 13 blog entries for each learner is assessed to yield more reliable results. The course instructor keeps an observation form to take notes on students' performance in class, and reads weblog tasks each week diagnosing weaknesses, and gives feedback on blog tutorial held every month.

Summative assessment comprises one midterm examination (25% of overall performance) and a final examination (35% of overall performance) which are prepared in order to meet the face validity, content validity, practicality, and the reliability criteria. *Face validity* in this approach is ensured through including test items in the test similar to those presented in in-class sessions. *Content validity* is reached by making sure that all test items are adequate and representative samples of the course syllabus. *Practicality* is attained by ensuring that sufficient time (one hour) is allocated for test administration. *Reliability* is expected to be high due to formerly announced scoring rubrics.

In step four, *feedback*, we deal with three sources from which learners draw feedback: *instructor*, *peers* and *self*. Here, the *instructor* provides feedback through two different types of tutorial: (1) discussions based on learners' midterm and final examination performance, and (2) one-to-one interaction (approximately 7-8 minutes for each learner) regarding weblog contents. As a result of such discussions, learners get better equipped with the potential to provide more constructive and objective feedback on their performance in exams and weblog entries. The underlying aim here is to raise their awareness on the targeted structures so that they perform in the target language more effectively especially on their weblog tasks.

Peer-to-peer feedback requires learners to give feedback on their peers' performance in in-class (performed in group work) and outside-class settings (posting comments on blog entries). It is a requirement of the course to maintain an on-going feedback entry of comments on each other's performance throughout the term. Figure 2 depicts a sample of learner weblog including *peer-to-peer feedback*. Here, learners have the opportunity to discuss about their work

from different perspectives such as *structural points*, *content of the texts*, and overall *feelings* about their peers' work.

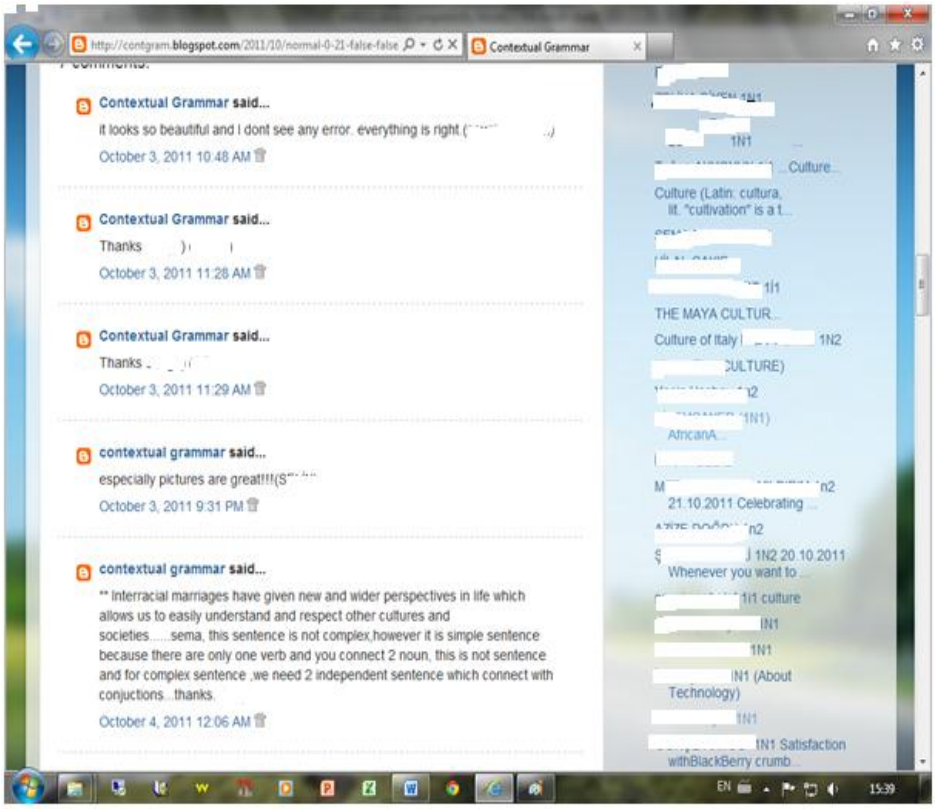


Figure 2. A sample learner weblog depicting peer feedback

The third, and probably the most important source, is the *self* of the learner. Here, learners, reflecting on their performance in the last five minutes of the course in class, voice their comments through either statements or questions. In outside-class setting, they also reflect upon their own tasks via weblogs by editing and/or commenting on their own previous work. Figure 3 displays the final week's blog task which requires reflection on the blogging experience in the English grammar course. The learner, here, in her comments expresses her difficulties regarding the *recognition* part of blog tasks. She also expresses the benefits of such an experience she gained through this approach.

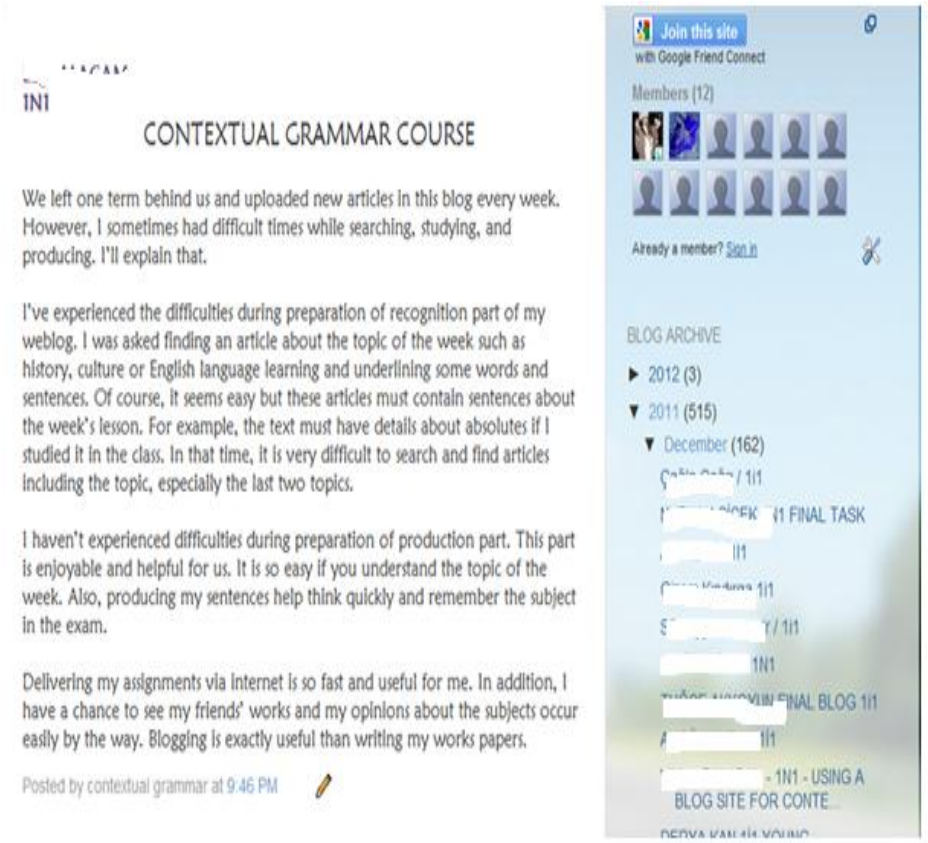
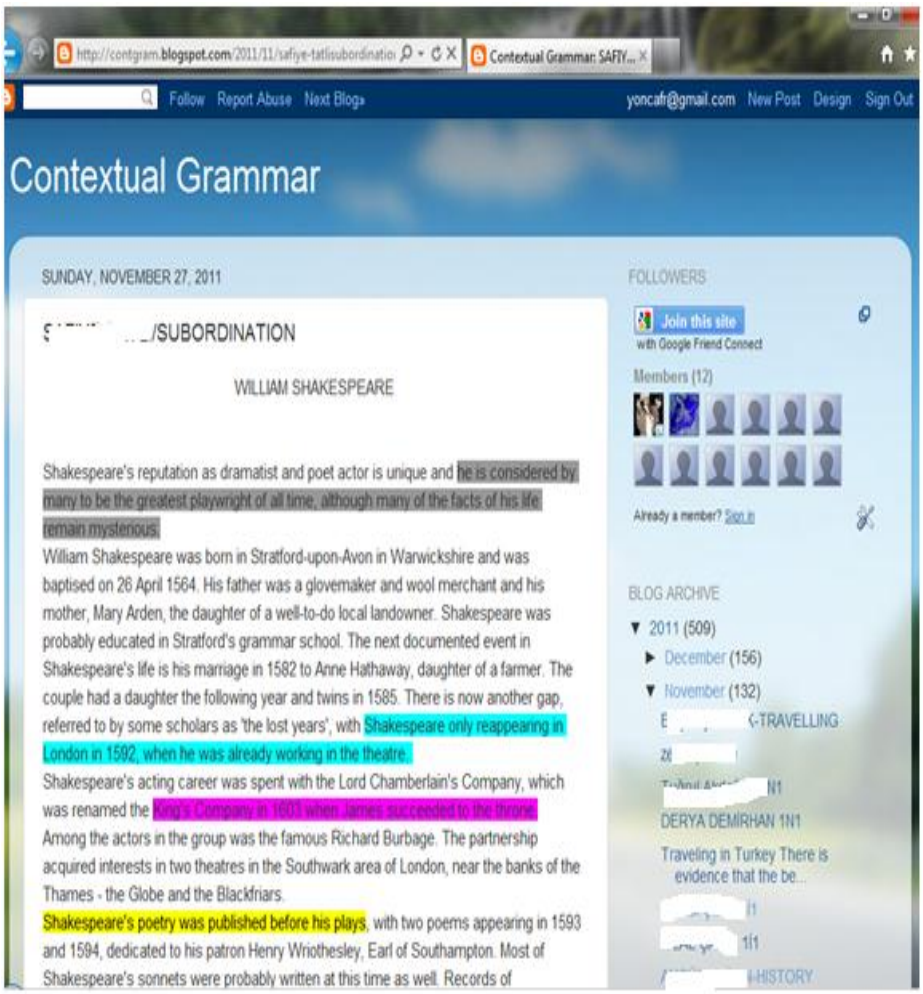


Figure 3. A sample final weblog including self-feedback

The last step of the approach, *output*, is where *recognition* and *production* emerge Here, learners are expected to recognize and produce targeted structural points dealt with both in in-class and outside-class settings. This is where the instructor is able to observe to what extent targeted points have been internalized both at *recognition* and *production* levels. *Recognition* is illustrated by learners through textual enhancement (highlighting, underlining, bolding, italicizing, etc.) and labelling. *Production* requires learners to produce parallel structural points highlighted on texts both in in-class and outside-class environment. All output data of the learners experiencing the SAB approach is recorded by the course instructor in order to make a comprehensive evaluation of the course for future use aiming to assess learners' English grammar profile when designing prospective syllabi.

A sample of output on learner weblog is presented in Figure 4. This weblog reflects the learner's recognition of the s*ubordination* structure. Here on this

weblog, the learner highlights the *subordinators* in complex sentences to accomplish the *recognition* part of her task. She also identifies the type of subordinate clauses, and labels each of the structural points within the text she has chosen. Labelling of structures is accomplished in light of in-class sessions, which may imply whether transformation of input into output at recognition level has been actualized.



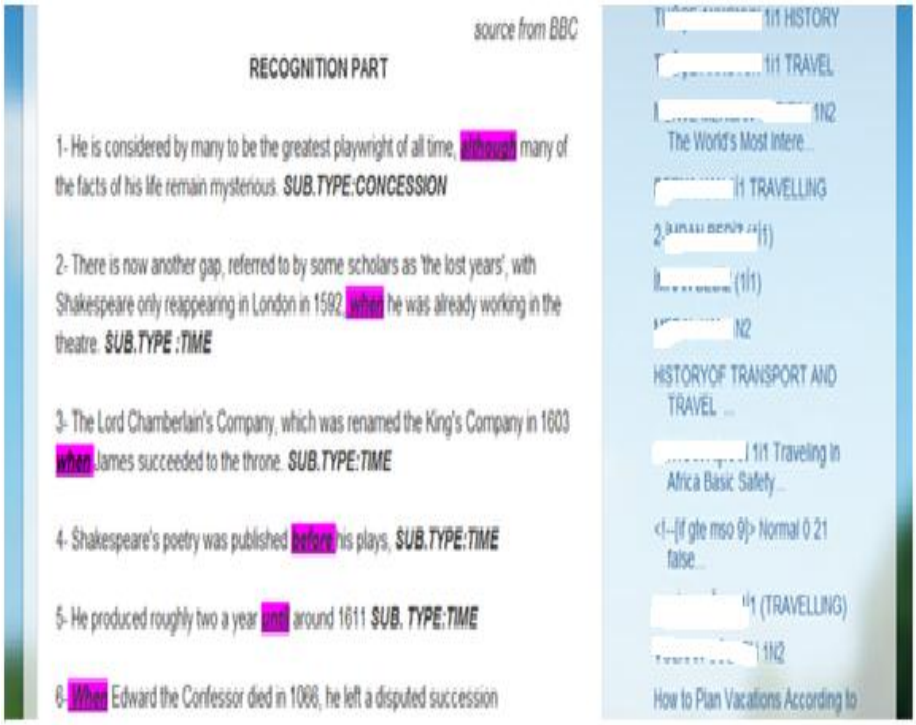


Figure 4. A sample of weblog entry including recognition part of the output stage

In the *production* part of the weblog (Figure 5), the learners produce sentences related to the topic of the week in question, which happens to be *history* for this particular week. The sentences in this production part should be relevant to the topic to reinforce the content of the text both linguistically and semantically. The learner, here, produces sentences including *adverb clauses* including different types such as *concession*, *condition*, and *time*. In addition to enhancement of structural competence, while producing related sentences to the *history* topic, learners could also improve knowledge regarding this topic. As a result of this experience with this approach, the learner begins to produce constructions as were modelled for him in self-chosen authentic texts, possibly activating a long term retention process.

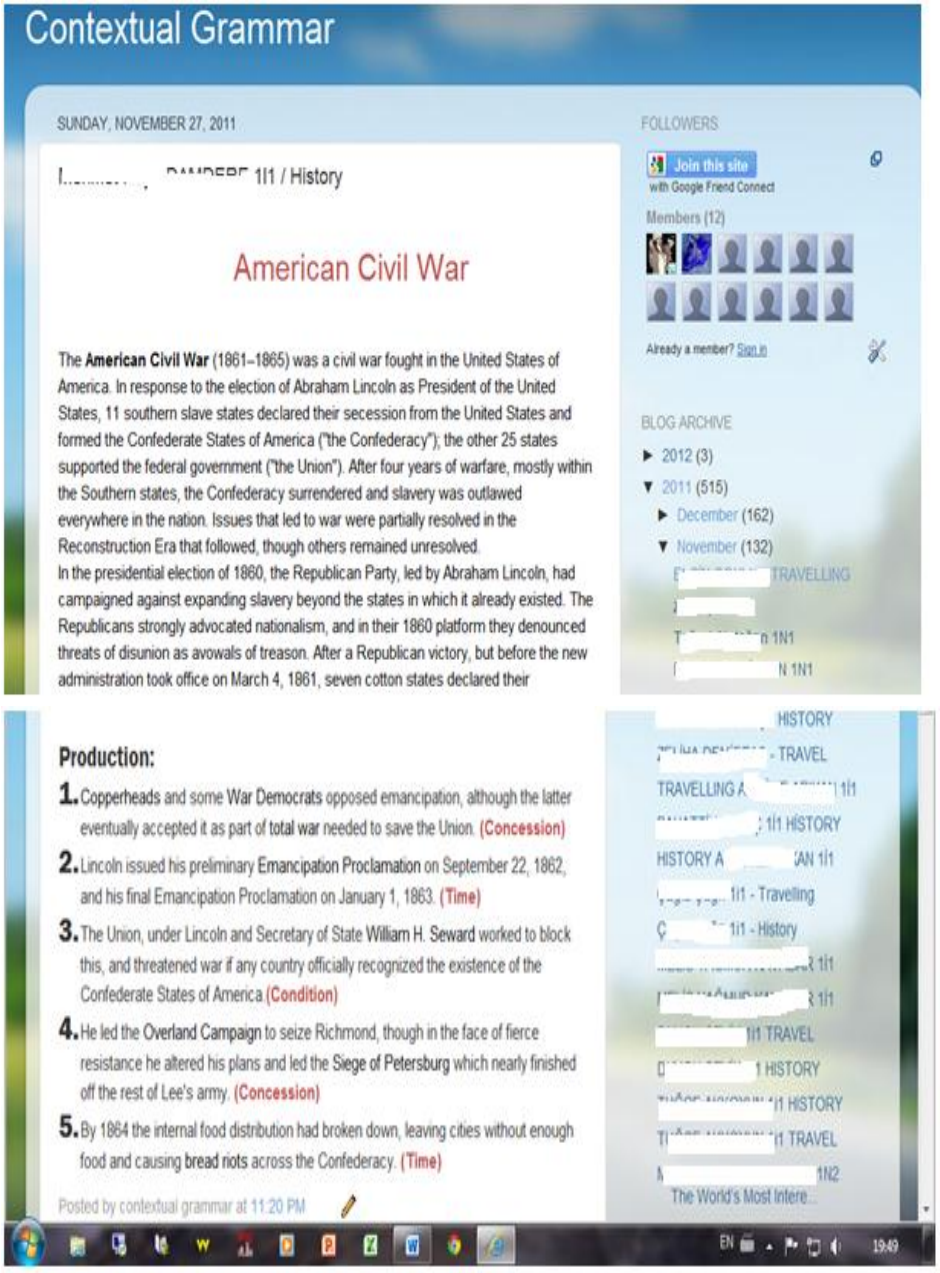


Figure 5. A sample of weblog entry including production part of output stage

Conclusion

In this present study, a sustainable approach for the future is introduced– an approach that does not exclude grammar from a language learning context but draws upon relevance in order to promote optimum English use in adults' academic, social and personal lives. The structure-andragogy-blog (SAB) approach, built with a perspective to incorporate self-directed learning into structure use, invites instructors to be dynamic and adult learners to exercise self-initiative learning by assuming utmost responsibility to choose and analyze content related to the English grammar system. The approach brings together structure, andragogy and technology in an adult learning context, where structure constitutes the core. It promotes adults' creativity in English use; enhances self-initiation; raises awareness of individual strategies and constructs, and provides room for reflection (Knowles, 1980). This way, for the tasks assigned on structural points, learners primarily become responsible to themselves rather than to a second party. Thus, the approach does not only provide platform for mastery of English grammar at both recognition and production levels, it also builds a sense of responsibility in the individual adult as well as the young learner.

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Appendix

YDI 102 Contextual Grammar

Course Objectives

This course will enable the students to:

- Recognize structural patterns and their functions within predetermined advanced level texts.
- Analyze English sentence, clause and phase structures at suprasentential level within authentic materials.
- Produce texts comprising structures studied and analyzed at advanced level.
- Develop a critical perspective into advanced level structures of different types of texts on a contextual level.

- Be able to use these structures in various contexts.

Lectures

Week 1 (Feb 14-18): Phrases
Week 2 (Feb 21-25): Phrases+ Discussion Section (based on the articles brought to class by the students)
Week 3 (March1-4): Nouns+ Discussion Section
Week 4 (March 7-11): The forms and meanings of verbs
Week 5 (March14-18): Verbs+ Discussion Section
Week 6: Midterm Exam
Week 7(March 28-31): Adjectives and Adjective Phrases
Week 8 (Apr4-8): Adjectives + Discussion Section
Week 9 (Apr 11-15): Adverbs and Adverb Phrases
Week 10 (Apr 18-22): Adverbs+ Discussion Section
Week 11 (Apr 25-29): Prepositions+ Discussion Section
Week 12 (May 2-6): Complements + Discussion Section
Week 13 (May 9-13): Course Reflection
Week 14 (May 16-20): Course Review
Week 15 (May 22-26): Final Exam

Assessment Methods

- Active participation (including discussion on selected authentic materials): (10%)
- Quiz: (10%)
- Midterm Exam: (20%)
- Final Exam and Reflection Paper: (60%)

Required textbooks:

Lobeck, A. (2000). *Discovering grammar*. New York: OUP.
Kolln, M. (2003). *Rhetorical Grammar*. Longman.