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No Books, No Problem: Teaching Grammar Theory Without a Textbook

Panel: Modern education technologies and Chinese language teaching

Chinese Grammar is one of the most difficult aspects of language to teach well. A typical university curriculum includes three kinds of lessons (Reading, Listening and Oral Communication), at low levels students can obtain explicit grammar knowledge through some practical Grammar lessons, with teachers focusing on grammar as a set of forms and rules of usage and then drilling students on them. After 2 years of studing usually they are led to be exposed to natural Chinese as an exchange programs student and have an intensive language course in China that is a big help in developing conversational fluency. Here they also absorb grammar rules to some extent as they hear, read, and use the language in communication activities. But students still lack an active understanding of what grammar is and how it works in the language they already know.

Grammar theory taught in the 3rd year is supposed to give them overt grammar instructions and explanations from a largescale typological perspectives that can help students acquire the language more efficiently. The contents of the practical grammar textbooks for lower proficiency levels include explanations of structures, parts of speech, particles, etc. They are accompanied by activities such as fill-in-the-blank exercises, rewriting, and translation drills. At an advanced level the grammar lessons (and therefore textbooks) actually include only translations of literary passages from the Chinese language into the native language, drilling vocabulary words and writing compositions. In Russia no textbook on Chinese grammar can give a satisfactory theoretical support for students. All existing Chinese grammar books in Russian are either outdated or lacking a theoretical framework. Grammar textbooks in Chinese can facilitate the task, but they are still not available countrywide.

So it's quite a challenge for Chinese language teachers in Russia to make use of up-to-date theories and theoretical frameworks and give easy-to-understand explanations and sufficient language examples to students on Grammar lessons. Considering that many digital resources available probably can soon make textbooks obsolete, to accomplish defined teaching tasks I summarized my first-hand experience as a Grammar instructor and now offer students a useful digitized Chinese Grammar course, a complex, typologically oriented one built on recent linguistics studies with illustrative materials from Chinese scholars and linguisitic corpora.