

## FOREWORD

The study of grammar tends not to be a favorite aspect of learning a foreign language. Sometimes, it is considered a necessary evil at the basic level of foreign language study, something that beginning students must put up with, but that students at the intermediate or advanced level should have risen above. So why should there be a course on consolidating basic grammar in the I.U.P. curriculum? The answer to that question is simple: A significant proportion of I.U.P. students in the last ten years or so have manifested weakness in mastery of basic grammar, as evidenced in their oral and written expressions and documented by their performance on the HSK (汉语水平考试) as well as in the I.U.P. Placement Test. Upon entry to I.U.P., most students have at least "survival Chinese" and have at their command a sizable daily life vocabulary. However, some students exhibit a level of grammar mastery considerably lower than their vocabulary and fluency. Some who *are* able to express themselves with a fair degree of grammatical accuracy lack self-confidence that they are expressing themselves correctly because they lack the theoretical foundation for their grammar usage. It is as though they are just winging it by "feel," but without the 语感 (feel for the language) of a native or near-native speaker. Some - the more timid ones - limit their expressions to the simple tried-and-true can't-go-wrong sentence patterns, avoiding the more complicated patterns that make one's language lively and colorful. By restricting themselves to a "safety zone," these students are less likely to make errors, but their language is monotonous and they are also less likely to progress beyond the survival level.

In the last couple of decades, the focus of Chinese language teaching at the basic level (i.e. first and second year) in America had shifted from a grammatical-structure-building orientation to a communicative orientation. Over-emphasis on one approach to the neglect of the other has its drawback. The grammatical-structure-building approach organizes materials at the beginning level around grammatical points in a systematic way; the communicative approach organizes material around "real life" situations and introduces grammar randomly. At the beginning level, the student's Chinese language repertoire is limited, so this random approach to grammar is still manageable, and some deviation in accuracy is tolerated for the sake of achieving communication quickly. But as students advance to the post-basic level, the deviations in grammar usage become more and more conspicuous. It is like building a house without proper scaffolding. Lack of proper scaffolding in a small simple house is not serious, the house will still stand. But it becomes quite serious when one is building a larger taller structure, where even one degree of lean will become more and more pronounced as the structure rises.

The course Consolidating Basic Grammar is designed to shore up the grammatical foundation for students at the intermediate level, so that they may continue building their Chinese language edifice toward academic or professional functionality. A student at the intermediate level weak in grammatical foundation who continues to study Chinese will have difficulty making further progress. His Chinese language structure will continue to acquire more external trappings (i.e. more sophisticated vocabulary) without the scaffolding to hang them on. For students who can "perform" with a fair degree of grammatical accuracy, this course should increase their accuracy to near 100% and provide them with a greater sense of self-confidence in actively using the language. For those timid students who avoid venturing into uncertain territory, this course will expand their "safety zone" to include the entire panorama of Chinese language patterns.

This course is organized strictly by grammatical points. While example sentences are given to illustrate each theoretical point, they are not in anyway governed by subject matter.

A considerable amount of attention is given to the pitfalls that tend to trap native English speakers, due to interference from the linguistic patterns etched in their minds.

Studying this book in and of itself - even if a student memorizes it from cover to cover - will not produce perfect grammatical usage. We can use getting a driver's license as analogy. Book knowledge enables one to pass the written test, but the final step - the more important one - is performance on the road test. Passing the written test certainly doesn't guarantee that one will pass the road test. To take the study of English in China as example, Chinese students "know" English grammar very well (as witnessed by their performance on grammar tests), but due to lack of "road practice," in actual usage they perform poorly on even the most basic points of English grammar such as gender and tense.

This book presents the grammatical facts. Students must transfer these *facts* into the daily *act* of expressing themselves in Chinese. In this course, the small-group and individual classes will be devoted to practicing acting out the facts that students should have absorbed into their brains before class. Between learning the *facts* and applying them to one's *act*, the latter requires much more time and effort than the former. For entrenched grammatical errors, students tend to repeat their errors even though they know the relevant grammatical rule. The more ingrained a student's grammatical deviation, the more effort it will take to develop accurate grammatical habits until they become second nature. This course will give you the scaffolding, but it's up to you to follow this scaffold as you hang the substance of your Chinese language edifice. This course, with the small group classes and individual classes, should give you a very good start in that process.

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