

Navigating “the pit of doom”: Affective responses to teaching ‘grammar’

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Abstract

This article presents the outcomes of a study investigating current secondary English teachers’ beliefs about grammar teaching, and illustrates the salience of teachers’ emotional response to the issue. Interviews with 31 teachers reveal two discourses which frame the ways in which teachers express their feelings: a dominant discourse of grammar as threatening, reactionary and dull, and an oppositional discourse which positions grammar as inspiring, fascinating, and empowering. The influence of these discourses on practice is explored, along with examples of how attitudes can change as a result of participation in a research project. This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant number RES-062-23-0775].

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Concerns about English teachers’ reactions to ‘grammar’ are not new. To accompany the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) to primary schools in England and Wales in 1998 (and to secondary schools in 2001), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) published a report into ‘Teachers’ confidence, knowledge and practice in the teaching of grammar at key stages 2 and 3.’ The report was one of a bank of justifications for the strategy framework’s detailed objectives for explicit grammar teaching, published as *The Grammar Papers* (QCA 1998). It highlighted negative perceptions of grammar amongst teachers “of all ages, backgrounds and experience” (p.26), alongside issues relating to poor linguistic subject knowledge and uncertainty as to how to integrate explicit teaching of grammar into the broader English curriculum. More than a decade on (and following two iterations of the NLS), Clark (2010) argues that “a revolution is taking place... about the teaching of grammar” (p.191). The outcome of this ‘revolution,’ characterised as it is by “more autonomy on the part of the teaching profession and

educationalists” (p.190), will inevitably be influenced by teachers’ attitudes towards grammar. In order to explore whether the picture has changed since the QCA report, this article presents the outcomes of a study investigating current secondary English teachers’ beliefs about grammar teaching and illustrates the salience of teachers’ emotional response to the issue. The paper also shows some of the ways in which these feelings influence practice, and demonstrates how attitudes can change as a result of participation in a research project.

Affect, Beliefs and the Grammar Debate

The ongoing debate about the effectiveness of grammar teaching has been traced back for more than a century by Hudson and Walmsley (2005). Twenty-first century reviews of research have produced conflicting opinions about the impact of teaching grammar on students’ writing development (Hudson 2001; Wyse 2001), and, most recently, have suggested that the quality and scale of research is insufficient for robust conclusions to be drawn (Andrews et al. 2004; Myhill et al. 2008). However, there is also a “growing feeling that grammar teaching has an unfulfilled potential” (Beard 2000:121), seen most clearly in the number of researchers worldwide who offer examples of pedagogical approaches which integrate grammar into reading and writing activities (Weaver & Bush 2006; Wheeler 2006; Kelly & Safford 2009). There does appear to be a growing consensus that grammar teaching may be useful if it is contextualised (Rimmer 2008), focused on a specific area which links directly to an aspect of writing (Hudson 2001) or an aspect of reading (Keen 1997), and adopting a rhetorical approach where the use of grammar to shape language for effect is explored, (Myhill et al. 2008) rather than a “deficit model” focused on accuracy (Hancock 2009). This movement has led Clark to remark that the debate has moved on from “whether explicit teaching of grammar directly affects pupils’ own command of language or interpretation” to “what kind of teaching and what theories underpinning it have the greatest chance of success” (2010:190).

Against this background of academic debate is a volte-face in policy which occurred with the National Curriculum revision in 1995 and introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998, a policy change which is paralleled by literacy drives in

other Anglophone countries such as the USA (Kolln & Hancock 2005; Bralich 2006) and Australia (Masters & Forster 1997). Traditional grammar teaching largely disappeared from schools in the UK in the middle of the twentieth century, following studies and reviews that reported no benefits to students' writing (such as Elley et al. 1975), alongside arguments from advocates of the personal expression approach that "the process of learning grammar interferes with writing" (Elbow 1981:169). The reintroduction of grammar into the curriculum was driven, Clark (2005) argues, by an ideological reaction from (Conservative) policy-makers to the "social unrest" of the 1980s, who blamed teachers and the curriculum "for a failure... to teach standard English and canonical literature and through it social cohesion based upon a common national identity." (p.33). However motivated, this reintroduction was carried out without support from a substantial evidence base (Wyse 2001), without a secure theoretical basis (Myhill 2005), and with accompanying advisory documents which were riddled with errors (Cajkler 2004). Strategy publications such as *Not whether but how: teaching grammar in English at key stages 3 and 4* (QCA 1999) asserted the importance of explicit teaching of grammar without acknowledging the extent of the doubt amongst the teaching and research professions, reflecting two "flaws" which have been "enshrined in government documentation and edict": "assuming that pupils need to know about sentence grammar through a terminology, and assuming that it is *how* that knowledge is conveyed rather than *whether it is*." (Andrews 2005:71).

The revised *Framework for Secondary English* (DfE 2008) assumed that grammar had been embedded into the teaching of writing. The detailed banks of sentence-level objectives were replaced by two "strands": 8.1, which focused on variety in sentence structure and punctuation, and 9.1, "using grammar accurately and appropriately." This change gave teachers more freedom to exercise their own professional judgement with regards to what they teach, although given that the current coalition government appears to be committed to curriculum reform (DfE 2010) it remains to be seen how long this will endure.

Alongside the academic debate and policy developments is a public discourse which associates grammar with traditional teaching methods and reactionary views. This is evident in media opinion-pieces such as Philip Pullman's response to the publication of Andrews et al.'s EPPI review into the impact of grammar teaching on children's writing (2004). Pullman satirised Conservative politician Norman Tebbit's oft-quoted slip between "standard" English and "standards" of morality (see Clark 2005:40), describing how those "on the political right...know without the trouble of thinking that of course teaching children about syntax and the parts of speech will result in better writing, as well as making them politer, more patriotic and less likely to become pregnant." (Pullman 2005). Such examples reflect the "political or ideological views" which shape discussion of grammar in the public sphere (Myhill 2000:151).

Teachers who were (on the whole) educated at a time when grammar was not valued are now confronted with these competing voices and pressures: a conceptually ambiguous centralised framework, a public discourse which associates grammar with right-wing policies, and continuing disagreement about the value of grammar from the academic community. This is exactly the kind of contested, "ill-defined" domain in which teachers' beliefs have been found to play an important role in determining their actions (Nespor 1987:324).

The relationships between affect, beliefs and practice are complex, not only because the realities of classroom life, or "classroom contingencies" (Segal 1998) may constrain teachers' ability to act in accordance with their beliefs, but also because belief systems themselves can be complex, with inherent competition or conflict amongst different elements (Phipps and Borg 2007). Nevertheless, studies have found that beliefs play an important role in guiding pedagogical practice, acting "as a filter through which a host of instructional judgements and decisions are made" (Fang 1996:51).

While the study of belief has been characterised as a "messy construct" (Pajares 1992), vexed by "conceptual ambiguity" (Borg 2003:83), there is widespread

agreement that one defining feature of beliefs is an element of affective loading (Rokeach 1968, Pajares 1992, Calderhead 1996). Nespor's (1987) widely cited conceptualisation of belief, for example, includes a core "affective and evaluative element," and he explains that beliefs "frequently involve moods, feelings, emotions, and subjective evaluations." (p.323). This affective element has a significant impact on practice, playing a particular role in determining the amount of attention and energy which teachers give to different tasks (p.320). Other researchers have found that affective elements play an important and sometimes unexpected role in beliefs, particularly underpinning belief change (Tillema 1998:220), and colouring teachers' attitudes to "the profession of teaching" (Fives & Buehl 2008:172).

The QCA-published study (1998) offered some evidence of teachers' feelings about grammar before the NLS was introduced. It reported that teachers were uncertain about the definition of 'grammar teaching' and its relationship to the broader notion of 'language study,' tending to associate it with traditional teaching methods such as decontextualised "exercises" and "drilling" (p.26). It also highlighted teachers' "uncertainty and anxiety" (p.26) about the reintroduction of grammar to the curriculum. The association of grammar with traditional practices is echoed even in countries in which grammar is not such a contested subject, as Van Gelderen found when lecturing teacher educators from Flanders and the Netherlands,

"...mentioning the G-word was sufficient to evoke negative reactions to such an approach. Protests against a back-to-basics ideology and "setting the clock back" sounded loudly." (Van Gelderen 2006:45).

Since the introduction of the NLS, studies of first-language English teachers' feelings about grammar have tended to focus on trainee teachers. These have reported the psychological difficulty for trainees of confronting an aspect of subject knowledge which lags far behind abilities in other areas (Burgess et al. 2000). Cajkler and Hislam's (2002) study of primary PGCE students found "considerable anxiety" about grammar at the start of the course, and interestingly discovered that while "knowledge increased" during the PGCE year, "anxiety remained high," (abstract) indicating a potentially deep-rooted apprehension about grammar. They also

reported that classroom experiences were the prompt for improvements in both attitude and linguistic subject knowledge, concluding that “it is mainly through *teaching and preparing for teaching* rather than explicitly *learning about* grammar that trainees were gaining in confidence and competence” (p.175). In her work with trainees, Turvey (2000) found more positive feelings about grammar, but also indicated a similar lack of confidence in subject knowledge which was exacerbated by “the lack of time to ‘read and study’” (p.143). In interviews with seven practising teachers of English, Findlay found fewer issues of confidence, but a clear division between attitudes to teaching language and literature, with unanimous “assertion that Literature is at the heart of English” (2010:5) and grammar perceived as a “chore” (p.4).

One clear message that emerges from all of the research is that ‘grammar’ is a source of significant difficulty for a large proportion of English teachers. While researchers may be moving towards a productive, conceptually rigorous understanding of how grammar can inform the teaching of writing (Clarke 2010), it is clear that teachers will need support in order to develop the linguistic and pedagogical subject knowledge which can translate this into successful classroom practice. Perhaps even more significantly, research into affect and beliefs indicates that teachers need to *want* this support: their receptiveness to ‘grammar’ will be contingent upon their feelings about it.

Methodology

This study draws on data from interviews with 31 teachers of English at secondary schools in England: each teacher was interviewed three times over the year, providing a data set of 93 interviews. The participants range from newly qualified teachers to Heads of Department with over thirty years in the profession. 19 have ‘English’ degrees (sometimes combined with other subjects), three have ‘English literature’ degrees, one has an ‘English language and linguistics’ degree, and eight hold degrees in other subjects.

The study is one strand of an ESRC-funded project designed to investigate the impact of contextualised grammar teaching on students' writing development (Myhill et al. forthcoming). This project followed a mixed-methodology design, with a randomised controlled trial based on analysis of pre and post-intervention writing samples, alongside a qualitative study which was designed to illuminate the complexities of the statistical results.

Schools in the South West and West Midlands were randomly selected and invited to nominate one year 8 class and their teacher to take part. Those who volunteered were separated into intervention and comparison groups (with control for teacher linguistic subject knowledge across groups). Both groups taught three, three-week schemes of work focused on writing: fiction in the autumn term; argument in the spring term; poetry in the summer term. While the intervention group was given detailed lesson plans which incorporated contextualised grammar teaching, the comparison group was given outline schemes of work which addressed the same NLS objectives (from the revised framework, DFES 2008) but which did not require them to address grammar. Each school was observed teaching one lesson from each scheme of work, and these were followed by semi-structured interviews with the teachers and a focus student from each class.

In order to avoid compromising the controlled trial, teachers were unaware of the existence of comparison or intervention groups, and initially did not know that the project was focused on grammar (although they were told that we had a 'hidden' focus within a wider writing remit which we would reveal at the end of their involvement). In the last of the three interviews teachers were asked explicitly for their views about grammar teaching. The earlier interviews also frequently provided opportunities for teachers to express their opinions and feelings about grammar: in the intervention group, because the materials addressed grammar explicitly, and in the comparison group, because the learning objectives often led to discussions about linguistic aspects of writing.

The semi-structured teacher interviews were organised into three sections: the first section asking teachers to reflect on the lesson just observed; the second asking them to discuss their confidence and beliefs about teaching narrative fiction, argument or poetry; and the third probing their beliefs about writing more generally. In the final interview, teachers were asked what they understand by the term 'grammar teaching,' along with questions regarding its value or lack of it, whether terminology is necessary, and how they approach teaching grammar themselves.

The interviews were coded inductively using NVIVO software under major headings which separated out conceptual, evaluative and affective elements (what teachers think 'grammar teaching' is, how useful they think it is, and how they feel about it). While recognising that these elements are necessarily intertwined in belief systems (Nespor 1987), this article focuses on the feelings which teachers expressed in response to the fact that these were overwhelmingly evident throughout the interviews despite the fact that there was no direct question to elicit them. After coding, comments were arranged into 'belief profiles' which included bullet point interpretations of teachers' statements, and these were presented to the participants at a dissemination conference for participant validation and further elaboration. The teacher names used here are pseudonyms.

The interviews capture teachers' espoused feelings and so are confined to a conceptualisation of beliefs which sees them as propositional and conscious, rather than tacit "theories in use" (Argyris et al. 1985). They are also open to the usual problems of self-report methods, such as the influence of social-desirability, or the unconscious nature of some beliefs (Kagan 1990), although the possibility that participants were influenced by their perceptions of what the interviewer values makes the dominance of negative attitudes potentially even more interesting. However, the use of interviews enables discussion of both generalised feelings and specific events which allow for the "context-specific" nature of beliefs (Pajares 1992:319), and the use of three interviews along with feedback on the belief profiles also allows for change over time.

Results

The Dominant Discourse: Grammar as “a bad word”

Fourteen of the thirty-one teachers – nearly half of the sample - expressed negative overall feelings about grammar, while an additional ten expressed some negative emotion, typically a lack of confidence in their subject or pedagogical knowledge which made them feel uneasy about teaching it. The table below shows the coding framework constructed to explore this discourse.

Table 1

Suffering Grammar

Negative feelings began with associations with the word “grammar,” with seven teachers expressing a feeling that grammar is “a really loaded word,” with “a really bad name.” These teachers felt that, despite more than a decade of the literacy strategy, grammar has “a stigma” within the teaching profession and among students:

“any child that’s ever been in my classroom or any teacher I’ve ever spoken to, if you say the word grammar their face drops.” – Lydia

The association of the word ‘grammar’ with traditional or “old-fashioned” teaching persisted, echoing the findings of the QCA report (1998) and Van Gelderen (2006), with statements such as “it makes me think of confusing terminology and dusty old classrooms.” More teachers couched their discussion of grammar in phrases which signalled dislike, with three teachers explicitly stating that they “hate” teaching it. Even teachers who believed in the value of teaching grammar used language relating to pain or hardship, such as John’s remark that his students “don’t have that level of grammatical education that I’ve had to suffer.” Unlike the QCA (1998) finding that teachers who had been practising longer were more confident in their linguistic subject knowledge (p.28), there appeared to be no direct correlation between length of service and confidence amongst teachers in this study. In fact, there was some evidence to suggest that teachers who had been practising before the reintroduction of grammar felt less inclined to develop this aspect of their subject knowledge than newly qualified teachers, as in the comment from Olivia who remarked that “part of

me thinks, I've got away with not knowing what a noun phrase is for twenty years, and so..."

Inadequacy and Fear

A majority of teachers expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to deal with grammar, both due to subject knowledge and to pedagogical issues. For a smaller but noteworthy number of teachers, expressions of fear, anxiety and a sense of inadequacy revealed the ways in which grammar challenged teachers' perceptions of themselves as successful professionals. These teachers described their lack of confidence as "a source of constant embarrassment," something which they feel "ashamed about," which makes them feel "inadequate." One teacher even worried that she might "expose" herself to the rest of her department "as some sort of grammar heathen." Even stronger than these feelings of inadequacy were the expressions of the fear which the topic aroused in some teachers,

"it's ridiculous how much it does alarm me actually, the idea of having to teach, you know, when I got onto determiner, I thought I'm not doing that."
- Heather

Boredom

Other teachers saw grammar as inherently uninteresting, even when their students appeared to enjoy it. This was often related to teachers' own experiences as learners, either experiences of traditional grammar teaching which they found dull and unhelpful, "because it put me off so much I'm afraid of putting them off," or because of the lack of grammar entirely: "I'm from a generation that wasn't taught it, and I consider myself to be a successful reader and writer, so I don't believe it's necessary." Such comments reflect the importance of early life experiences in belief formation (Smith 2005; Borg 2003).

This lack of interest may also, in some cases, be ascribed to teachers' identities as literature specialists. A teacher of 8 years standing, Claire, who described grammar teaching as "dry as a camel's arse in a sandstorm," reflected a grammar / literature

divide (Hudson and Walmsley 2005; Findlay 2010) in the way in which she positioned herself as a literature advocate in opposition to the “grammar buff”:

“if you love language and you love books and you love teaching those things, then you’re more passionate about literary techniques and the effect that it has, because you can have almost a physical pull to these things, but I’ve never seen anyone, you know, wet their pants in excitement over the use of an ellipsis... your grammar rules, they’re rules, the others, they’re a selection of feelings on page.”

This division between literature and language was reiterated by two other teachers, although interestingly, the process of reflection prompted one to begin to question the simple distinctions that she had drawn when she tangled herself up in trying to explain what interests her about her students’ writing,

“It’s a boring thing to have to explore, and for me, I suppose it’s because I’m more literature than language, for me the mechanics of language and how it’s shaped is irrelevant and it’s more about how it makes me feel and the effect of it at the end of it. I don’t really care how they’ve got there, but the point is they have, and I like to work out how they’ve got there, which I suppose is the grammar, hmm, interesting.” -Grace

This teacher later indicated that talking about her feelings made her more aware that she needed to “deal with my own issues of grammar, my own preconceptions about what grammar means,” suggesting that time given to reflection may help teachers to confront and rationalise their own emotional responses.

Influence on pedagogy

Teachers also explained how these feelings influenced their teaching. Lack of confidence was reported as a reason for avoiding teaching certain aspects of grammar by eight teachers, with statements such as “I just teach them what I feel comfortable with.” The same number commented that their dislike, anxiety or lack of confidence is sometimes evident when they are teaching, and that they are concerned about the impact this could have on their students. Olivia, (who referred to “this horrible grammar bit” in an observed lesson) explained that her “block” with grammar made her pupils see it as particularly difficult “you know, Miss is finding it

hard, so therefore this must be hard.” Such reflections highlight the importance of teachers’ feelings, suggesting that they can have an impact on students by controlling both what grammar is taught and what attitude to grammar is evoked in the classroom.

An Oppositional Discourse: Grammar as “empowering”

Fewer than half of the teachers expressed generally confident feelings regarding their linguistic subject knowledge, usually couching them in tentative terms (although this may have been driven in some cases by a desire not to appear over-confident to the interviewer). A much smaller number of teachers, seven, expressed strongly positive feelings about teaching grammar. In direct opposition to the discourse above, these teachers framed grammar as inspiring rather than frightening, fascinating rather than boring, and empowering rather than reactionary. These comments were captured in two codes which focused on confidence in linguistic subject knowledge and positive feelings about grammar.

One of the strongest declarations in favour of grammar came from Sophie, who described the influence of the free-expression model through which she was taught to write, and explained the ‘liberation’ she felt after teaching herself grammar in response to the realisation that “I had absolutely no grammar” during her teacher training:

“It was perceived that grammar was an inhibitor to free flow, and that self expression was what was really important....I have a completely, a different and opposite view because of my experiences of not knowing why I wrote the way I wrote... there were rules and regulations that were out there that I didn’t understand and I couldn’t play with them.”

Sophie recognised the common attitude to grammar, indicating that her own attitude is a reaction against this,

“There seems to be this concept in people’s imagination that you say the word grammar and its sort of like the pit of doom you’ve just thrown them into and it’s hell and it’s not, actually to me, that’s where freedom lies.”

Another teacher who expressed similar feelings, Gina, was enthused by the idea of grammar, “I find it quite exciting looking at things to work out how they’d been written well and trying to figure out how to teach that to kids.” Gina vividly recalled an emotional critical moment when she recognised the gaps in her knowledge about language:

“I remember being at university and a university lecturer saying to me ...I’d have given you the A if you’d have put in some possessive apostrophes, and I’d never heard of them, and I went to the library and looked them up and was devastated and thought well why did I never spot those in my reading?... I can remember just standing in the library blushing and feeling so ashamed... I felt quite angry that the school had let me down in that way. Look. I even feel like I’m starting to blush now thinking about it.”

These examples indicate a common thread amongst some of the teachers who expressed positive views about grammar: the fact that their opinions were shaped by emotional reactions *against* the lack of grammar in their own education. For these teachers, feelings about grammar have been shaped by particular ‘critical episodes,’ events which “colour or frame the comprehension of events later in time” (Nespor 1987:320). These changes have been reinforced by later experiences of moving beyond rule or accuracy focused notions of grammar to the “buzzy” atmosphere (Gina) of rhetorical “play” (Sophie) as their students experiment with grammar.

Re-framing Grammar

The project which formed the context of this research also provoked changes in the attitudes of eight of the participant teachers. For one intervention teacher, Rachel, using the project lesson plans and resources prompted her to reconsider her initial anxieties about grammar:

I think that we now, realise that we... I need to take the bull by the horns as it were and just get over my own fear.

Another teacher, Sandra, commented that her practice is beginning to change as she “confronts” her insecurities,

“there are some elements of grammar where I feel less secure and so I probably have avoided. This project has made me start to confront that, and so I think my approach is changing.”

Even in the comparison group, the process of reflecting on her beliefs in the interviews prompted a “change of heart” in one teacher,

“I have come to realise that yes, it [grammar teaching] is very important, and I have changed my opinion.” –Victoria.

These changes are evident from participants’ espoused feelings only, so it is not yet clear whether they represent superficial or a deep-rooted shifts. However, such spontaneous statements suggest that working with the project materials and being asked to reflect on their practices has made a difference, at least temporarily, and these new feelings were reiterated and confirmed when teachers validated their belief profiles up to 6 months later. For at least one teacher, change was accompanied by a process of reconceptualisation which moved away from seeing grammar as superficial and related to accuracy, towards an understanding of how grammar “can change the meaning of what you’re trying to get across” (Simon). When coupled with the determination to ‘confront their fears’ and ‘take the bull by the horns,’ this understanding may empower teachers who would previously “shy away” from teaching grammar to explore the “potential” that Beard suggested (2000:121).

Discussion

While the teachers were never asked directly about their feelings, the influence of affective factors pervaded all of the interviews: this is a topic that provokes great emotion, even undermining professional confidence to the extent that some teachers admit to feeling the need to hide their lack of knowledge. There is also evidence that some teachers’ dislike arises from their perception of themselves as literature specialists (see also Findlay 2010).

In the light of Cajkler and Hislam’s finding that trainees’ anxieties did not diminish even when subject knowledge grew (2002), this study suggests that such negative

feelings may be pervasive, hindering teachers' ability to explore the potential of grammar. More alarmingly, the fact that teachers' dislike is sometimes communicated to their students could create a legacy of anti-grammar sentiment. However, a significant minority of teachers espoused very different feelings. It's notable that two discussed above, Gina and Sophie, were both literature specialists and self-taught. Their positive attitudes arose from the frustration they felt in their lack of knowledge and the sense of empowerment that accompanied their new understanding when they taught themselves about grammar. Given Tillema's finding that affect underpins belief change (2008), the question remains for those engaged in teacher development as to how to encourage more teachers to embrace an aspect of English which they may find challenging emotionally, as well as intellectually (Burgess et al. 2000). The study is significant in underlining the need for policy and professional development to take account of teachers' affective responses to curriculum change: the affective discourses constructed by these teachers signal that addressing the 'grammar problem' is more than a simple matter of subject knowledge and top-up courses, but one in which engagement is mediated by emotions, not just intellectual knowledge.

One way to achieve constructive change may be through participation in research projects such as the one described here, or through professional development which involves a similar structure of practice and reflection. Participation in this project gave teachers a forum to articulate and in some cases "confront their fears," and it has been suggested that exactly this kind of reflection can help teachers to explore, challenge and consolidate their beliefs (Calderhead 1996:713). The affective changes that occurred as a result of this project reflect the "dialectical relationship" between beliefs and practice (Poulson et al. 2001), as change was preceded by classroom practice as well as reflection. Given Cajkler and Hislam's similar finding that trainee confidence changed as a result of teaching and preparing for teaching (2002), it would seem sensible to conclude that some teachers will need to work with materials which demonstrate how grammar teaching can be contextualised within reading and writing activities before their own negative perceptions of grammar will be challenged.

Conclusions

Teachers' decisions about whether to tackle grammar, and how to tackle grammar, are influenced by their feelings about the subject. These feelings have been shaped by discourses which frame grammar as "old-fashioned", which associate it with difficulty or hardship, and which oppose language to literature. In many cases, negative feelings have also been exacerbated by the absence of grammar in teachers' own education. If we heed Elizabeth Gordon's (2005) belief that schools will not "satisfactorily teach grammar until teachers themselves are well equipped to teach it and see it as being useful, interesting and relevant" (p.66), the picture seems grim. However, this study also indicates that, when teachers want to learn about grammar, they can find it exciting and empowering, not "the pit of doom," but "where freedom lies." When they are supported in changing their practices and reflecting on their beliefs, many teachers can disentangle themselves from negative discourses and approach grammar with renewed enthusiasm and vigour.

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Theme	Code	Example	No. of Teachers
<i>Suffering Grammar</i>	Negative feelings overall	"I see it as being quite old-fashioned "	14
	Perceive problems with the term 'grammar'	"the word grammar has got a really bad name"	7
	Dislike grammar	"I hate grammar teaching"	9
<i>Inadequacy and fear</i>	Lack Confidence	"I feel completely lost when anybody mentions grammar to me"	17
	Feel inadequate, ashamed or embarrassed	"I feel inadequate a lot of the time... because I don't really understand my own language"	9
	Feel fear or panic	"just looking through this seeing modal verbs, that frightens me"	4
<i>Boredom</i>	Find grammar boring	"punctuation, grammar... all the boring tedious jobs that we need to teach"	11
	Literature/Language dichotomy	"meaning and imagery... it's almost inherently interesting, whereas grammar features... there isn't that much that's different or exciting or creative"	3
<i>Influence on pedagogy</i>	Negative feelings influence students	"I worry that I pass on this fear to my students"	8
	Lack of confidence influences pedagogy	"I've always shied away from the nitty gritty of prepositions and adverbs... because I've been under-confident about them myself"	8

Table 1: Coding framework for negative affective responses