ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FORMING GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE BASED ON THE "TOPIC-COMMENT" SYSTEM FOR LEARNERS OF THE CHINESE LANGUAGE AT HSK 2 LEVEL

АНАЛІЗ ЕФЕКТИВНОСТІ ФОРМУВАННЯ ГРАМАТИЧНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНЦІЇ ЗА СИСТЕМОЮ «ТЕМА-КОМЕНТАР» ДЛЯ ТИХ, ХТО ВИВЧАЄ КИТАЙСЬКУ МОВУ HSK 2 РІВНЯ

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The paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of the "Topic-Comment" (TC) method in teaching Chinese grammar to Ukrainian-speaking students at HSK 2 level. Taking into account the substantive structural differences between the Ukrainian and Chinese languages, the process of mastering Chinese grammar requires adaptation to the peculiarity of the Ukrainian language system. The TC method focuses on identifying the topic and comment structure in the sentence. This helps students build logically and sequentially grammatical constructions, and as a result, learners increase their level of assimilation of the material.

During the study was conducted an experiment with pupils and students, between the ages of 12 and 19, from two educational institutions: pupils were from the private institution "Collegium Years" and students were from Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University. Pupils were divided into two groups: the experimental group of pupils was using the TC method, while the control group used traditional methods. The university students were not divided into groups – they were asked to assess their knowledge subjectively: "before" and "after" completing the course of learning the "Topic-Comment" method. Knowledge diagnostic, objective and subjective assessments of progress after the course were provided by using Google Forms.

The study results showed that pupils who were studying with the TC method mastered word order and the usage of locatives compared to the control group. The TC method contributed to a deeper understanding of the grammatical structures of Chinese sentences and greater integration of grammar into communicative practice. Subjective assessments of the students demonstrated an increase the level of their grammatical competence. The obtained data confirm the feasibility of using the TC method in teaching Chinese grammar at the elementary level. Further research has a great promise to integrate TC with other approaches, evaluating its effectiveness at higher HSK levels, and studying its long-term impact on learning grammar.

Key words: Chinese grammar, Topic-Comment method, HSK 2, Ukrainian-speaking students, word order.

У статті здійснено комплексний аналіз ефективності методики «Топік-коментар» (ТК) у навчанні китайської граматики для україномовних студентів рівня HSK 2. Враховуючи суттєві структурні відмінності між українською та китайською мовами, процес засвоєння китайської граматики потребує адаптації до специфіки української мовної системи. Методика ТК, що базується на виділенні теми (топіка) й коментаря в структурі речення, допомагає студентам будувати граматичні конструкції логічно й послідовно, покращуючи рівень засвоєння матеріалу.

У дослідженні проведено експеримент із залученням учнів та студентів 12-19 років із навчальних закладів: учні приватного закладу «Колегіум Єарс» та студенти Київського столичного університету імені Бориса Грінченка. Учні були поділені на 2 групи: учасники експериментальної групи працювали за методикою ТК, тоді як контрольна група використовувала традиційні методи. Студенти не були поділені на групи – їм було запропоновано суб'єктивно оцінити свої знання «до» та «після» проходження курсу за методикою «Топік-коментар». Діагностика знань, об'єктивна та суб'єктивна оцінки прогресу після курсу здійснювалася за допомогою Google Форм.

Результати дослідження показали, що учні, які навчалися за методикою ТК, ефективніше засвоїли порядок слів і використання локативів, ніж учні контрольної групи. Методика ТК сприяла глибшому розумінню граматичної структури китайських речень і більшій інтеграції граматики в комунікативну практику. Суб'єктивні оцінки студентів продемонстрували підвищення рівня граматичної компетентності. Отримані дані підтверджують доцільність використання методики ТК для навчання китайської граматики на початковому рівні. Перспективними є подальші дослідження для інтеграції ТК з іншими підходами, оцінки її ефективності на вищих рівнях HSK, а також дослідження довготривалого впливу на засвоєння граматики.

Ключові слова: китайська граматика, методика Топік-коментар, HSK 2, україномовні студенти, порядок слів.

Problem Statement. Ukrainian-speaking students face a number of difficulties while learning Chinese, particularly in the area of learning Chinese grammar at the elementary level. This is due to the substantive differences in sentence structure, the use of particles, word order, syntactic structures, and other language-specific features between Ukrainian and Chinese. These challenges highlight the necessity to use purpose-built methods that will be capable to adapt the process of learning Chinese grammar to the needs of the learners and specifics of the Ukrainian language system.

In this context, the "Topic-Comment" (TC) method, that is based on the concept of distinguishing the topic of a sentence and its comment, has a forward-looking approach for developing grammatical competence. The aim of this method is facilitation the teaching of Chinese grammar to Ukrainian-speaking learners. The effectiveness of this method is related to create conditions for building logical sentence structures and developing communicative skills. This allows learners to incorporate new knowledge into their speaking practice. The TC method is based on a systematic approach that unifies all aspects of Chinese grammar. Research is focused on the practical usage of the "Topic-Comment" method. It is relevant and essential because it allows to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach in teaching grammar to Ukrainian learners at the HSK 2 level.

The **purpose** of this paper is to present the 'Topic-Comment' system and the results of this study on the use of method in developing grammatical competence among learners at the HSK 2 level.

Metodology. Sentence communicative structure involves dividing it into the known parts – the topic, and the information that is given about it – the comment. The idea of such division existed among the proponents of the logical approach (Y. Holovatsky, M. Osadtsia), the psychological approach (O. Potebnia, W. Wundt), and the formal approach (P. Fortunatov, O. Shakhmatov, and others). The founders of the concept are the scholars of the Prague Linguistic School: V. Matesius, J. Firbas, F. Danes, and others [1].

At present, the study of the "Topic-Comment" system as a curriculum for studying Chinese grammar in Ukraine has not gained widespread attention. There are no widely available, specific publications or dissertations dedicated to this area of study in Ukraine. This issue is forward-looking for further research.

Future studies could explore effective ways to implement this system in classrooms, particularly for non-native speakers, and examine its potential benefits for enhancing grammar comprehension. Another area of interest could involve conducting comparative studies between the "Topic-Comment" system and other grammatical frameworks, such as the subject-predicate system, to assess its advantages and disadvantages.

Main findings. Predicative connections in Chinese are exemplified in specific types. There are constructions with nouns, verbs, and adjectives. In these cases, the meaning of the predicate is closely related to semantic and functional aspects, as a result, assigning it a key role in semantic meaning and information.

The predicate in this model is expressed through the comment. The comment conveys the main information about the topic, just as the predicate conveys information about the subject in traditional syntactic structures. The main information provided by the comment (or predicate) about the topic (or subject) remains the central element of the utterance [2, 42].

Identifying the "Topic-Comment" structure requires determining the main idea of the sentence, which is usually found at the end of the sentence – in the comment. This is consistent with the role of the comment, as it is something new to hearer, while the topic is something that has already been established. To identify the topic, it is convenient to ask, "What is the sentence about?". The answer will indicate the topic. Then, "What information is conveyed about this topic?". The answer will indicate the comment [6]. Consider the following example: 我的哥哥去了伦敦。 (My brother went to London.) Question: "What is the sentence about?" Answer: "My brother" (topic). Question: "What information is conveyed about this topic?" Answer: "Went to London" (comment).

One more way to identify the comment is to find the main idea of the sentence. Asking a question about the sentence may help the hearer define the topic and comment. The part that is repeated in both the question and the answer is already known – the topic. What remains as new information is the comment.

However, a simple sentence is not only limited to the "Topic-Comment" structure. There are other elements of the Chinese sentence, such as adverbials (状语), negations, modal verbs, verb complements (补语), verb suffixes (动词词尾), objects (宾语), and modal particles (语气词). We propose numbering these patterns by using "Cells". For example, cells preceding the comment core refer to sentence elements placed before the comment, while cells following the comment core refer to elements placed after it.

In the "Topic-Comment" system, the main component is the core. The core of the topic may be omit-

ted in a sentence if its meaning is already clear from the context. Furthermore, the core of the topic shares a semantic bond with Cell 0, corresponding to the temporal and locational context (adverbial of time and place). The core of the comment cannot be omitted because it would lead to the loss of the sentence's meaning. As a result, the hearer will only perceive isolated lexical units or word combinations.

According to our analysis, there are four types of topics: simple, double, inverted, and absent. The core of the topic– a noun or pronoun– can be specified (with a modifier before the noun). Nouns are specified by adjectives, pronouns, numerals, participles, prepositional phrases, etc. Classifiers specify the category and quantity of objects. In a simple topic, there is cell 0 with adverbials (time, place, introductory words). Two cores are placed next to each other in a double topic. An inverted topic is moved to the back without any changes and contains only the cells of the comment. An absent topic has empty cells or an implicit noun/pronoun.

After analyzing the structure of simple sentences in Chinese, we have found three types of comments in the sentence: with a verb (verb predicate), a noun (nominal predicate), and an adjective (qualitative predicate). Each of these types of comments has its own unique features and construction rules.

The comment is based on a verb predicate, which is always present in the sentence. The cells before and after the verb can be filled with different complements: in Cell 5 can appear the simple direction complements, result complements, and prepositional complements; there can be placed time, frequency, possibility, and degree complements in Cell 7; complex direction complements, time complements, state complements, and frequency complements can appear in Cell 9.

The topic described by an adjective is called a qualitative predicate. The features of the cell filling are as follows: in Cell 4 can be placed a degree adverb must be used, such as 很, 非常, 特别, 真, 好, 挺, etc.; in Cell 5 the speaker may use direction complements, prepositional complements, complements of possibility, degree, evaluation, quantity, and the suffixes 过 and 了 can be used; in cell 6, a modal particle may appear.

Nominal predicates are typically characterized by the presence of the linking verb 是 between the topic and the comment. The cells before the core of the comment are similar to those in other sentence types, but in Cell 2, only the negation 不 can appear but never 没. In some cases, the linking verb 是 may be omitted if the sentence is short, affirmative, and used in spoken language. Cells 5-9 are not filled because nominal predicates do not accept suffixes, complements, or objects.

The proposed system includes four preceding cells: adverbials, negations, and modal verbs, and six following cells: complements, suffixes, objects, and modal particles. For better visualization, we propose a generalized diagram of the "Topic-Comment" system, where the verb serves as the cell of the comment (see Table 1).

Table 1

The schematic overview of the 'Topic-Comment' system, where the verb serves as the core of the comment

0	Topic	Comment with a verb									
	Core of topic	1	2	3	4	Core of comment	5	6	7	8	9	10

Explanation of the numbers meanings in Table 1: 0, 1, 4 – adverbial; 2 – negation; 3 – modal verb; 5, 7, 9 – complements; 6 – suffixes 了, 过, 着; 8 – object; 10 – modal particle.

Based on "Topic-comment" system that was described above we have conducted the research. It process involved pupils from the private institution "Collegium Years" and students from Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University. Using Google Forms as a tool for diagnostics and analysis the participant's responses, identified challenging aspects of Chinese grammar and provided comparative data on the current levels of both groups.

During the preparatory stage of the research have been chosen participants, and some of them have been divided into groups and also prepared educational materials. The study involved pupils aged 12 years old and students aged 18-19 years old with an HSK 2 level of proficiency in Chinese.

Particular attention was paid to random formation of groups of students to avoid subjectivity and ensure representativeness. Two groups with seven participants in each were formed at "Collegium Years": one group used the "Topic-Comment" method and another one followed the traditional approach to grammar learning. In contradistinction to pupils, a group of 24 students from Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, who already had some experience in learning Chinese, was created without dividing them. The key point was to make objective evaluation of knowledge after the course for pupils and subjective for the students.

One of the key stages in the preparatory process was creating curricula for both courses, taking into account the age, learning format, and differing course durations.

At the beginning of the study, Google Forms were used to assess the initial knowledge of the pupils

and students, helping to identify the grammatical topics that caused the most difficulties. These topics included word order in sentences with clarified comments, the correct use of suffixes and particles (such as 了), constructing sentences with the 把 structure, and applying complements to verbs. This data enabled the creation of an adapted curriculum for each group, focusing on the problem areas and enhancing the effectiveness of the learning process.

The implementation of the "Topic-Comment" system at "Collegium Years" involved various methods and approaches to achieve practical results during the 20-session offline course, with each session lasting 45 minutes. The experimental group (pupils who were working with the "Topic-Comment" method) had the opportunity to learn the main patterns of sentence construction, emphasize the topic and comment, and practice this knowledge in various communicative situations. The training began with an introductory block explaining the meaning of the topic as the main subject of the sentence and the comment as additional information that expands upon the meaning of the topic. This phase ensured better integration of grammatical knowledge into practical usage and enhanced the overall understanding of Chinese sentence structure.

The group of pupils following the traditional grammar-learning approach (control group) focused on mastering the rules through lectures and written assignments. The theoretical lessons for this group aimed to explain grammatical rules in the traditional format, after which pupils completed written exercises to reinforce the material. The primary focus of this group was on memorizing and applying rules, rather than on integrating grammar into communicative situations. Participants completed gap-filling tasks, translations, and sentence transformations, which also contributed to the basic skills acquisition, but these exercises did not always meet the needs of communication.

The final lesson (Session 20) of the study have been used by both experimental and control group to complete a comparative analysis of their learning achievements. The results showed that pupils from both groups demonstrated an equal level of understanding of word order in simple sentences. However, for constructing complex sentences, the quality scores varied significantly. Experimental group achieved 80% (8 out of 10 correct answers), indicating a high level of understanding and the ability to construct sentences according to word order rules. In contrast, control group achieved a much lower result – 40% (4 out of 10 correct answers). This suggests that without proper methodological support and the implementation of the "Topic-Comment" system, pupils could not achieve a high level of understanding of simple sentence structure. For example, pupils in the control group frequently made mistakes by rearranging elements in sentences, leading to a loss of meaning.

When we analyzed the acquisition of verb complements, the results were significantly better. Experimental group demonstrated an excellent result – 100% (10 out of 10 correct answers), which confirms the effectiveness of using the "Topic-Comment" system in teaching this aspect of grammar. In comparison, control group achieved 80% (8 out of 10 correct answers). Although control mastered verb complements, their level of proficiency was lower than in experimental group. Pupils in the control group often skipped or misused complements – indicating a lack of practice and understanding.

The results of acquiring knowledge about the concepts of time and place were identical for both groups – 10 out of 10 correct answers. This suggests that both groups equally mastered these aspects of grammar, regardless of the use of the "Topic-Comment" system. Pupils were able to formulate successfully sentences that included temporal and spatial constructions, such as "Tomorrow we will go to the park" (明天我们去公园).

The assessment of mastering locatives revealed significant differences. Experimental group achieved 100% (10 out of 10 correct answers). Pupils demonstrated an excellent understanding and usage of locatives in sentences. Pupils in this group skillfully constructed sentences with locatives, such as "The cat is sleeping under the table" (猫在桌子下睡觉). In contrast, control group achieved 60% (6 out of 10 correct answers), indicates difficulty in mastering this grammatical aspect. Pupils in this group made mistakes with locatives frequently. For example, they got confused with "in" and "on", which led to ambiguity in their sentences.

An analysis of the results reveals differences in the effectiveness of learning between experimental and control groups. The first one, which used the "Topic-Comment" system, achieved higher results in word order of complex sentences and locatives. In contrast, contrast group, which lacked of this support, showed lower results, particularly in word order.
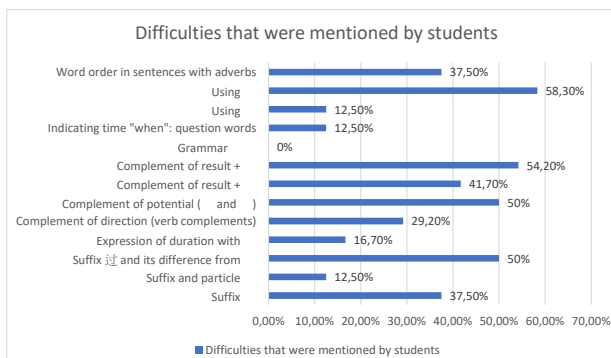
The results presented in a grouped histogram for better visualization (Fig. 1), illustrating the research on various aspects of grammar mastery between the two pupil groups, across different categories: word order, verb complements, temporal and spatial constructions, and locatives.
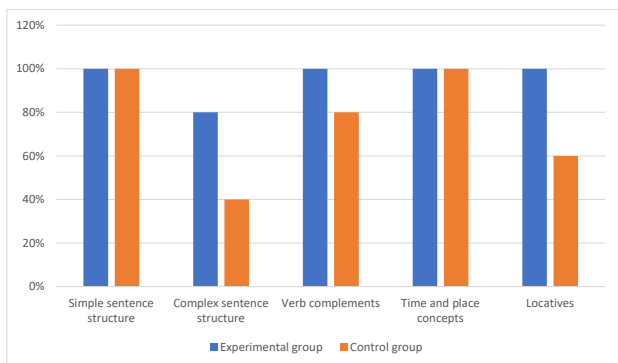
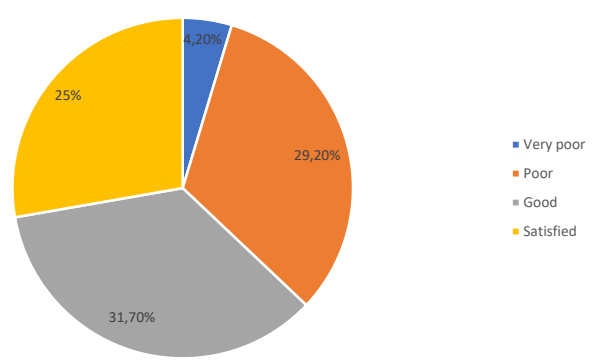**Fig. 1. Comparison of grammar proficiency between topic-comment and traditional teaching methods**

Fig. 3. Initial knowledge Level Before the "Topic-Comment" Express Course (Responses from Students of the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University)

The duration of the courses at the private institution "Collegium Years" and Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University was different. Another important aspect was to study the optimal duration of the programme to ensure effective planning of training beyond the curriculum.

Students at the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University completed an express course lasting 140 minutes, which has been developed according to the "Topic-Comment" methodology. It was developed with consideration of their previous knowledge and experience in studying Chinese. Based on a subjective analysis of responses from these students, the following types of difficulties in learning Chinese grammar were identified. These results are shown in the diagram below (Fig. 2):

Fig. 2. Types of Difficulties in Learning Chinese Grammar (Responses from Students of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University)

Students at the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University were asked to assess their current level of grammar proficiency: 4.2% of students rated their current level as "very poor", 29.2% as "poor", 31.7% as "good", and 25% as "satisfactory", with no students rating their level as "excellent" (Fig. 3).

All surveyed students (100%) confirmed that they had no prior familiarity with the "Topic-Comment" methodology. This is essential for the objectivity of the study. It eliminates the influence of existing knowledge about the system on the results. As a result, it ensures a more accurate assessment of how well the material was understood after completing the course.

Students were invited to take a follow-up survey via Google Forms to evaluate their results after the course based on "Topic-Comment" system: 12 students reported that they understand how to form grammatically correct sentences without usage of direct translation; 10 students expressed willingness to apply their acquired knowledge in the written part of the HSK exam; 9 students noted that they have acquired a structured method of learning grammar, where they understand the links between topics instead of practicing it as individual parts. They are prepared to implement this understanding in their written tasks; 8 students mentioned that they can identify grammatical errors in word order in Chinese sentences; 6 students showed readiness to work with unadapted Chinese texts and understood how to use the verb complements; 4 students are able to explain the specifics of the topic within the structure of Chinese sentences. The detailed results are shown graphically in Figure 4:
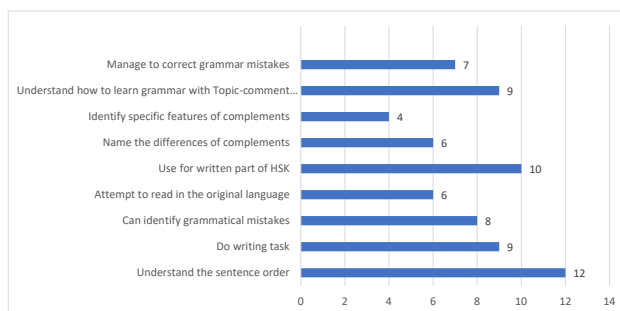
Fig. 4.

Furthermore, students were asked to assess their overall level after completing the course: 42.2% rated their level as "good", 42.9% as "satisfactory", and 14.3% as "excellent" (Fig. 5). When have been compared their self-assessments at the start of the course, no students rated themselves as "very poor" or "poor." The "good" rating increased by 5.1%, and the "satisfactory" rating increased by 17.9%.
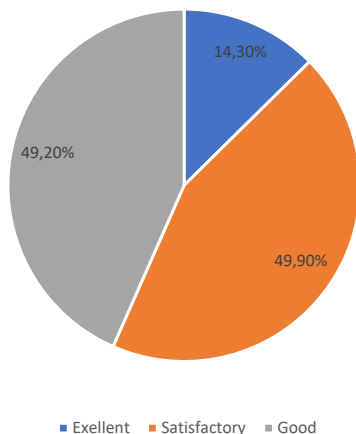
Fig. 5. Subjective self-assessment of the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University students knowledge

Conclusions. Both the objective results of the pupils and the subjective evaluations of the students confirm the hypothesis that the use of the "Topic-Comment" system can be an effective method for teaching grammar. It has the potential to improve students' grammatical competence. A comparison of the results between students and pupils showed that age and the format of the course (online or offline) did not affect the outcomes. However, the duration of the course proved to be a key factor in enhancing the effectiveness of learning.

Based on the results of the study, it can be stated that the "Topic-Comment" system is an effective approach to teaching grammar for HSK 2-level students. However, to achieve better results, it is important to expand the research and adapt this methodology to other learning contexts.

Possible directions for the further development of this research include:

1. Future research can be focused on the impact of the "Topic-Comment" system on students at different levels (HSK 3–5). This would explore if the approach is effective for beginners as well as advanced students with strong grammatical skills. After the course, 85.7% of students said they would recommend it to others who is struggling with learning grammar.

2. Future research can explore integrating the "Topic-Comment" system with other teaching methods, such as the communicative approach, project-based learning, or gamification. This could create more comprehensive and effective teaching programs.

3. Future studies can assess the long-term effectiveness of the "Topic-Comment" system by conducting follow-up tests after some time. This would help evaluate the retention of grammatical structures. The "Topic-Comment" system shows great potential for further integration into the educational process. Expanding research in this area could not only confirm its effectiveness but also provide new methods for enhancing grammar teaching, ultimately improving students' language proficiency levels.

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