Cairo University.
Faculty of Arts.
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The Professor Series

in

Teaching English Grammar

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إهداء

*إلي من افتقدتها وأنا في أمس الحاجة إليها .....

*فهي إن كانت غائبة عن عالمنا هذا فهي حاضرة بقلبي ووجداني ... أمي الغالية .

*إلي من شملني بعطفه ورعايته ..
*إلي من أدبني فأحسن تأديبي...والدي العزيز.

* أهدي باكورة أعمالي اليهما تقديرا لصنيعهما معي وعرفانا بجميلهماعلي .

Teaching English Grammar

Definitions of the word 'grammar' are manifold: they can range from a 'theory of language' to 'a description of the (syntactic) structure of a particular language'. Of these 'grammars', work by applied linguists on what they call 'pedagogical grammar', which focuses on language teaching, syllabus design and the production of teaching material, might be of particular interest to the teachers as well as learners. Moreover, grammar is central to the teaching and learning of languages. It is one of the more difficult aspects of language to teach well. Many people, including language teachers, hear the word "grammar" and think of a fixed set of word forms and rules of usage. They associate "good" grammar with the prestige forms of the language, such as those used in writing and in formal oral presentations, and "bad" or "no" grammar with the language used in everyday conversation or used by speakers of nonprestige forms. The following research sheds light on the techniques as well as approaches used in teaching grammar.

First, Traditional grammar is the grammar found in many English textbooks, college   rhetoric manuals, and practical English handbooks and usage guides. Such works typically provide a glossary of vaguely defined grammatical terms as the basis for rules of standard grammar, punctuation, and usage. Traditional grammar embodies both a theory of sentence structure (involving notional parts of speech and unlabelled Reed-Kellogg diagrams) and a purpose for grammar (to indicate how various levels of

writing and speech should be expressed). Traditional grammar books vary from works that provide simple definitions of grammatical terms together with advice on grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and word choice to works of grammatical criticism (such as Fowler's Dictionary of Modern English Usage} that assume a robust knowledge of grammatical terminology and provide literate but sometimes misguided suggestions for usage.

Academics like Henry Sweet developed descriptive grammars to account for forms and structures rather than relying on Latin-based grammar teaching in the teaching of English grammar. These (descriptive) grammars take account of the key differences between Latin and English. Descriptive grammars set out 'the rules that appear to govern how a language is used' (QCA, 1998). During the last 40 years linguistics has grown as an academic subject. Consequently grammar is viewed in broad terms with some linguists focusing on syntax, some focusing on sociolinguistics, others on pragmatics, etc. Progressive (descriptive) approaches tend to look at the grammatical features of the text as a whole.

The goal of grammar instruction is to enable students to carry out their communication purposes. This goal has three implications: First, students need overt instruction that connects grammar points with larger communication contexts. Second, students do not need to master every aspect of each grammar point, only those that are relevant to the immediate

communication task. Third, error correction is not always the instructor's first responsibility.

To illustrate, at all proficiency levels, learners produce language that is not exactly the language used by native speakers. Some of the differences are grammatical, while others involve vocabulary selection and mistakes in the selection of language appropriate for different contexts. In responding to student communication, teachers need to be careful not to focus on error correction to the detriment of communication and confidence building. Teachers need to let students know when they are making errors so that they can work on improving. Teachers also need to build students' confidence in their ability to use the language by focusing on the content of their communication rather than the grammatical form. Teachers can use error correction to support language acquisition, and avoid using it in ways that undermine students' desire to communicate in the language, by taking cues from context.

When students are doing structured output activities that focus on development of new language skills, use error correction to guide them.

Example:

Student (in class): I buy a new car yesterday.

Teacher: You bought a new car yesterday. Remember, the past tense of buy is bought.

When students are engaged in communicative activities, teachers correct errors only if they interfere with comprehensibility and respond using correct forms, but without stressing them.

Example:

Student (greeting teacher) : I buy a new car yesterday!

Teacher: You bought a new car? That's exciting! What kind?

The communicative competence model balances these extremes. The model recognizes that overt grammar instruction helps students acquire the language more efficiently, but it incorporates grammar teaching and learning into the larger context of teaching students to use the language. Instructors using this model teach students the grammar they need to know to accomplish defined communication. To achieve this goal, teachers distribute two short narratives about recent experiences or events, each one to half of the class. They teach the regular -ed form, using verbs that occur in the texts as examples. Then, they teach the pronunciation and doubling rules if those forms occur in the texts. Next, they teach the irregular verbs that occur in the texts. After that, students read the narratives, ask questions about points they don't understand and work in pairs in which one member has read Story A and the other Story B. Finally, students interview one another; using the information from the interview, they then write up or orally repeat the story they have not read.

In the 1940s and 50s, the audio-lingual method was popularized by behavioral psychologists such as Skinner and Watson. Teaching grammar was simply making students learn language habits through numerous drills and pattern practices.(Brown, 1994). But, there were problems with this method as there was no focus or emphasis on "the intentions, thinking,

conscious planning and internal processes of the learner" (Stern, 1984, p.305).

In the 1970s and 80s, the Communicative Approach propelled by sociolinguists and the collective works of Krashen, Halliday and Hymes, replaced the audio-lingual method. This approach focuses on meaning rather than form (grammar rules) as it was believed that it is meaning which drives language acquisition and development. Ellis (1994) noted in his review of research in the 1970s that much of the Communicative L2 teaching focused on meaning only. While the Communicative Approach simplified the teacher's task, schools began seeing hordes of students who could provide 'meaningful' sentences but which were often riddled with grammatical mistakes. The question teachers now often ask is whether a return to grammar teaching is necessary. If so, should grammar be taught implicitly or explicitly? Research indicates that a combination of form and meaning may be the best teaching approach.

To illustrate, a research by Prabhu (cited by Beretta & Davis, 1985) showed that students who received meaning-based instruction did well on the meaning-based test but poorly on a discrete-point grammar test. Spada & Lightbrown (1993) postulated that "form focused instruction and corrective feedback within the context of communicative interaction can contribute positively to second language development in both the short and long term" (p.205). This is supported by Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell (1997) who suggest that the integration of form and meaning is gaining importance in what they refer to as the 'principled communicative approach.' Musumeci

(1997) went on further to say that students should learn grammar explicitly but should also be given the opportunity to practise them in communicative and authentic tasks.

That is to say, as to the application of Communicative Grammar, teachers choose a topic that is appropriate for the students considering their areas of interests and levels. The concept of levels of usage can be introduced to students easily. Instead of attempting to convince them that what they say is incorrect and what teachers teach is correct, teachers can show them that what is appropriate when speaking privately with friends on the playground may not be appropriate when talking to the superintendent or when writing a business letter. As for lower level students, topics that are connected to their everyday lives, hobbies, school, friends, memories, likes and dislikes. But for more advanced level students, topics that go beyond everyday matters such as social issues, values, and news. After that teachers decide the grammatical area(s) to be focused on, to be reinforced or to be introduced and prepare six to eight questions related to a particular topic area. Lower level students start with yes or no questions. More advanced level students start with WH questions (where, who, why, when and what) and questions asking for opinions. Teachers use the questions to make a gap filling or matching exercise, add space for students to produce their own questions. On the backside, they write a number (letter) on each handout - two handouts with the same number (letter), so that in class students can look for their partners to pair up with (someone with the same number) to do the interviews as it follows :

Sample 1 : reviewing WH Questions and responses about travel :

Let's find out! – Travel

My interviewee :
Where was your worst trip?
Who do you usually travel with?
When was your best trip?
Why do you want to travel to next?
What do you like to / don't like to travel?

1-……………………………………………..   2-……………………………………………

3-……………………………………………..   4-…………………………………………

5-……………………………………………...

Sample 2 : How Questions :

Let's find out! – Summer vacation

My interviewee :
How far did you go traveling?
How many books/movies did you read/see?
How much money did you save?
How often did you go out with your friends?
How late were you up until every night?

1-…………………………………   2-…………………………………………

3-…………………………………..   4-…………………………………………

5-…………………………………………

Teachers let the students match and complete the questions in the box. This can be done in groups or on their own. They ask for volunteers or assign students to write their questions on the board for everyone to see. Then, they go around and help students make their original questions. Teachers start the interview activity. Students, with a pen and their handout,

go around looking for their partners asking, "What's your number? They sit down with their partners and interview each other with their questions in English. After they finish the interview, they write a short report or summary to the teacher of their interview results. Small classes can report the results orally.

As to using textbook grammar activities, textbooks usually provide one or more of the three types of grammar exercises. First, mechanical drills in which each prompt has only one correct response, and students can complete the exercise without attending to meaning. For example, George waited for the bus this morning. He *will wait* for the bus tomorrow morning, too. Second , meaningful drills in which each prompt has only one correct response, and students must attend to meaning to complete the exercise. For example, where are George's papers? *They* are *in his notebook*. (Students must understand the meaning of the question in order to answer, but only one correct answer is possible because they all know where George's papers are.) Third, communicative drills in which students use textbook grammar exercises effectively; instructors need to recognize which type they are, devote the appropriate amount of time to them, and supplement them as needed. Considering the element of time, when deciding which textbook drills to use and how much time to allot to students, teachers keep their relative value in mind. Mechanical drills are the least useful because they bear little resemblance to real communication. They do not require students to learn anything; they only require parroting of a pattern or rule. Meaningful drills can help students develop understanding of the workings of rules of grammar because they require students to make form-meaning correlations.

Their resemblance to real communication is limited by the fact that they have only one correct answer. Communicative drills require students to be aware of the relationships among form, meaning, and use. In communicative drills, students test and develop their ability to use language to convey ideas and information.

As regards developing grammar activities, many courses and textbooks, especially those designed for lower proficiency levels, use a specified sequence of grammatical topics as their organizing principle. When this is the case, classroom activities need to reflect the grammar point that is being introduced or reviewed. By contrast, when a course curriculum follows a topic sequence, grammar points can be addressed as they come up. In both cases, instructors can use the Larsen-Freeman pie chart as a guide for developing activities. For curricula that introduce grammatical forms in a specified sequence, instructors need to develop activities that relate form to meaning and use. For example, teachers describe the grammar point, including form, meaning, and use, and give examples (structured input) .They ask students to practice the grammar point in communicative drills (structured output) After that , they let students do a communicative task that provides opportunities to use the grammar point (communicative output).

When instructors have the opportunity to develop part or all of the course curriculum, they can develop a series of contexts based on the real world tasks that students will need to perform using the language, and then teach grammar and vocabulary in relation to those contexts. For example,

students who plan to travel will need to understand public address announcements in airports and train stations. Instructors can use audiotaped simulations to provide input; teach the grammatical forms that typically occur in such announcements; and then let students practise by asking and answering questions about what was announced.

In addition to this, integrative grammar teaching is of a great importance, combining *the* form and the meaning, and proposes what is so-called the EEE method, which consists of three equally important stages: exploration, explanation, and expression.

Exploration is the first stage of integrative grammar teaching. This stage is characterized by "*inductive learning*." Students are given sentences illustrating a certain grammar rule and are asked as a group to find the pattern and, with the help of the teacher, to formulate the rule. Many scholars have arguing against passive or inactive learning in which teachers refer to a textbook for explanations of rules. I completely agree with this critique. Students should be given opportunities to figure out everything by themselves, receiving help only when necessary. To make the task easier in the beginning, some grammatical forms or endings can be highlighted. Students tend to prefer assignments that allow them to explore the language. The knowledge they obtain becomes theirs and it is often much easier to remember. Exploration, then, works as an excellent tool for motivation.

Explanation is the second stage of learning. As students find sequences or patterns in the examples they used during the *exploration* stage, the teacher or the students can summarize what was previously discovered, now focusing on the form. In some situations it may be essential to go to the textbook and together with students relate 'textbook rules' with the examples and findings of the *exploration* stage. The *explanation* stage is important because students feel safer when they know the rules and have some source to go back to in case of confusion or for future reference. Depending on students' proficiency, confidence, and actual performance, this stage can sometimes be omitted. However, students should be aware of and experience the strategies they may use to refer to the explicit rules, if needed.

Expression is the third and last stage of the process. After discovering certain grammatical patterns in the *exploration* stage and getting to know the rules in the *explanation* stage, students start practicing the production of meaningful utterances with each other in communication and interactive tasks. The rationale of this stage is to provide students experience in applying their acquired knowledge in practice by making meaningful utterances. On the one hand, this may also serve as a motivation technique, since learners can actually see what they can do with what they have learned. On the other hand, the expression stage gives them the opportunity to practise communicating under the teacher's supervision, which usually assures the students that they can produce a correct utterance. Communicative interaction will be better if it is content-based, which allows students to relate it to something they care or know about, thus making it

authentic. For example, the following excerpt from the ESL lessons that was conducted based on the EEE method, the explanation and interpretation of the patterns of classroom participation will be provided. The topic of the lesson presented in this excerpt is "The formation and use of the present simple tense."

Excerpt

The rule: The use of the ending -s with verbs in the present simple tense.

Stage 1. Students were given the following sentences and were asked to find the grammatical pattern. All instructions were done in English.

1) I **go** to school *every day*.

2) My friends **play** tennis with me.

3) My mother work**s** at the IBM Company.

Moreover, earlier 'Grammar Translation' method was used in the class room. This method emphasizes on teaching of rules of language through translation from mother tongue to a target language and vice-versa. Practice to use a language was provided through translation and explanation of the rules of grammatical items needed for translation. As teaching of classical languages was the main and not fluency, so this method employed bilingualism.

Contrary to Grammar-Translation Method, Direct Method abolished the use of mother tongue altogether from the English Language Teaching class-rooms. It also banished teaching of grammar rules in isolation which seems pedantic and does not lead to fluency in the use of language.

Structural Linguistics that came into vogue in the first half of the 20th century made some modifications in the Direct Method. It regards language as a highly structured system in which language items are arranged in a hierarchy. It advocates teaching of language items in a graded manner through drilling in meaningful situations. The Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching which was developed between 1930 to 1960 by British Linguists Harold Palmer and A.S. Hornby necessitates the presentation of all language items in 'situations'. It requires contextualization of the language items and their practice.

As for declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge in teaching grammar , both language teachers and language learners are often frustrated by the disconnect between knowing the rules of grammar and being able to apply those rules automatically in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This disconnect reflects a separation between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge is knowledge *about* something. Declarative knowledge enables a student to describe a rule of grammar and apply it in pattern practice drills. Procedural knowledge is knowledge of how to do something. Procedural knowledge enables a student to apply a rule of grammar in communication. For example, declarative knowledge is what you have when you read and understand the instructions for programming the DVD player. Procedural knowledge is what you demonstrate when you program the DVD player. Procedural knowledge does not translate automatically into declarative knowledge; many native speakers can use their language clearly and correctly without being able to state the

rules of its grammar. Likewise, declarative knowledge does not translate automatically into procedural knowledge; students may be able to state a grammar rule, but consistently fail to apply the rule when speaking or writing.

There has been a movement away from the traditional methods of teaching English grammar through writing, rewriting and worksheets to using a more active approach through games. But before using fun learning games, teachers should make sure their students will be more than willing. Arif Saricoban and Esen Metin, authors of "Songs, Verse and Games for Teaching Grammar" explain how and why games work for teaching grammar in an ESL classroom. They say, "Games and problem-solving activities, which are task-based and have a purpose beyond the production of correct speech, are the examples of the most preferable communicative activities." They go on to explain that grammar games help children not only gain knowledge but be able to apply and use that learning. Additionally, games have the advantage of allowing the students to "practice and internalize vocabulary, grammar and structures extensively." They can do this because students are often more motivated to play games than they are to do desk work. Plus, during the game, the students are focused on the activity and end up absorbing the language subconsciously.

Aydan Ersoz, author of "Six Games for the ESL/EFL Classroom" also explains more reasons why games do work for teaching grammar. Learning a language requires constant effort and that can be tiring. Ersoz says games

can counter this as because games that are amusing and challenging are highly motivating and also they allow meaningful use of the language in context. But, the most important point now is the kinds of games that work best. When teachers are looking for games to use in their classroom, they don't just pick something to be a "time filler" which does not have a definite linguistic outcome. These games may entertain the students, but when teachers don't have much time with them each day as it is, they want their game to do double duty to get the most out of the time they spend playing games. Also, teachers should have a clear linguistic outcome for each game. The game can be a listening game to allow the students to repeatedly hear a new grammatical structure in use, or it can be a speaking game to allow practise of the grammar once it has been absorbed through listening beforehand.

Concerning testing grammar, it has been said that students would do the exercises with pleasure and in a funny way. But it is quite difficult to test grammar in the same way. However it is difficult, it is possible. There are several types of tests. Teachers can test their students' ability to speak or write, their reading or listening skills. Of course, written tests take less time and they are easier to administer. That's why most tests are based on written skills. This could cause some problems, because so much teaching in the classroom is based on oral work. Teachers should remember this fact and try to make the tests suitable for students. A good test shows both teacher and learner how well they are all doing. Teachers who write tests should bear in mind the following rules:

1-Teachers do not test general knowledge.

2-Teachers do not introduce new techniques in tests.

3-Teachers do not just test accuracy.

In conclusion, the teaching of grammar is by far, the most challenging task any teacher may face in his/her daily classroom. Many do not wish to teach grammar explicitly but are keenly aware that students need an understanding of the rules to achieve fluency as well as accuracy. A series of experimental lessons were administered to ESL students to study the patterns of classroom interaction during each of the suggested stages. Students, thus, can be exposed to various grammatical items through their contextualization in various real life situations. As discussed above a teacher can create situations of different sorts to provide practice and exposure to the students in learning grammatical rules in order to achieve communicative competence.
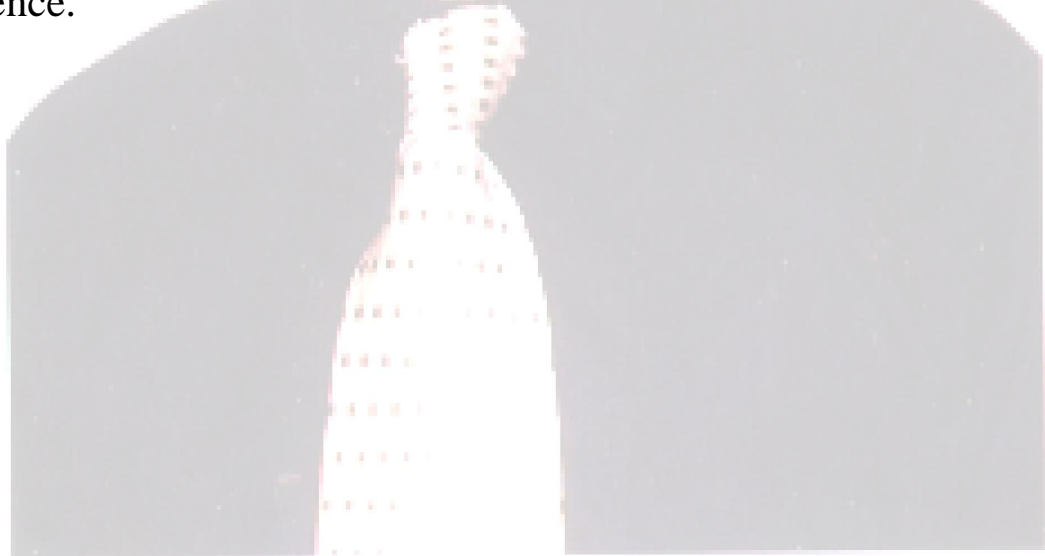
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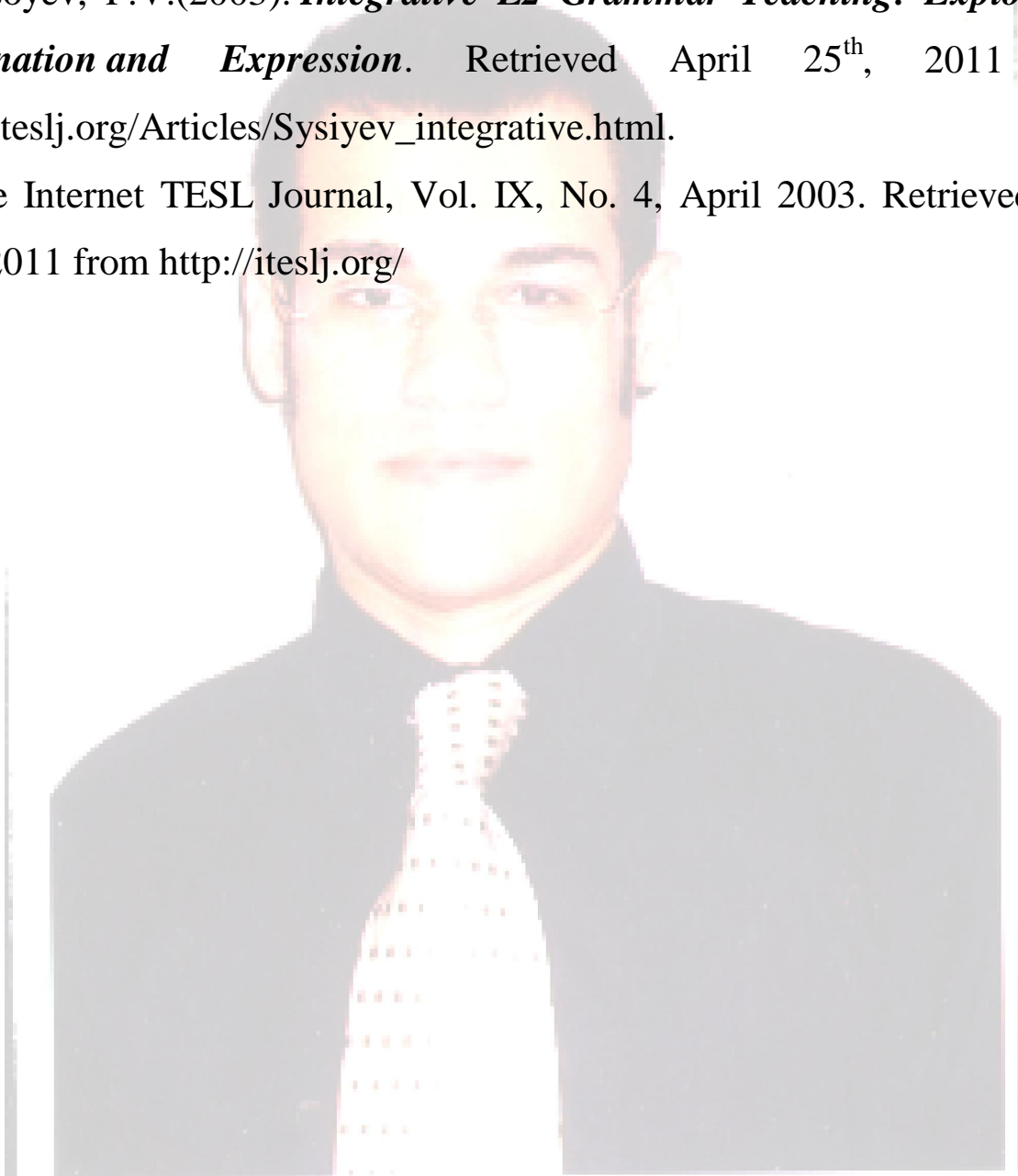
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