GRAMMAR AND COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: WHY, WHEN AND HOW TO TEACH IT?

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Your ideas about grammar?

- What is grammar?
- Why do you teach grammar?
- When do you teach grammar?
- How do you teach grammar?
Your ideas about grammar?

- Are they grammatical?
  - *I love youse all!*
  - *...to boldly go where no man has gone before.*
  - *After I pass the English test, I apply for a scholarship to study overseas.*
What is grammar?

“I think of grammar as “necessary evil” for language contexts. Or something poisonous (poison). If we abuse or misuse it, it will be fatally harmful” (Korean teacher)

“On the way to the lecture there is a funny picture [that] appeared in my mind.” (Chinese teacher)

[Picture of person fishing with fish labelled with grammar terms swimming into a net]
What is grammar?

Defining grammar is not straightforward and teaching grammar depends on your learning experiences and the theory of grammar you have in mind as you teach.

- Traditional grammar
- Formal grammar
- Functional grammar
What is grammar?

- Traditional grammar
  - parts of speech (analysis of clauses, word categories)
  - based on written language (esp. Latin)
  - prescriptive (based on rules of usage)

Are they grammatical?
What is grammar?

- Formal grammar
  - asks why humans are able to learn language
  - language as a cognitive-psychological phenomenon
  - transformational-generative (universal) grammar
  - based on the grammar of the sentence

Are they grammatical?
What is grammar?

- Functional grammar
  - asks how language functions in social contexts of daily life
  - focuses on how word patterns make meaning
  - language as text/discourse
  - descriptive (based on language use)

Are they grammatical?
What is grammar?

A working definition!

Grammar is essentially about the systems and patterns we use to select and combine words...

By studying grammar we come to recognise the structure and regularity which is the foundation of language and we gain the tools to talk about the language system.

(de Silva Joyce & Burns, 1999, p. 4-5)
Grammar and CLT

- CLT arose in late 1970s from dissatisfaction with limitations of grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches.

- Put focus on communication related to realistic use of language in context.

- Emphasised authentic language use and “realia” in the cultural context of the language studied.

- Placed focus on student-centred teaching and learner autonomy.
Advantages of CLT - a personal view

- Provides a more holistic view of language and language learning (focus on meaning and interaction of teacher and students)

- Gives students opportunities to practise using the language and to see its relevance outside the classroom

- Can provide genuine information-gaps and tasks that stimulate critical/creative thinking

- Focuses on active learning as well as teaching
Disadvantages of CLT - a personal view

- Can result in an unbalanced curriculum (focus on “communication as speaking”? role of reading/writing?)

- Downplays the role of grammar in language learning (dangerous to teach grammar? authentic communication?)

- Confuses the role and expertise of the teacher (teacher as “facilitator”? too much responsibility on learner?).

- Communicative tasks are not easy to design (role of the teacher? role of the textbook?).
Grammar and CLT - some questions

- In “strong” communicative classrooms, have the previous educational experiences of the students prepared them to undertake and understanding communicative tasks?

- Do students have the time available to learn only by participating in communicative activities, with no explicit teaching of grammar?

- In the learner-centred curriculum, who has control over what grammar will be taught and how the classroom operates?
Grammar and CLT

My arguments:

- Grammar must be a part of communicative language teaching.

- Recent research (e.g. Norris and Ortega, 2000) indicates that a focus on meaning alone is not sufficient.

- Instruction that includes a focus on form (grammar) is also required.

- Functional and discourse-based grammars provide a way of introducing students to grammar above the sentence level - they focus on meaning and form.
Grammar - to integrate or not to integrate?

Should grammar be taught separately or integrated into classroom task and texts?

What’s your view? Do you integrate or separate?
Grammar - to integrate or not to integrate?

Which of the following applies to you?

- No integration
- Some integration
- Substantial integration
- Complete integration
Grammar - to integrate or not to integrate?

Which of the following applies to you?

I separate G - I believe this helps SS learn

I separate G - I don’t believe this helps SS learn

I integrate G - I believe this helps SS learn

I integrate G - I don’t believe this helps SS learn
An international study
(TIRF Priority Research Grant 2005)

Burns and Borg (2005-6)

- How do teachers define effective grammar integration?
- What practices do teachers adopt in order to integrate grammar effectively?
- What beliefs about language teaching and learning underpin these practices?
- What evidence do teachers cite to support their beliefs that their approach to integration is effective?
Data collection

- Survey of 231 teachers in 18 countries
- Surveys included quantitative and qualitative responses
- Distributed through personal contacts in each country
- Surveys completed online and in hard copy
“Grammar should be taught separately, not integrated with other skills such as reading and writing”.

84.1% of teachers disagreed or disagreed strongly with this statement.
In your teaching, to what extent is grammar teaching integrated with the teaching of other skills?
## Key Findings

Teachers’ views of the effectiveness of their approach to integration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separate and effective</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate but not effective</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate and effective</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>90.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate and not effective</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Findings

Teachers’ descriptions of their integration practices - two main approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual Orientations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Derive grammar from texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose texts to illustrate grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on grammar required for tasks</td>
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<table>
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<th>Temporal Orientations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar to prepare for skills work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grammar to follow up skills work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grammar during skills work</td>
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</table>
How do you know that your approach to separating or integrating grammar is or is not effective in helping your adult learners improve their English?

- Communicative ability
- Progress
- Student affect
- Student feedback
- Performance on assessment
- Teachers’ experience
Some Conclusions

- Strong beliefs in the need to avoid teaching grammar in isolation of skills work
- Strong beliefs in the effectiveness of integration in promoting language learning
- Conceptions of integration focusing on contextual and temporal relationships between grammar and skills work
- Sources of evidence cited by teachers for effectiveness of integration overwhelmingly experientially and practical
- Absence of technical language and explicit reference to formal theory
So when should we teach grammar?

- Students need grammar, not for its own sake, but in order to scaffold them into achieving a particular activity.

- Before, during or after communicative activities?

- Research suggests that teaching “at the point of need” is the most effective:
  - when students need the grammar in preparation for a particular activity
  - as they are doing the activity and need brief input from the teacher on a particular form
  - after the activity in order to refocus their attention on key patterns or vocabulary needed to complete the activity
How to teach grammar - support and challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High challenge</th>
<th>Low challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Support</strong></td>
<td><strong>Low Support</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development zone</td>
<td>Boredom Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(learning and ability extended)</td>
<td>(low interest and motivation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration zone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(demands too high)</td>
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Adapted from Mariani, L. (1997).
Final thoughts?

“The English speaking world may be divided into:

1) those who neither know nor care what a split infinitive is;

2) those who do not know, but care very much;

3) those who know and condemn;

4) those who know and approve;

5) those who know and distinguish.

Those who neither know nor care are the vast majority, and are happy folk, to be envied by most of the minority classes.”

(H. Fowler, 1965, Dictionary of Modern English Usage)
References


Mariani, L. (1997). Teacher support and teacher challenge in promoting learner autonomy. Perspectives, 23(2).