

THE PRAXIS OF GRAMMATICAL APPROACH IN EFL CLASS, FROM THEORY TO PEDAGOGIC

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Abstract

Definitions of grammar often refer to the study of language as a system of words that demonstrate some apparent rule of structure and arrangement into sentences. Sometimes the definition includes pronunciation, meaning of words, and history of words (etymology). Some definitions emphasize grammar as a system of rules in a language. In simplest term, grammar covers the rules that govern the way our communication system works. In order to meet the need of grammar teaching, in pedagogical field, there have been some methods and approach which are applied. However, critics pertaining to the weaknesses of such methodology have been aroused. The main question as the result of the quest for better methodology for grammar teaching is what appropriate method or approach as an alternative

way of grammar teaching is. This theoretical research is aimed to propose the influential alternative approach for grammar teaching. This study will start by describing the historical view of grammar teaching and pointing out the link between language input and pedagogical mediation, in plain language between grammars and teaching, by introducing and redefining the concept of pedagogical grammar. Eventually, as the ultimate aim of this research this study is going to explain the current development of grammar teaching, lexical approach, as the problem solver concerning with grammar teaching.

Keywords: *Grammar approach, pedagogic, theoretical, lexical approach*

Introduction

This part looks at the history of grammar teaching and how this shapes our assumptions about how we teach it. The reason for looking back is that “history gives us perspective” (Titone, 1968, p. 2) and past experiences give us the opportunity to better think about today’s language teaching methodology. In order to fully understand the present picture of

grammar teaching, it is useful to consider some detail some of the most important development in its history. “Traditionally, grammar has been the *sin qua non* of language teaching” (Stern, 1992, p. 127). It means that grammar has to be taught in language teaching. Current views on grammar teaching and learning can be traced back to nineteenth-century thinking. There is, for instance, the assumption that a good knowledge of grammar leads to clear thinking discipline rules of language.

However, its central position in language teaching has been debated for several decades. To teach or not to teach grammar becomes the question which often appears. This is led by the view of traditional grammar methods which are believed to reduce communicative competence. The word “traditional” is often used in connection with grammar teaching when referring to the beginning of the nineteenth century. By “traditional” we mean a

simple, straightforward and systematic approach to grammar. As Richards and Rogers describe it:

Grammar translation approaches the language first through detail analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language. It hence views language learning as consisting of little more than memorizing rules and facts in order to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the foreign language. (Richards & Rogers, 1986, p. 3)

Although certain scholar-educators challenge the grammar translation approach in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in an effort to place emphasis on the acquisition of oral language skills, grammar translation was a dominant language teaching paradigm well into the middle part of the twentieth century. Born of the United States army's interest in developing oral language skills during World War II, audio-lingual method was supported by American structural linguistics and the theory of

behaviourism. This means that the grammatical system was to be uncovered by the learner through rote practice of sentence patterns, memorization of dialogues, and other oral practice. In audio-lingual method, grammar learning was thought to take place through stimulus-response conditioning, which leads to the over learning of the grammatical patterns of a language. It was not necessary for learners to know what rules they were learning, but it was necessary for them to correctly repeat, transform, and perform other manipulations on sentences orally as a necessary first step towards achieving communicative ability.

Generally, the twentieth century is characterized by the rise of experiential theories of language learning and development. The view that we learn primarily by using the language achieved wide acceptance and resulted in the abandonment of the formal teaching of grammar. Krashen's theories of language learning (1988) encouraged more meaning-

oriented use of foreign language and de-emphasized formal grammar instruction.

In language teaching there has been a shift of focus from teaching to learning during the last 50 years. In the 1970s arguments were developed to support the undesirability of teaching grammar based on empirical research by L2 researchers. Grammar or no grammar has been a debate in language teaching since the early days of what come to be known as the communicative revolution in the late 1970s and early 1980s. An extremist position was no grammar at all, a view held by over enthusiasts in the field. However, the need for grammar teaching is embedded in the slogan of the communicative revolution itself. The aim of language teaching is defined to help the development of communicative competence, which includes grammatical competence.

In line with the above statement, it is important to describe the relationship between Communicative

language teaching (CLT) and grammar. The integration of grammar teaching into communicative language teaching seems to be a need to fill the gap left by the first attempts to apply communicative language teaching. CLT does not mean a rejection of grammar, but the adaptation of a different approach to the teaching of grammar.

Reason, balance, and the experience of teachers in recent CLT tradition tell us that judicious attention to grammatical form in the adult classroom is not only helpful, if appropriate techniques are used, be essential to a speedy learning process. (Brown, 1994b, p. 349)

In simple words, the integration of grammar teaching into the communicative syllabus needs to be addressed as part of communicative competence, however, the reinstatement of grammar should not lead back to an emphasize on formal considerations. In addition, psycholinguistics need to be involved for evidence of how learners learn looking for ways of

relating these insights to pedagogical practice. Another influence on the communicative approach came from Searle's *Speech Act Theory*. His distinction between "just uttering sound or making marks and performing an illocutionary act" (1969, p. 42), cannot be realized in many activities in language teaching, since these are still ultimately concerned with language as a code, rather than language as communication. Many activities under the umbrella term "communicative" still fall outside Searle's definition of communication since they include a number of things which are not normally part of the way language is used in the world outside the language classroom. The problem arises dealing with CLT which lies in the separation of language forms from meaning, since grammar does not exist apart from communication has to be solved. Grammar and communication cannot be separated because they influence each other. The message and the code interact and ideas take shape in the moment. The

wrong order, the wrong function word, or the wrong inflection may cause miscommunication in the message. Therefore, proficiency and accuracy should be allies not enemies.

Eventually, after describing the historical view of grammar teaching, it is probably fair to draw the following conclusions. Firstly, and most importantly, to the participants of the communicative language teaching movement we owe the insight that functions and notions, rather than structures and forms are conveyed as elements of human communication. Secondly, new teaching practices have been steadily gaining grounds that were firmly based on the belief that efficient foreign language learning could best be realized through intensive classroom interaction. The role of grammar instruction in this process has gone through different stages.

Methodology

This study applies documented study in which it focuses on the analysis or interpretation of written materials based on the context. The materials are published notes, published articles, and some books.

Finding and Discussion

A. From theoretical to pedagogical grammar

This chapter creates the link between language input and pedagogical mediation, in plain language, between grammar and teaching by introducing and redefining the concept of *pedagogical grammar*. Effects of teaching grammar are influenced by the teachers' knowledge of language, by their own attitudes towards language, and the instructional methods they use. In this part, I will discuss first the grammatical paradigms that have had an influence on grammar teaching and provide the source for teachers' knowledge. Secondly, recent development of grammar teaching I am going to point out.

Acknowledging the role of grammar in language teaching and learning, the focus of attention has shifted from whether or not to teach grammar to the question of what kind of grammar is to be taught and how best it can be taught. For an informed decision we have to investigate the different types of grammar and their scope. Therefore, the following sections provide an overview of the most influential grammatical paradigms in language teaching and then a discussion of types of grammar follows influenced by the paradigms.

B. Grammatical paradigms

Historically, English grammars, according to their general aims and objectives, can be divided into traditional grammar, structural grammar, transformational-generative grammar, functional grammar. These grammatical paradigms have not existed in isolation. Moreover, they have been linked over the centuries. A detailed discussion of

these paradigms, its relationship to language teaching, and its drawbacks are as follows;

a. Traditional grammar

The term traditional grammar itself is a vague expression to refer to a number of grammars that are primarily concerned with language as a set of rules. Traditional grammar is often valued as a mental discipline and respected as a tradition. The main objective of these grammars was to make language rules systematic and explicit what every native speaker knows implicitly. However, they were limited in scope and flexible in the sense that they were unable to cope with the realities of English in use. As a result, traditional grammars do not deal explicitly with semantics. However, meaning is not totally excluded. Sweet expressed his didactic purpose when writing his grammar and summarized it the following way.

We study the grammar of our own language for other objects than those for which we study the grammar of foreign languages. We do not study grammar in order to get a practical mastery of our own language, because in the nature of things we must have that mastery before we begin to study grammar at all. (Sweet, 1891, p. 5)

i. Traditional grammar and language teaching

The grammar translation method as a teaching method is generally associated with the traditional grammar paradigm. This traditional method has been extremely influential in instructional pedagogy and it is still being used as the primary approach of language instruction. The grammar translation method has no explicit theory of language learning, language is regarded as an object to be studied rather than a tool to be used. Students are expected to learn the rules, memorize

patterns, and translate sentences and passages from one language to another. The method is easy for a teacher with limited language knowledge and not much time or training who simply wants to follow a textbook and have the reassurance of clear-cut answers. Different versions of this method are still widely used all over the world as the main language teaching approach.

ii. *Drawbacks of traditional grammar*

Traditional grammar provides a poor model for the grammars of different languages. The Latin frameworks used by it do not reflect the realities of the language and implies that Latin is an organized language while other languages are not. Its scope is limited, overemphasizing form over function and meaning, disregarding the dynamic nature of language. It does not adequately distinguish all

the linguistic levels. It operates only at the sentence level and below. According to the traditional method, the sentence is analyzed in terms of the parts of the sentence: *subject, predicate, object, attribute, adverbial modifier*. One and the same constituent is often given more than one analysis. In the sentence *John wants to go there* we can not say whether the infinitive is part of the verbal predicate of the object. This example suggests that traditional sentence analysis is provided with some problems. Beside that, it is normative and prescriptive. As a result, its main concern is correctness and preciseness. It lacks scientific accuracy, objectivity, and ignores the contemporary uses of the language and all the varieties of languages. These days traditional grammar incorporates the achievements of past and present, and, it is used as a reference source

by teachers of English and as a point of departure by scholars.

b. Structural grammar

Structural grammar aims at overcoming the shortcomings of traditional grammar: the lack of objectivity, precision, and scientific respectability. The aim was achieved through objective, detailed and systematic observation which resulted in descriptions of patterns of language in use. While traditional grammar provides an idealized set of rules derived from Latin, structuralises are concerned with patterns of language in use.

While the focus of traditional grammar was the written language, structuralise grammar dealt mainly with speech and analysed the sound system. Whereas traditional grammar defined the parts of speech in terms of meaning, structuralises regarded it as subjective and unscientific. Therefore, they defined the parts of speech based

on where they are located in the structure of a sentence and based on their structural characteristics.

Sentence patterns are important in structuralise grammar. In analyzing the sentence, they used a process called immediate constituents analysis (IC). The sentence is divided into parts until the process can not be continued any longer and the fundamental building blocks of the sentence are reached. It is not difficult to see a similarity between IC analysis and the traditional procedure of parsing sentences into subject, predicate, attribute, object, and adverbial. However, a big advantage of the IC analysis is that it does not use the traditional concepts, which are not defined clearly.

i. Structural grammar and language teaching

Structuralism provided what was required by the age, the mid-twentieth century. People started to travel, and the demand for language

courses increased which focused on the spoken language for purposes of communication with native speakers. This was the era of emergence of the new learning theory, behaviourism.

The structural view of language was combined with the principles of behaviourist psychology. As a result, audio-lingual method to second language teaching emerged. The linguistic description provided by structuralism outlined patterns that could be drilled without recourse to rules and translation. Substitution tables and pattern drills were used that involved manipulation of a particular structure. The structures were designed so that they started with the easy structures and moved gradually to more complex ones. This way they tried to avoid errors and the use of learners' first language was also discouraged. The audio-lingual method was influential until the 1970s, however, pattern drills and substitution tables

are quite commonly used techniques to reinforce a particular structure even nowadays.

ii. *Drawbacks of structural grammar*

Structuralism ignores meaning, native speakers' intuition and their competence of being able to generate an infinite number of sentences from finite set of items. It does not recognize that the analysis of a relatively small sample of instances of language can not account for the entire language system. It emphasizes structure at the expense of function and meaning. As a result, it does differentiate for example between sentences that have the same structure but different meaning. Similarly it does not deal well with the syntax of complex sentences. Despite the above mentioned drawbacks structuralise grammar brought a fresh perspective to the teaching and learning of languages.

c. Transformational-generative grammar

Transformational-generative grammar is a linguistic theory associated with Noam Chomsky, particularly with his book *Syntactic Structure* (1957). Transformational-generative grammar does not teach us how to analyze sentences; it teaches us how sentences are generated in a language. It attempts to define rules that can generate the infinite number of grammatical sentences possible in a language. Neither traditional nor structural grammar was interested in the generation of sentences. The starting point of Transformational-generative grammar is a rationalist assumption that a deep structure underlies a language, and that a similar deep structure underlies all languages. These abstract deep structures are transformed into the surface structures that characterize particular languages. Transformational-generative grammar seeks to identify rules called deep structure rules that

govern relations between parts of a sentence, on the assumption that beneath such aspects as word order a fundamental structure exists.

Chomskys' (1957) belief of the existence of a *universal grammar* as a key characteristic of all languages contradicts the ideas of structuralism. Instead of focusing on surface structures he looks at the relationship between the surface structures and the underlying deep structures. The deep structures are seen as universal to all languages and are said to be genetically programmed in the human brain. These abstract deep structures are transformed into the surface structures that characterize particular languages.

The recognition of surface and deep structures makes it possible to relate all the sentences of a language and even different languages. Transformational-generative grammar can account for any structural ambiguity by

relating ambiguous constructions to two deep structures.

i. Transformational generative grammar and language teaching

Chomsky's theory of language acquisition challenged the dominant language teaching approach that was based on structuralism and behaviourism. He argued that language was learnt not through the repetition of structures until they became automatic, but rather by experiencing it in context. Then the language acquisition device was activated and the learner got access to the innate rules of language. As a next step the learner made hypothesis about the working of the language based on the evidence supplied in the context of using the language. In this view the learner is an active processor of language.

Transformational-generative grammar provides a framework for relating mind and grammar, going beyond surface structures. It also offers a more accurate and complete conception of the system of language, building on both traditional and structural models. One of its biggest benefits is that it provides the basis for analyzing the nature and degree of learner errors, which are viewed positively as indications of the learners current hypothesizing about how the language works.

Since the deep structure rules represented the speakers' competence, there was no point in teaching the rule explicitly. It was suggested that a context should be created where the rules could be activated through exposing the learner to comprehensible input that is graded and useful for the learner (S. D. Krashen, 1987). In the 1970s there was great optimism regarding transformational generative grammar. Its

emphasize on how surface structures can be generated from deep structures and how structures can be transformed into stylistic variants seemed to indicate that a study of transformational grammar would lead to improve language use. This expectation has not been realized, transformational-generative grammar has not provided an alternative to language teaching. The theory is directed more towards linguists and psychologists than towards language teachers, therefore, it is assumed that generative grammar is pedagogically inadaptable to language teaching.

ii. *Drawbacks of transformational generative grammar*

Transformational-generative grammar emphasizes the ideal speaker-listeners competence at the expense of the ability to use the language appropriately in real

communication. The emphasis is still on form and it does not take social and cultural differences into account. It operates at sentence level and below. However, the generative approach opened a new perspective which reflected “the creativity of language, the process of linguistic production and interpretation, which structural linguists disregarded” (Stern, 1983). Chomsky and his followers did not take any steps to encourage the use of transformational-generative grammar in language teaching. As a result, the theory is seen as an abstract system by teachers and tends to be ignored.

The theory of Transformational-generative grammar influenced the emergence of the cognitive view of language learning creating an opposition to the Audio-lingual method, behaviourism and structuralism.

d. Functional grammars

As a next step in the development of competence offers an alternative model of communicative competence that has become extremely influential. This model consists of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Sociolinguistic competence is broken down into sociocultural discourse competence. In this model, grammatical competence is the knowledge of the language code, including lexical items, rules of morphology and syntax, sentence-grammar semantics and phonology.

Grammar started to have a more functional orientation and meaning in social contexts became the centre of investigation. Functional approaches to grammar can be differentiated from formal or generative approaches to grammar by their focus on the

communicative, as opposed to cognitive, aspects of language.

Functional grammars and language teaching

Although functional grammar is theoretical construction, it has had a great influence on language teaching, more specifically on syllabus design. A more functionally oriented syllabus was prepared by Wilkins(1976) describing the communicative meanings that learners would need to be able to make. In this type of syllabus, “notions and functions are generally seen as replacing linguistic structures as units of content, and a notional/functional orientation is seen to be incompatible with a concern for grammatical structure and

meanings intrinsic in form” (Widdowson, 1990, p. 41).

The typical characteristics of functional grammars as opposed to their structural alternatives are summarized in the following:

1. Linguistic form sub serves communicative function;
2. Focuses on competence and performance;
3. Acquisition arises from use;
4. There is discourse basis form for selection

Functional grammar put the emphasize not so much on correcting grammatical errors or on syntax, but extending the learners’ ability to use language effectively and appropriately in a variety of contexts. The key point is that taking text as a major unit of analysis means that grammar is treated beyond the level of sentence syntax. The words and structures that make up a text are known as the lexicongrammar, which realizes

the three metafunctions, the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings of a text by patterning words into phrase, clauses, or clause complexes.

The impact of functional grammars on the teaching of grammar includes the exploration of the context and the situation first, then the specific genres are analyzed and finally students are assisted to identify grammatical patterns characterizing a particular genre. Undoubtedly, functional grammar brought a new perspective into language teaching, which requires a pedagogical shift on the part of teachers as well as learners.

i. Drawbacks of functional grammar

Although functional grammar places the emphasis on using language to achieve real life purposes, it has some weaknesses as well. Similarly to transformational-generative

grammar, the theory is too complicated for teachers to directly implement in the classroom. However, it would require investment on the part of the teacher and a willingness to re-think language and grammar.

The second half of the 20th century was greatly influenced by formal and functional grammars. The most influential formal grammar has been the Transformational-generative theory of grammar by Chomsky (1957), with a primary focus on morphology and syntax. Functional models on the other hand, are also concerned with the appropriate use of language in context. The influence of these theoretical models is evident in various areas in applied linguistics and language teaching.

However, recently, there is a tendency to favour an approach that draws not on one or the other grammar models, but on all.

Widdowson(1990) argues that it is a mistake to concentrate solely on functional considerations while ignoring form altogether. Approaches that rely heavily on an ability to use language appropriately can lead to a lack of necessary grammatical knowledge. Therefore, an eclectic approach is needed that provides the middle ground. Such an approach should be created by language teachers themselves. Therefore, for a language teacher the knowledge of grammatical paradigms and their effects are essential in order to make the right choice about teaching grammar in their own contexts.

C. Recent developments: lexis and grammar

The different types of grammar are largely influenced by the grammatical paradigms and they are mainly concerned with what to describe and how to describe it. One of the limitations to

descriptions of grammar is the isolation from all other parts of the language system. Grammar does not exist on its own, it is interdependent with lexis, and in many cases, and grammatical regularity and acceptability are determined by words. This approach is called the *lexical approach* and has been influential in second language teaching and learning.

The lexical approach puts lexis at the hearth of language learning rather than grammar. Using lexis including chunks of language as a starting point rather than grammar “represents a radical change to the status quo and a major shift with profound theoretical and practical implications”. (Lewis, 1993). Unlike vocabulary, which is seen as a collection of individual words, lexis may consist of multi-word units. These can be produced and processed more rapidly as they are perceived as single, unanalysed wholes. In our conversations, we use fixed and pre patterned

phrases by which we routinely manage aspect of interaction. These language chunks are called routines by Edmonson(1999) and were first observed in first language acquisition and later applied in teaching German as a foreign language successfully. The Collins COBUILD English Course Willis and Willis(1989) has been the most ambitious attempt so far to develop a syllabus based on lexical rather than grammatical principles.

The *lexical approach* suggests a different approach to grammar teaching which is in opposition to traditional and the structuralise practices where language is divided into individual components which then put together to form larger chunks. A *lexical approach* would stress the introduction of meaningful, prefabricated chunks of language, which can be expanded on, played with or analysed. Lewis(1993) rejects the Chomsky's models of

languages as being mainly concerned with the production of well-formed of sentences. He stresses real language use which is not simply a degenerate version of some idealized competence and makes the distinction between correct language (which is not necessarily natural) and successful language (which achieve the purpose at the time).

The work of Lewis (1993) represent a significant theoretical and pedagogical shift from the past. First, their claims have revived an interest in a central role for accurate language description. Second, they challenge a traditional view of word boundaries, emphasizing the language learner's need to perceive and use patterns of lexis. Most significant is the underlying claim that language production is not syntactic rule-governed process but is instead the retrieval of larger phrasal units from memory.

The lexical phrases can be taught as a means of

realizing speech acts in conversation. This idea is very much in line with the functional orientation in language teaching. In the process of learning grammar whether explicitly or implicitly, words inevitably come before structures. The explicit knowledge of grammatical rules is useless unless we know some of the words whose behaviour the rules describe. The implicit knowledge of grammatical rules can develop only in association with a developing mental lexicon.

However, implementing a lexical approach in the classroom does not lead to radical methodological changes. Rather, it involves a change in the teacher's mindset and in their belief systems. Most important, the language activities consistent with a *lexical approach* – for instance the exploration of words in terms of semantic links between them – must be directed toward naturally occurring language and toward

raising learners' awareness of the lexical nature of the language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *lexical approach*, which makes up the recent development of grammar teaching paradigm, offers the solution to develop grammar teaching to attain better result by maintaining the balance between English knowledge and performance of the learners. Although it still needs empirical studies to provide the evidence of this theory, this kind of approach shows much strength better than the previous grammar teaching paradigms.

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