

## Teaching Grammar

### What is grammar?

Grammar is the system of a language. People sometimes describe grammar as the "rules" of a language; but in fact no language has rules. If we use the word "rules", we suggest that somebody created the rules first and then spoke the language, like a new game. But languages did not start like that. Languages started by people making sounds which evolved into words, phrases and sentences. No commonly-spoken language is fixed. All languages change over time. What we call "grammar" is simply a reflection of a language at a particular time.

### Different views of grammar

1. Grammar involves the rules of combining words into sentences and the rules for forming words.
  2. The grammar of a language consists of the devices that signal structural meanings... that can be described in physical terms.
  3. Grammar includes the study of phonology, syntax and semantics.
  4. Grammar is concerned with how words are combined to form utterances which function meaningfully in different contexts.
  5. Grammar involves the rules of how language operates in text, genre and discourse.
- Different theories of language entail different ways of studying language and different views of grammar. In essence theories of language are theories of grammar.
  - "Language is not fixed, but is rather a dynamic system. Language evolves and changes... [it] grows and organises itself from the bottom up in an organic way, as do other complex systems." (Larsen-Freeman, 2006)

### Grammar books/grammars

The study of grammar involves the study of individual languages and uses linguistic data as a means of developing insights into the nature of language. It is dependent on different theories of language and therefore we have different grammars (functional grammar, structural grammar, transformational generative grammar)

**Pedagogical grammar:** Designed specifically for teaching a foreign language or developing awareness of the mother tongue. It is inherently prescriptive.

- **Theoretical grammar:** goes beyond the study of individual languages and uses linguistic data as a means of developing insights into the nature of language and develops categories for linguistic analysis. It presents a theory of language (functional grammar, universal grammar, transformational generative grammar etc.).

### To teach or not teach grammar explicitly...

#### Arguments against

- The study of grammar promotes knowledge about language not how to use the language.
- We acquire our first language without any explicit knowledge of grammar.
- The natural order in which languages are learned precludes the influence of instruction.
- If communicative competence is the goal, then classroom time is better spent engaging in language use (Krashen, 1981).

#### Arguments in favour

- Without explicit instruction learners' interlanguage often fossilizes.
- Grammar instruction may act as an advanced organizer helping learners to notice features of language when they are ready.
- Learning finite rules can help to simplify an otherwise daunting and complex task by organizing it into neat categories.



### **Arguments in favour**

- Older students' expectations about language learning often include grammar instruction.
- Learning grammar structures allows for more creative applications of language.
- Understanding how language operates at sentence level, does not help learners understand how language is used purposefully on oral and written discourse.
- It is one thing to be able to understand and create sentences and quite another to be able to put sentences together and taking into account features of the context to produce socially purposeful meanings.
- Current view of teaching/learning grammar also focuses students' attention at how grammar operates in context and how discourse and genre determine our linguistic choices.

### **Approaches to teaching grammar**

- Deductive**– teaching through rules (the rule is provided followed by the provision of examples in which the rule is applied).
- Inductive**– teaching through examples (students are provided with several examples from which a rule is inferred).

#### **The deductive method**

The deductive method relies on reasoning, analysing and comparing. •Presentation of an example, •Explanation, •Practice with given prompts

#### **Sources of inductive instruction**

- Realia/Actions.
- Worksheets (can often be structured to inductively lead students to a grammar rule).
- Authentic texts (after listening to a dialogue or reading a text, students can answer questions to highlight certain grammatical structures– these may then be used to derive rules).
- Dialogues.
- Recorded Conversations.

#### **Inductive grammar teaching**

- In the inductive method, the teacher induces the learners to realise grammar rules without any form of explicit explanation.
- The rules will become evident if the students are given enough appropriate examples.
- The inductive method is more effective in that students discover the grammar rules themselves while engaged in language use



## Teaching Pronunciation

Pronunciation is an area which is often neglected in the classroom because teachers do not feel as confident teaching it as they do with other aspects of the language. Effective techniques for practicing pronunciation is an essential skill that all EFL teachers should develop, because the sounds, stress, and rhythm of English are so central to effective communication, and often causes great difficulty to learners.

### What is pronunciation

Pronunciation is an umbrella term covering <sup>4</sup>intonation, <sup>2</sup>stress, <sup>3</sup>rhythm and <sup>1</sup>sounds. As such it potentially huge subject area, so the crucial thing is to focus on the aspects of pronunciation that be easily taught and will immediately benefit the student: individual sounds, word stress and sentence stress.

### The Basics of Pronunciation

#### Sounds

A phoneme is the smallest contrastive unit in the sound system of a language. Most English learner dictionaries identify between 44 and 47 phonemes. This variation occurs because the exact number of phonemes in English depends on the speaker and the method of determining what is a phoneme and what is an allophone. An allophone is a variant of a phoneme. For example, some dictionaries consider the sound at the end of *pretty* to be an allophone of the phoneme /ɪ /, whereas others consider it to be a separate phoneme and mark it as / i /

The phonemes are divided into vowel and consonant sounds. There are 8 short vowel sounds, 5 long vowel sounds, 8 combined vowel sounds called diphthongs. The 24 consonant sounds are divided into 9 unvoiced and 15 voiced sounds.

#### Stress-timed and syllable-timed language

English is a stress-timed language. A stress-timed language is language where the stressed syllables are said approximately regular intervals, and unstressed syllables shorten to fit this rhythm (regardless of the number of unstressed syllables in between). Examples of other stress-timed languages are German, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, and Portuguese. Stress-timed languages can be compared with syllable-timed one, whose syllables take approximately equal amounts of time to pronounce. Examples of syllable-timed languages are Spanish, French, Italian, Hindi, Chinese, and Japanese. Learners whose first language is syllable-timed often have problems producing the unstressed sounds in English (they tend to give them equal stress), and they also have problems recognising and then producing features of English such as contractions and elision.

In the following example the underlined words remain stressed, even as more unstressed words are added

You                    me                    him                    her

You and                me and                him and                her

You and then        me and then        him and then        her

You and then it's me and then it's him and then it's her

#### Sentence stress- weak forms

Weak forms are syllable sounds that become unstressed in connected speech and are often pronounced as schwa / ə /. Functional words, such as prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliaries and articles are often pronounced in their weak form, since they do not carry the main content, and are therefore normally not stressed. Consider a sentence like: *Do you want a cup of tea?* If we look at the pronunciation of each individual word, the sentence would look like: /dʌ: ju: wɒnt ə kʌp ɒv ti: /

But in normal speech, the stress falls on the information words: want, cup and tea, and the other words are not stressed, so we get something like this /dʒɔ wɒnə kʌp ə ti: /



pronunciation and stress works, they will be less mystified about the whole system, and less worried about not hearing words that aren't pronounced in the way they would expect.

### Which pronunciation?

One important question a teacher needs to consider, namely which pronunciation variety to teach?

The abbreviation RP refers to 'received pronunciation', a UK pronunciation variety, originally from South-East England, but sometimes regarded as a kind of standard educated British English pronunciation. UK-published coursebooks have mainly offered RP on their recordings. There was a fairly widespread assumption in many teaching contexts that all students wanted and needed to learn and communicate in a way that sounds as close to a UK (or US) native speaker as possible. In fact, sometimes it is hard for teachers to teach an accent that they can not use naturally by themselves. So, the work on pronunciation can be based on some starting points:

- Students need to learn pronunciation that will allow them to be understood in the contexts where they are most likely to need to use the language.
- It is often appropriate to teach a natural model of pronunciation, to draw attention to different variations and to highlight differences in accents that appear in the course material.

### The Phonemic Chart

		monophthongs				diphthongs		Phonemic Chart voiced unvoiced	
VOWELS	i:	ɪ	ʊ	u:	ɪə	eɪ			
	sheep	ship	good	shoot	here	wait			
	e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:	ʊə	ɔɪ	əʊ		
bed	teacher	bird	door	tourist	boy	show			
æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ	eə	aɪ	aʊ			
cat	up	far	on	hair	my	cow			
CONSONANTS	p	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	k	g	
	pea	boat	tea	dog	cheese	June	car	go	
	f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ	
fly	video	think	this	see	zoo	shall	television		
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j		
man	now	sing	hat	love	red	wet	yes		

↓  
according to the manner of articulation



## Teaching vocabulary

Learning new words is an important part of learning a new language. So, learning some words and phrases in a language allows people to start communicating at once; learners get an early return on their investment of time and effort. As Wilkins wrote in 1972 "the fact is that while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" So, in an approach which values the ability to communicate, vocabulary is essential, and in recent years vocabulary has become increasingly central to language teaching.

### What is vocabulary

- Our everyday concept of vocabulary is dominated by the dictionary; we tend to think of it as an inventory of individual words with their associated meanings.
- But, does vocabulary consist of single words, or should we be thinking in terms of larger chunks of speech? • Finally, what does "knowing" vocabulary actually mean?

### What are words?

Function words have little meaning on their own and are chiefly used to indicate a grammatical relationship

The class of function words is closed. Languages do not easily add new words to this set. English has 300 closed class words. Examples are:

- Prepositions: of, at, in, without, between.
- Pronouns: he, they, anybody, it, one
- Determiners: the, a, that, my, more, much, either, neither.
- Conjunctions: and, that, when, while, although, or.

• Auxiliary: verbs be (is, am, are), have, do

Content words are words that carry the content or the meaning of a sentence

The class of content words is open. Example are:

Nouns: John, room, answer.

• Adjectives: happy, new, large, grey.

• Main verbs: search, grow, hold, have.

• Adverbs: really, completely, very

### More than just words...lexical items (multi-word items)

- 1) **Phrasal verbs:** they are generally recognised as lexical units consisting of more than one single form (e.g. come across, put up with etc.)
- 2) **Idioms:** notorious for causing trouble to second language learners because the whole unit has a meaning that cannot be deduced from the meaning of its individual components (e.g. kick the bucket, let the cat out of the bag etc.)
- 3) **Collocations:** words commonly appearing together in combinations of two or more words that seem to form relatively fixed expressions.

### What does it mean to know a lexical item?

- 1) **Form:** It refers to the mechanics of language, the visible and audible parts of vocabulary → the spelling, phonemes, syllable stress, words in a phrase, prefixes or suffixes, choice of noun or verb, etc.
  - Prefixes, suffixes, and roots are important; Students should be able to breakdown the components of a word to guess its meaning. They should also be able to use inflectional suffixes to understand whether a word is an adjective, a noun etc.
  - E.g.: 'submarine' ('sub' → under; underwater), or that the suffix →
  - -ly is typically (though not always) an adverb suffix.

2) **Meaning:** What meaning does the vocabulary item have in a (specific) context?

• There are two aspects of meaning: the literal/referential meaning of the lexical item

E.g.: •She's wearing a red skirt. (Literal/Referential meaning → the naming of the particular colour.)

Vs• She's red from sitting in the sun. (Meaning: Her skin has turned a particular shade of pink-red indicating sunburn.)

Vs• He was a well-known red. (Red indicates the person's political beliefs and affiliation.)

3/ **Use/Function:** When or why is a particular lexical item, used in a specific text (oral or written)?

•The lexical items, functional expressions etc., we choose to use are determined by the situation we are in and/or what we want to communicate to our listener(s). (Use and meaning are interconnected.) e.g.: 'Thank you in advance for your prompt reply' would be really unnatural and inappropriate in a context of an 'informal mail to a friend'.

#### 4/ **Denotation Vs Connotation**

•**Denotation:** what the word actually refers to, its primary meaning or reference.

•**Connotation:** The feelings and undertones conveyed by certain words (they could be positive or negative). The connotative meaning of a word is based on implication or shared emotional association with a word. 'Greasy' has a denotation meaning slippery but also has a connotation when referring to a "greasy" person.

•**Associations:** Similar to connotations, but unlike them they do not relate to the system of the language but to the individual or the culture.

e.g. The denotation of the word snake is "any of numerous scaly, legless, and sometimes venomous reptiles".

•The connotations for the word snake could include evil or danger

#### 5/ **Sense relations**

5.0 **Synonymy (partial conceptual synonymy):** is essentially a bilateral or symmetrical sense relation in which more than one linguistic form can be said to have the same conceptual or propositional meaning. This does not mean, however, that the words should be interchangeable in all contexts. There are no totally substitutable synonyms. E.g.: kid vs child / skinny vs thin / house vs home.

b. **Antonymy** Is a notion of semantic opposition or unrelatedness.

b.1 **complementarity:** where the presence of one sense component excludes another. e.g.: alive vs dead / single vs. married / male vs. female.

b.2 **converseness:** these are contrastive lexical relations where there is a measure of logical reciprocity. e.g.: husband vs. wife / buy vs. sell, above vs. below.

c.3 **incompatibility:** this refers to relational contrasts between items in a semantic field. It occurs in sets like seasons, days of the week, generic types etc. e.g. : "The house is red" > this automatically excludes any other colour.

c.4 **gradable opposites:** degrees of opposition are identified. e.g. : hot-cold / big-small / good - bad.

#### 6/ **Hyponymy**

Refers to super- and sub-ordinate relations. Hyponymy is a hierarchical relationship existing between specific and general lexical items ; the meaning of the specific item is included in the meaning of the more general one.

e.g.: flowers > superordinate & roses, daisies and tulips > co-hyponyms.

**What does knowing a word actually mean?**

It means that we can:

•Recognise it in its spoken or written form.

•Recall it at will.

•Relate it to an appropriate object or concept.

•Use it in the appropriate grammatical form.

•Pronounce it in a recognisable way when speaking.

•Spell it correctly when writing.

•Use it in a collocationally appropriate way (with the words it correctly goes with).

•Use it at the appropriate level of formality  
•be aware of its connotations and associations.



Simplified English Lessons

A word is acquired when the learner can identify its meaning in and out of context and can use it appropriately and naturally in oral/written communication.

- **Receptive knowledge:** language items which can be recognised and comprehended in listening/reading material.
- **Productive knowledge:** language items which the learner can recognise, comprehend, recall and use appropriately in speech and writing.

### Three approaches to vocabulary instruction

- 1) **Incidental learning:** teacher provides learners with opportunities for extensive reading and listening.
- 2) **Indirect instruction** happens when teachers purposely expose students to a wide variety of literary sources by creating a literate-rich learning environment, and occurs naturally when students read, write, talk, and listen to each other on a daily basis.
- 3) **Explicit instruction:** diagnosing words learners need to learn, presenting meaning of words, practising the use of new words, developing fluency with known words.
- 4) **Direct instruction** includes those times when a teacher systematically demonstrates how to determine the meanings of words or when the teacher leads the students to specific tools for discovering meaning.

**Independent strategy instruction:** training students in strategies for vocabulary acquisition (guessing meaning from context, training learners to use dictionaries).

Teach students to learn words independently

- Teach strategies for learning unknown words.
- Teach students to use the dictionary and thesaurus.
- Have students express themselves in writing and speech throughout the day

Vocabulary record system

- Personal dictionary (word notebooks):
  - adding pictures,
  - putting an L1 translation,
  - putting the word into context,
  - adding a synonym,
  - mapping a word family.
- Keeping a diary (blogs).
- Creative writing by using newly-learned words or phrases.
- Looking for recently learned words in storybooks, the Internet, the newspapers, etc., and noticing how they are used.

### Practical implications of vocabulary acquisition research

- Incidental vocabulary learning should be accompanied by explicit vocabulary instruction.
- Provide students with meaningful tasks which require them to analyse and process language more deeply.
- Encourage repetition and memorisation of words for students to commit words to short term memory.
- Provide a number of encounters with a word through different activities and contexts.
- Integrate new words with old.
- Both formal and semantic aspects of words need to be given attention to in the teaching/learning process.
- Facilitate imaging of words. Visual images can facilitate memory and can fix new items into our memory.
- Try to present vocabulary in an organised manner.
- Use of a variety of techniques and tasks.

*Encouraging independent learning*



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