

# Towards a Pedagogy of Grammar Instruction

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## Abstract

Grammar can be viewed both as knowledge and as ability. When viewed as knowledge, the focus is on rules for sentence formation. When viewed as ability, the focus is on how grammar is used as a resource in the creation of spoken and written texts. Twelve principles are proposed as the basis for a pedagogy that focusses on acquiring learning to use grammar in texts. Each principle is illustrated with examples from classroom practice.

## Keywords

Grammar instruction, writing instruction, text-based teaching, materials design, authentic materials

## Introduction

Despite the significant changes in approaches to language teaching that have occurred in recent years, the status of grammar instruction is an issue that language teachers still have to resolve (Ellis 2002, 2006). Cullen (2012: 258) contrasts two basic positions, one being ‘the view that the most effective form of instruction was no overt instruction: learners would acquire the grammar of the language implicitly through exposure to comprehensible input roughly tuned to their level and engagement in meaning-focused tasks’, and the other the belief ‘that some kind of focus on form in the language classroom is necessary both to accelerate the process of grammar acquisition and raise ultimate levels of attainment’. The practical realities of classroom language teaching however generally offer teachers few choices. They may encounter frequent problems with grammar in their students’ written or spoken English that demand some form of

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response, and they may also need to prepare students for tests where accurate use of grammar plays an important role.

Central to a pedagogy of grammar instruction is the distinction between grammatical knowledge and grammatical ability. Grammatical *knowledge* refers to knowledge of the rules that account for grammatically correct language. Its unit of focus is the sentence. In traditional approaches to language teaching it was typically viewed as an independent component of language ability and assessed through discrete point tests that assessed mastery of different grammatical items. Correct language use was achieved through a drill and practice methodology and through controlled speaking and writing exercises that sought to prevent or minimize opportunities for errors.

Practice in producing grammatically correct sentences was viewed as the key to learning, embedded within a methodology with the following features (Ellis, 2003: 168):

1. A specific grammatical feature is isolated for focused attention.
2. The learners are required to produce sentences containing the targeted feature.
3. The learners are provided with opportunities for repetition of the targeted feature.
4. There is an expectancy that the learners will perform the grammatical feature correctly; therefore practice activities are success oriented.
5. The learners receive feedback on whether their performance of the grammatical structure is correct or not. This feedback may be immediate or delayed.

Grammatical *ability* refers to the ability to use grammar as a communicative resource in spoken and written discourse and requires a different pedagogical approach (Jones, 2012). Its unit of focus is the *text*. As Cullen (2012: 259) puts it:

The grammatical choice that speakers or writers make – for example, whether to use an active or passive be+ verb form, or whether to use the modal *can* or *would* when making a request – are not made in a vacuum, but in a context of language use. They are thus text-based, not sentence-level, choices made in the act of participating in a communicative event, whether it be a conversation with friends or writing an e-mail to a colleague. In each situation there is ‘text’ being created and an audience’.

‘Text’ here is used to refer to structured and conventional sequences of language that are used in different contexts in specific ways. For example, in the course of a day a person may use English for a variety of interactional and transactional purposes, both spoken and written, such as casual conversation, telephone calls, requests, reports, discussions and so on. Each of these uses of language involves the use of texts, that is, stretches of language that consist of a unified whole with a beginning, middle and end, that conform to norms of organization and content, and that draw on appropriate grammar and vocabulary (Hewings and Hewings, 2005). Grammatical ability thus involves using grammar as a resource to create different kinds of spoken and written texts for use in specific contexts. These contexts might include studying in an English-medium university, working in a restaurant, working in an office, or socializing with neighbors in a housing complex.

Students often develop a good understanding of grammatical *knowledge* through traditional teaching methods that focus on grammar as a somewhat isolated collection of rules – rules that exist independently of their use in the production of authentic written or spoken language. They may have spent many hours practicing the rules for correct sentence

formation but lack the ability to use grammar as a resource in communication. However, in order to develop grammar as a communicative resource it needs to be taught and assessed as a component of communicative ability and performance – particularly in relation to the productive skills of writing and speaking. In this paper we seek to explore how this can be achieved and to describe principles that can inform a pedagogy of grammar instruction.

1. Identify the Grammatical Resources the Learners Need

The starting point in teaching grammar as ability is an understanding of what learners’ communicative needs are and the role of grammar in relation to these needs. This does not mean developing a list of grammar points that will be used as the basis for sentence-level practice, but rather, identifying the learners’ ability to use grammar appropriately in relation to different kinds of spoken and written texts. For example to what extent are the learners able to use appropriate grammar in expository or descriptive writing or in narratives and recounts? In order to use *recounts* the learner needs the following grammatical resources:

- The past tense.
- Use of adverbs which link events in time, such as *when, next, later, after, before, first, at the same time, as soon as*.
- Variety of verbs to describe events (action words) and adverbs (which describe and add more detail to verbs).
- Use of personal pronouns (personal recount).
- Use of passive voice (factual recount).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) lists the following text types as examples of texts learners may need to understand, produce or participate in:

Spoken texts	Written texts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public announcements and instructions.</li><li>• Public speeches, lectures, presentations, sermons.</li><li>• Rituals (ceremonies, formal religious services).</li><li>• Entertainment (drama, shows, readings, songs).</li><li>• Sports commentaries (football, cricket, etc.).</li><li>• News broadcasts.</li><li>• Public debates and discussion.</li><li>• Interpersonal dialogues and conversations.</li><li>• Telephone conversations.</li><li>• Job interviews.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Books: fiction and non-fiction.</li><li>• Magazines.</li><li>• Newspapers.</li><li>• Instructions (e.g. cookbooks, etc.).</li><li>• Textbooks.</li><li>• Comic strips.</li><li>• Brochures, prospectuses.</li><li>• Leaflets.</li><li>• Advertising material.</li><li>• Public signs and notices.</li><li>• Supermarket, shop and market-stall signs.</li><li>• Packaging and labelling on goods.</li><li>• Tickets, etc.</li><li>• Forms and questionnaires.</li><li>• Dictionaries (monolingual and bilingual), thesauruses.</li><li>• Business and professional letters; faxes.</li><li>• Personal letters.</li><li>• Essays and exercises.</li><li>• Memoranda, reports and papers.</li><li>• Notes and messages, etc.</li><li>• Database (news, literature, general information, etc.).</li></ul>

Each text type makes use of a particular set of grammatical resources. The goal of a diagnostic test of learners' grammatical ability would focus on identifying the extent to which the learners can draw on relevant grammar as well as other knowledge in realizing the texts they need to master. Identifying learners' grammatical needs in relation to texts in this way provides an authentic context for the presentation and practice of grammar.

## 2. Teach Awareness of the Nature of Texts

While students are generally familiar with the role of grammar at the level of the sentence, exploring the role of grammar in the organization of texts involves looking at the ways in which language is used for particular purposes and how the social context for language use (school, work, colleagues, peers, friends, family) affects the choice of language (Paltridge, 2006). The key feature of texts is the use of recognizable patterns of organization. For longer, written expository texts, the reader generally expects to see the text organized into paragraphs and, within paragraphs, to find main ideas and supporting details – features that contribute to the coherence of a text. However, a writer's use of the accepted organizational patterns of a text may vary, according to the intended audience. Hedge (2000: 323) points out that although a text describing a medical problem and its treatment might generally follow the pattern: *situation – problem – solution – conclusion*, a writer may vary this sequence of information for effect:

The sequence of elements above would probably be considered normal, with conclusions coming last. However, a newspaper article on the topic might report on the treatment first, in order to raise curiosity, and then move on to explain the problem. In fact, there could be several possible sequences for the information.

There are several ways in which students can be introduced to the concept of text, the ways in which texts work and how they reflect grammatical choices. For example:

- Have students read two texts with the same content and identify what makes one an effective text and the other not effective;
- Have students compare written and spoken texts on the same topic (e.g. a news event) to compare how they are organized and how the grammar of the texts differs.
- Have students listen to or read examples of transactions such as requests made in different contexts (e.g. among friends vs. with a boss) and see how features such as modals and pronouns work together to create politeness.
- In more advanced academic contexts, give students examples or model texts of different types of writing and have them analyze how the text is put together and to use the information to inform their writing, i.e. by studying the different 'moves' or sections that make up a text (Swales, 1990). Students focus on questions such as: how does a text begin?; Where is the main idea introduced?; How is an idea developed?

Lock (1995, 129-33) shows how by comparing texts, students can learn the difference between ergative and non-ergative verbs and the restrictions on passive voice in descriptions of processes related to this distinction. The procedure (in shortened form) is:

1. The teacher prepares two short texts, one describing a manufacturing process (e.g. manufacture of olive oil) and one describing a natural process (e.g. the rain cycle).
2. Students compare the two texts and discuss why a different verb form is used in each text: verbs in one text imply a 'doer' or 'causer' but not in the text describing a natural process.
3. Students create their own texts on topics of their choice.

As a follow up activity the teacher can source authentic texts such as the one below, delete the verb forms, and have students complete them and compare in groups.

*To tourists who hail from more orderly, sanitized societies, Myanmar's street life can be charming. On the sidewalks of Yangon, radishes are shredded, corn is steamed, coconuts are hollowed out and stalks of sugar cane are crushed into juice. Vendors sell knick-knacks. On one stretch of sidewalk, they hawk teacups, used knives, Chinese-made plastic toys, two types of rat poison and a large pile of dusty, secondhand TV remote controls.*

*New York Times* 20 November 2013: Thomas Fuller: As Myanmar modernizes, old trades are outpaced by new competitors.

### 3. Develop Awareness of Differences between Spoken and Written Language

An important feature of texts is the way they reflect differences between spoken and written grammar. One of the differences between written and spoken English is the use of clausal and non-clausal units (Biber et al., 1999). Non-clausal units are more common in conversation. Hewings and Hewings (2005: 8) citing Biber et al., give these explanations and examples:

A clausal unit is defined as a structure 'consisting of an independent clause together with any dependent clauses embedded within it' (2005: 1069), while a non-clausal unit 'cannot be analysed in terms of clause structure, and ...is not analyzable as part of any neighboring clause' (2005: 224). In the following extract .... non-clausal units are indicated in bold and the boundaries of clausal and non-clausal units marked with II:

- B: II So this was your mother's?II  
 A: II **No, my father's.** II  
 B: II **Your father's mother?**II  
 A: II **Yeah.** II Her name was Martha.II  
 B: II **Uh huh.**II

Students can explore examples of spoken texts such as the following example of a conversation between two friends in Japan who meet in a shopping mall (McAndrew, 2007)

and find examples of clausal and non-clausal units. They could then turn the conversation into a written text (e.g. in the form of a blog to a friend or a recount) and compare the language of the two types of text:

- A: Hi.  
 B: Oh hi, how's it going?  
 A: Good, good, fine.  
 B: Are you, er, doing some shopping?  
 A: Yeah, just a few things really, you know.  
 B: Yeah.  
 A: Yeah ... actually, I've been looking for a present, for Hiroko, but it's difficult to ... you know ...  
 B: Yeah, umm, what kind of thing?  
 A: Oh, something like, umm, a present ... something like, it's her birthday tomorrow actually. [laughs]  
 B: Tomorrow?  
 A: Yeah, tomorrow. So I've looked in Hamaya, like at the make-up and stuff, but it's not very exciting.  
 B: Tomorrow? How about Amu Plaza ... they've got Tower Records and some kind of new shops.  
 A: Yeah. OK, great, Tower Records might be good. I might give that a go. I've got to go over to the station, anyway. So, anyway, good to see you, and thanks for the tip.  
 B: That's fine. Say 'happy birthday' to Hiroko from me.  
 A: OK, I will. Bye.  
 B: Yeah, bye.  
 A: Bye.

By comparing examples of spoken and written texts, students can become aware that spoken and written grammar often make use of different grammatical resources. For example, although *maybe* and *perhaps* have the same meaning, *maybe* is preferred in conversation and informal contexts such as e-mail while *perhaps* is typically used in more formal contexts (usually written).

#### 4. Use Corpora to Explore Texts

Corpora provide a way in which teachers can help students learn grammar as it is actually used in spoken and written texts. The availability of online corpora that provide easily accessible data on authentic language usage, such as MICASE ([micase.elicorpora.info](http://micase.elicorpora.info)), MICUSP ([micusp.elicorpora.info](http://micusp.elicorpora.info)) or COCA ([corpus.byu.edu/coca/](http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/)) provide teachers and students with ready resources for examples of discipline specific writing or to highlight differences between spoken and written language. MICUSP (2009) is composed of over 800 papers (over 2 million words) with a grade of A written by upper level college students across 16 different disciplines. The website is designed to allow for user-friendly searches of not only vocabulary, but also across different types of papers

**Table 1.** An Example of a Table for Recording the Results of Searching COCA.

	Written	Spoken
find out	☑	☑☑☑☑
Discover	☑☑☑☑	☑☑
look at	☑☑☑	☑☑☑☑☑
Examine	☑☑☑☑☑☑	☑
put up with	☑	☑☑☑☑☑
Tolerate	☑☑☑☑☑	☑

(e.g., argumentative essays, research papers, reports), and organizational aspects of academic prose, including methods sections, referring to sources, and problem solution patterns. An example of a classroom application use of MICUSP would be where students in an academic writing class explore which verbs are used to refer to figures or charts, or what verb tenses are used in abstracts of academic articles.

Teachers can use COCA to prepare discovery activities that clearly demonstrate differences between spoken language and academic prose. An example of one activity of this type is to highlight the different types of verbs used in academic prose and conversation. Corpus research suggests that single-word verbs are generally preferred in academic prose over multiword verbs (e.g., tolerate vs. put up with; discover vs. find out). Novice writers, however, often use multiword verbs in their papers since these are more frequent in conversation and often more familiar to students. After reading student papers, a teacher can compile a list of multiword verbs that frequently appear in student papers and have students explore COCA to compare those with single verb alternatives. Table 1 is one way to have students record their results.

When drafting or revising academic writing, students can enter in multiword verbs that they plan to use and single-word verb equivalents (e.g., put up with tolerate; find out discover) to see which one is more suitable for their paper. This not only builds students’ vocabulary but also helps reinforce differences between informal spoken and formal written texts.

Research from corpus studies enables teachers to identify information of this kind and to use it to inform both teaching and materials development (Reppen, 2010). In this way grammar can be taught in relation to different contexts of use and with different types of texts. Use of a corpus also helps identify the vocabulary that is commonly used with different text types such as *procedures*, *information texts*, *persuasive texts*, and *story texts* mentioned above. It can also help students become aware of the verbs that most frequently occur in the passive and which prepositions frequently go with some of the passive forms, helping students master some of the more difficult aspects of English.

5. Use a Variety of Teaching Approaches

The learning of grammar is a complex, multifaceted, and lengthy process and no single pedagogical approach can claim priority in teaching (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). Approaches to teaching grammar need to acknowledge that learners have different

learning style preferences when it comes to the learning of grammar. Some students like explanations and are uncomfortable when they do not have a clear understanding of something. They like to find logical relationships, rules, and structure. Others are more tolerant of ambiguity and do not feel the need for detailed explanations.

Therefore at times it may be appropriate to present grammar explicitly using a deductive or rule-driven approach (Thornbury, 1999): the lesson may start with the teacher presenting information about the role a particular grammatical feature plays in texts, and then examine one or more texts to see how the text reflects the grammatical feature. Students may also be introduced to the terminology needed to identify and discuss grammatical features using terms such as *defining and non-defining relative clause*, or *finite and non-finite verb*. Thornbury suggests a number of advantages of a deductive approach (1999: 30):

- It gets straight to the point, and can therefore be time-saving. Many rules – especially rules of form – can be more simply and quickly explained than elicited from examples. This will allow more time for practice and application.
- It respects the intelligence and maturity of many – especially adult – students, and acknowledges the role of cognitive processes in language learning.
- It confirms many students' expectations about classroom learning, particularly for those learners who have an analytical learning style.
- It allows the teacher to deal with language points as they come up, rather than having to anticipate and prepare for them in advance.

A deductive approach can also be used within a problem-solving collaborative format. For example, to teach the differences between the use of the simple past and the present perfect, the class could be arranged into sets of pairs and given an information-gap task. Half of the sets of pairs receives a summary of rules for the use of the simple past. The other half receives a summary of the use of the present perfect. Next, they all receive a partially completed text in which there are many instances involving a choice between simple past and present perfect. The students use their grammar summaries to complete those sentences where their rules apply. Following this the pairs are regrouped so that pairs consist of one student who received rules of the past tense and one who received rules for the present perfect. They then examine the text again and share their ideas on how it can be completed, justifying their choices using the information from their summaries. Thornbury (1999: 43) describes the advantage of tasks of this kind:

To complete the task (the grammar exercise) learners will need to share the information, which in turn will involve speaking English. They are learning about the language and getting communicative practice at the same time.

At other times the teacher may prefer to use an inductive approach, providing examples of texts that include particular grammatical features and inviting the students to examine the grammatical features of texts. One way in which this can be achieved is through activities in which students compare two texts on the same topic or situation but which differ in their use of particular grammatical features. Students can consider differences that may reflect differences in *mode* (e.g. spoken or written), *purpose* (e.g. to persuade or



to describe), or *genre* (e.g. newspaper report or an encyclopedia entry). For example, students might compare an extract from a travel guide that gives suggestions and advice on things to do and see in a city and compare this with a blog entry or an email message from a friend on the same topic. In comparing the two texts, they could consider how obligation is expressed in each text through choices related to modality. This could highlight the role of modal verbs as well as other means of expressing obligation and necessity.

## 6. Provide Opportunities for Guided Noticing

Second language acquisition research has drawn attention to the role of consciousness in language learning, and in particular to the role of *noticing* (Schmidt, 1986, 1990). Consciousness of features of the input can serve as a trigger which activates the first stage in the process of incorporating new linguistic features into one's language competence. The extent to which items are 'noticed' may depend on the frequency of encounter with items, the perceptual saliency of items, instructional strategies that can focus the learner's attention as well as the kind of task the learner is taking part in.

An example of a guided noticing activity is for the teacher to give out extracts from texts (e.g. magazine or newspaper articles) and to ask students to see how many examples they can find of a particular form or grammatical pattern. These are then examined more closely to observe the functions they perform at both the sentence and text level. An example of taking a noticing activity outside the classroom is when students act as 'language detectives': they can be asked to observe and notice target forms in use in the 'real world', such as by watching interviews and other speech events on the internet or on television and documenting the use of particular grammatical features they have been asked to focus on. This can serve to reinforce vocabulary or particular forms, but it can also be used to help more advanced students become aware of how grammar works together at a textual level instead of focusing only on vocabulary or on sentence-level structures. Students can use a notebook or mobile device for recording examples and can bring these to class for further discussion or clarification.

When using an inductive approach to grammar, textual enhancement (e.g. by underlining, boldfacing, italicizing, capitalizing, or color coding) can be used to help students 'notice' forms or features they may not be aware of (Nassaji and Fotos, 2011). The procedure involves:

1. Select a particular grammar point that you think the learners need to attend to.
2. Highlight that feature in the text using one of the textual enhancement techniques or their combination.
3. Make sure that you do not highlight many different forms as it may distract the learners' attention from meaning.
4. Use strategies to keep learners attention on meaning.
5. Do not provide any additional metalinguistic explanation.

However, this in itself is not usually sufficient and needs to be coupled with questions or tasks that prompt the students to reflect on or analyze the function of the highlighted

items in a text. By ‘guiding’ the student in this way this kind of activity raises awareness of the target forms and their use and also actively involves the student in the process of discovery.

Jones and Lock (2011: 29-30) recommend ‘sequencing activities’, in which learners ‘are presented with a text that has been altered in terms of the sequence of elements’, including paragraphs, sentences within paragraphs, clauses within sentences, and words and phrases within clauses. Sequencing activities ‘guide the learners to notice and to explore either (a) grammatical or lexical features in texts that give information about the sequence of elements (e.g. articles, pronouns and conjunctions) or (b) larger patterns of textual organization’. Jones and Lock describe the general procedure involved in sequencing, as follows (2011: 29-30).

1. Choose a text or series of texts and change the sequence of some of the paragraphs or sentences within paragraphs or of certain elements within sentences.
2. Have students work out what the original sequence might have been in one text or a portion of one text through noticing a particular grammatical feature or set of grammatical features.
3. Work with the students to explore further the kinds of grammatical features that can be used as clues to help determine the original sequence and why the original sequence is better.
4. Have the students practice this procedure on their own with the rest of the text or another similar text.

## 7. Provide Opportunities for Meaningful Communicative Practice

It is important to keep in mind the distinction sometimes made between three different kinds of practice – mechanical, meaningful, and communicative. *Mechanical practice* refers to a controlled practice activity that students can successfully carry out without necessarily understanding the language they are using and in which the primary focus is on form. Examples would be repetition drills and substitution drills designed to practice use of particular grammatical or other items or an activity in which students have to change the tenses in a business letter from present to past tense. *Meaningful practice* refers to an activity where language control is still provided but where students are required to make meaningful choices when carrying out practice. It involves a focus on both form and meaning. For example, using a model letter the teacher has provided in which particular grammatical features are highlighted, students might be asked to draft a letter of complaint to a company about a product they ordered over the internet. *Communicative practice* refers to activities where practice in using language within a real communicative context is the focus, where real information is exchanged, and where the language used is not totally predictable. The following example is from a teacher’s business-writing class:

*In my Business writing course we have to work with lots of very routine texts such as email messages, blogposts and business letters. To make it more interesting I ask students at the start of the semester to invent their own company, logo, staff list and products so that they can use*

*this material when they are developing their own scenarios and situations throughout the semester rather than having to stick rigidly to examples in the textbook. In this way, they create a kind of personal narrative throughout the semester, telling different stories about what has happened in the company and what they need to communicate about.*

Communicative practice implies practicing the use of language with a focus on form, meaning, and most importantly, context. Jones and Lock (2011: 2) comment:

Texts are always produced in some kind of context. As features of context change, texts change. Or, to look at it in another way, as texts change, the contexts they evoke also change. Because of this, it is rarely possible to give an adequate account of why a particular grammatical feature is used in a particular clause or sentence without referring to, or trying to reconstruct, some context, including both features of the text that it comes from (the context) and features of the situation in which the text was produced (the situational context).

Contextualized practice involves using grammar in the context of spoken or written communication. It also means ensuring that contexts for spoken or written practice are authentic and that the grammar of spoken or informal language is not practiced in a formal written context just to provide additional practice. Meaningful practice also means that when overtly teaching a form, or focusing on accuracy, practice moves from controlled to open-ended. Once students can control the form, they then need opportunities to practice using it in a variety of ways and in tasks that move from sentence to text.

Some forms, such as modals (e.g., *can*, *could*, *should*) are easy to learn when it comes to producing the correct form, however using modals accurately is more difficult since they often serve pragmatic functions, such as showing politeness. After students have mastered the appropriate forms through controlled and semi-controlled practice (e.g. tasks moving from a controlled gap-fill activity to more open-ended activities) students could be given practice that emphasizes the use of modals in different situations. They might be provided with scenarios of making requests to friends, strangers or people who represent different power relationships (e.g., co-workers vs. supervisors or classmates vs. teachers). This activity could be done individually, following which students work in pairs to act out various scenarios for the class: classmates then vote on which scenario is being performed. If students vote on the ‘wrong’ scenario, then a class discussion can be a valuable activity to raise awareness of what led the class to choose the incorrect scenario. Activities such as this provide students with real-world situations in the safe environment of the classroom and can build student confidence for interactions outside the classroom.

Communicative practice often involves collaboration on tasks and this can be included at all levels of instruction. For example in beginning-level classes, students can be given strips of texts, either sentences or paragraphs that have been cut apart, and then in pairs reconstruct the sentences and/or paragraphs. This task can raise awareness as to how texts, even at a sentence or paragraph level can be reordered to create different effects. At a more advanced level, students can participate in group-editing tasks that might include guidelines or ideas for beginning discussion of a text. Tapping into expertise that students have is another way to increase collaboration and the co-construction of texts. If some students are very good at synthesis, they could be responsible for

combining information that others have gathered and presented in the form of notes from specific readings that individuals have done on particular topics relevant to the task.

### 8. Provide Opportunities for Students to Produce Stretched Output

An important aspect of language learning is the complexity of the learner's language – in the case of grammar the range of grammatical resources the learner is able to use. Skehan (1998) argues that ideally, fluency, accuracy, and complexity develop in harmony, but this is not always the case. In order for the learner's language to complexify, new linguistic forms have to be acquired and added to the learner's productive linguistic repertoire. This is referred to as *restructuring*. For restructuring to occur two things seem to be required: noticing features of language that the learner has not yet acquired (referred to as 'noticing the gap') referred to above, and the use of tasks that require the learner to use new and more complex grammar, i.e. that require the use of certain target-language forms and which 'stretch' the learner's language knowledge, requiring a 'restructuring' of that knowledge. Activities that involve 'stretched output' are those that expand or 'restructure' the learner's grammatical system through increased communicative demands and attention to linguistic form.

For example a task may be completed orally, it may be recorded or it may require writing. In each case, different opportunities for language awareness and production are involved. Swain (1999: 3) describes how tasks with a written product provide an opportunity for students to focus on form and to stretch their language resources:

Students, working together in pairs, are each given a different set of numbered pictures that tell a story. Together the pair of students must jointly construct the story-line. After they have worked out what the story is, they write it down. In so doing, students encounter linguistic problems they need to solve to continue with the task. These problems include how best to say what they want to say; problems of lexical choice; which morphological endings to use; the best syntactic structures to use; and problems about the language needed to sequence the story correctly. These problems arise as the students try to 'make meaning', that is, as they construct and write out the story, as they understand it. And as they encounter these linguistic problems, they focus on linguistic form – the form that is needed to express the meaning in the way they want to convey it.

Jones and Lock (2011) recommend 'elaborating' as a means of helping learners expand their grammatical resources. This refers to activities in which students add to and expand the information contained in a text, and in the process, need to use more sophisticated grammatical features. 'Elaborating activities can help to dramatize for them the fact that learning grammar is not just about "correctness" but that it is first and foremost about gaining control over resources for making communication more effective' (2011: 73). Jones and Lock (2011: 74) describe the general procedures used in elaborating:

1. Present students with a simple text.
2. Create a situation in which questions are asked about the text in a way that students notice that additional information would make the text better and that this new information is typically associated with certain grammatical features.

3. Explore with students why certain kinds of additions in the text require certain grammatical features and others require different ones.
4. Have students practice by continuing to elaborate on the same text or elaborating on a similar text.

Dictogloss (an activity in which the teacher reads a short text at normal speed while students jot down key words and phrases and later work in groups to reconstruct the original text) can also be used to facilitate restructuring.

## 9. Make Links between Grammar and Vocabulary

Although grammar and vocabulary are often presented separately, the boundary between them is not rigid. In fact, it is sometimes difficult to separate the two. There are a number of ways in which the connections between grammar and vocabulary can be highlighted and developed. Advocates of the lexical approach suggest incorporating lexical phrases or chunks containing examples of grammar that will be acquired initially as vocabulary and later as grammar. For example the modal *might* could be introduced in a chunk such as *It might take a while*, without focusing on its full range of modal meanings. Later, other phrases with *might* can be used such as *it might take a long time*. *It might take a couple of weeks*. *It might take even longer*. Similarly the adjective + infinitive construction might be introduced in a phrase such as *He isn't easy to talk to*, and later extended to *isn't easy to work with*, *is easy to get along with*. Using a lexical approach the past perfect might occur first in chunks such as *worse than I'd expected*, *better than I'd imagined*, *than I'd thought*, etc. Later it can be presented again, but this time as grammar.

A simple activity that helps strengthen knowledge of connections between grammar and vocabulary is gap-filling. Jones and Lock (2011: 43) comment:

Having learners either listen for the missing 'bits' in the transcript of a spoken text, or try to work out from the context what is missing in a written text can be a good way of drawing their attention to the use of particular forms in particular contexts, and can provide a starting point for exploration of their functions. Also, having them compare ways that they have filled in blanks with the original version of a text or conversation can help them notice where they are having difficulties producing appropriate forms and to explore why certain forms are appropriate and certain forms are not.

Jones and Lock (2011: 44) recommend the following procedure:

1. Find, adapt or write a text containing occurrences of a particular feature you would like your students to work on.
2. Prepare a version of the text with some or all of the occurrences of this feature blanked out. They may be single words or longer stretches of text like phrases or clauses.
3. Have the students fill in as many gaps as they can, either based on some limited exposure to the original text (listening to it or reading through it once) or based on their own contextual or grammatical knowledge.
4. Present the original text to the students (either in spoken or written form) and have them compare the ways they filled in the gaps with the occurrences of the

feature in the original text and notice the kinds of forms that are used and where their answers are different from the original.

5. Have students explore the reasons why certain forms are appropriate or inappropriate by trying to either justify what they wrote or explain why it should be changed.
6. Have students practice producing the feature in an appropriate way in similar conversations or texts.

The use of corpora is another useful way of exploring links between grammar and vocabulary, as this teacher describes:

*One way to utilize the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), with advanced or upper-intermediate students is to help them discover the difference between hope and wish. Using the KWIC (key word in context) feature, students can see each word in a natural context. The parts of speech are color coded, so students can easily look for the words in their verb forms only. I provide some guiding questions before they begin in order to facilitate their understanding. I want them to see that hope is used when something is still possible and wish is used when something is no longer possible/likely, so my questions are designed to make that difference salient. Going further, students investigate which verb tenses occur with each word by answering more guiding questions. They find that hope often occurs with present tense discussing future possibility, whereas wish occurs with past tense, in reference to the present, or past perfect, in reference to the past. If students have studied conditionals, I try to help them make the connection that the meaning-tense connection follows the pattern of unreal conditionals, where past tense refers to the present and past perfect refers to the past.*

## 10. Use Student Errors to Inform Instruction

Problems students experience in using grammar can be a useful source for teaching. Students' errors might be both at the level of the sentence as well as the text, and teaching activities can be developed both around a collection of typical errors students have made in the past as well as through addressing errors that arise in ongoing classroom work. Experienced teachers are often aware of certain challenging areas of grammar. However, novice teachers and even experienced teachers working with students from different language backgrounds can benefit from trying to identify patterns of errors found in student texts. These patterns of errors can then be used to inform instruction.

An example of a sentence-level error and how a teacher addressed it is from a class where students were struggling with *result* + *preposition* and were using *result of* and *result in* interchangeably. The teacher noticed this error pattern and created an activity that leads students through a guided noticing activity to help the student understand that *result of* is used when *result* is a noun (The result of heavy rain is often flooding) and *in* is used when *result* is a verb (Heavy rain can result in flooding) and developed a *result in/of* guided noticing activity:

- a) Fill in the blanks with either *in* or *of*. Check your answers with a classmate.
  1. Failure to do so may result \_\_\_ an 'F' for your final grade.
  2. Five unexcused absences will result \_\_\_ a failure in this class.

3. You should become better writers as a result \_\_\_\_ this course.
4. The result \_\_\_\_ this exercise will be a carefully organized essay.
5. Excessive absences may result \_\_\_\_ a failing grade.

b) Look at the sentences and answer the two questions below:

- ~ What part of speech (noun or verb) is *result* when used with *in*? \_\_\_\_\_
- ~ What part of speech (noun or verb) is *result* when used with *of*? \_\_\_\_\_

The teacher then gave students a number of short texts based on extracts from students' writing which contained incorrect uses of *result in/of* examples and asked students to work in pairs and correct the texts. An example of an activity that draws on students' errors at the level of text is one that addresses problems with the active/passive distinction. This distinction can only be understood in the context of extended texts, since the correct voice depends on the context of the text and its communicative purpose. Students can be given examples of texts containing clauses that could be completed in passive or active voice or which contain clauses with an incorrect voice, together with guiding questions that prompt them to think about the context of the text and the information focus and to use this information to make the choice between active or passive. Using error patterns from student texts in this way is an efficient way to inform instruction.

### 11. Integrate Grammar With the Four Skills

Grammar does not exist in isolation as lists of rules for forming sentences but is an essential part of the structure of texts. It can be thought of as the 'glue' that holds words and sentences together to create written and spoken texts and that serves as one of the means we make use of to understand conversations or to understand readings. Grammar is not an end in itself but a means to an end. With this in mind, it is essential that grammar is taught and practiced across all skills and in a manner that moves from part to whole or from sentences to entire texts. In our view the appropriate place for grammar in the curriculum is as a component of skill-based courses in reading, writing, listening or speaking or as part of an integrated approach which includes all skills such as content-based instruction and CLIL, rather than as a stand-alone course on grammar. Much of what is often taught in traditional grammar courses that focus on sentence-based practice, can be assigned for self-study, using the resources that technology provides for practice activities of this sort (see below).

*Grammar and Reading.* There are many ways in which grammar can be included in a reading activity, several of which have been illustrated elsewhere in this paper. For example a reading text may contain 'while-reading' tasks that may occur alongside the text to guide the reader through the text and through the reading process. Guiding or focusing questions can be used in this way and can be used to draw attention to grammatical choices made by the writer. The type of while-reading activity will depend upon the type of text. If the text is a narrative, students might number the sequence of events in the narrative on a list or chart and later write their own version of the narrative, using the information in the chart.



Here is another example of an activity that links reading and grammar:

1. The teacher prepares (or chooses) a text that can be divided into three sections (e.g. a descriptive text, an expository text, a narrative) and that includes several examples of a grammar feature that will be the focus of the activity.
2. Students receive the beginning and final section of the text but not the middle section. They examine it and the teacher draws their attention to the grammar features in focus (e.g. tenses, conjunctions, adjectives depending on the content of the text). They also discuss the discourse features of the text that enable it to be read as a beginning and a final section.
3. The students work in pairs or groups to try to construct the middle section of the text.
4. They compare their efforts with others and make any needed changes, paying attention to the grammar features that have been used.
5. The students then receive the original middle section of the text and compare their texts with the original.

Celce-Murcia (2002: 131) describes the use of authentic texts that are chosen to illustrate particular features of text grammar. These are used initially for reading comprehension, following which students explore the grammar of the texts in groups, guided by focus questions. The students then create their own written texts, using the grammatical features they have explored.

*Grammar and Writing.* Writing classes are often the most obvious place to link grammar as a resource used in the creation of texts. Hinkel (2002) uses oral interviews as a springboard to practicing texts ‘that contain various time frames (and tense uses) within the conventions of English discourse’ (2002: 195). Students are first assigned a topic and interview a number of people to collect information for use in a written information report. Feez and Joyce (1998: 28-31) illustrate how grammar and writing are integrated in a deductive and text-based approach.

*Phase 1: Building the Context.* In this stage students are presented with a sample text (e.g. a descriptive text) and discuss the general cultural context in which the text-type is used and the social purposes the text-type achieves. They may compare the model text with other texts of the same type with different text types.

*Phase 2: Modeling and Deconstructing the Text.* This stage focuses on exploration of the structural or organizational features and also the grammatical features of the model text. ‘Modeling and deconstruction are undertaken at both the whole text, clause and expression levels. It is at this stage that many traditional ESL language teaching activities come into their own’ (1998: 29).

*Phase 3: Joint Construction of a Similar Text.* Guided by the teacher, the students now begin to create a new text, one which reflects the grammatical and discourse features of the model text they have studied. The teacher gradually reduces his or her contribution to



text construction, as the students move closer to being able to write their own text-type independently. Activities at this stage include teacher questioning, discussing and editing class texts; small group construction of texts, dictogloss, self-assessment and peer assessment activities.

*Phase 4: Independent Construction of the Text.* In this stage, students work independently to write a text, drafting and revising a whole text.

*Phase 5: Linking to Related Texts.* Activities which link the text-type to related texts include comparing the use of the text-type across different fields, comparing spoken and written modes of the same text-type, researching how a key language feature used in this text-type is used in other text-types.

*Grammar and Speaking.* In speaking classes, grammatical choices and features can be a focus at different stages of a lesson. For example prior to a speaking activity focusing on casual conversation, students might be given a handout containing a transcript of a conversation and consider the use of discourse markers, choice of tenses, and differences between spoken and written grammar as seen in ellipsis. (See the transcript of a conversation in section 3 above). Students might then practice writing their own dialogues, using the same grammatical features and later enact and compare them with those produced by other students. Noticing activities can also be a useful feature of speaking activities. Students can observe examples of different oral activities on video or on the internet and be given tasks that involve tracking the use of different features of grammar. They can then replicate some of the examples they observed in dialog development and role-plays.

Gap filling (discussed above) can also be used with conversation and other spoken texts, in which students are given examples of spoken texts from which key grammatical features or items have been deleted, and students complete them in pairs or groups.

*Grammar and Listening.* In a listening lesson, post-listening activities can be used that involve returning to the listening texts that served as the basis for comprehension activities and using them as the basis for language awareness (Richards, 2005; Field, 2009). For example, students can listen again to a recording or view a video in order to:

- identify differences between what they hear and a printed version of the text;
- complete a cloze version of the text;
- complete parts of sentences taken from the text;
- check off from a list, forms that occurred in the text.

Restructuring activities are oral or written tasks that involve productive use of selected items from the listening text. Such activities could include:

- written sentence-completion tasks requiring use of grammar that occurred in the listening texts;
- dialog practice based on dialogs that incorporate grammatical features from the text;
- role plays in which students are required to use key language from the texts.

## *12. Use the Resources of the Internet and Technology\**

Both the internet and technology or TLLT (technology for language learning and teaching) offer useful resources to help learners expand their grammatical resources. Technology and the internet can bring many types of language use into the classrooms, allowing students to be exposed to and interact with a variety of spoken and written texts. At an advanced level, in content or ESP classes, students can use the internet to find texts that are authentic examples of content-related texts. These can then be used in class activities to explore structures, such as the use of transitions, or to see how features work together to create a particular type of text. For example, students can identify features that are used to signal contrast in persuasive texts, or which grammatical resources are used to package information in scientific reports.

The internet can be also used to provide a real audience for student writing. Students can submit movie or book reviews to online sites, expanding the audience beyond the classroom teacher. This can be a powerful motivator for students to produce accurate texts, since now the task is a real-world task and goes beyond simply writing a class assignment that only the teacher will read. In addition to the written texts, the audio available on the internet is a rich resource for engaging, meaningful activities. Through the internet, students can be exposed to variety of speakers and regional styles of English. In addition to being exposed to different speakers, students see how grammar in spoken language varies within different contexts of use. Students can listen and compare formal speeches and casual conversations and see how the grammar used in these two spoken, but different contexts of language use varies. A useful starting point for this activity is for students to notice or count the use of contractions and/or different personal pronouns. Students could also listen to newscasts and then read a news article on the same topic/event and compare how language varies in these two different contexts of use. Raising student awareness of how grammar varies according to the context and function of language is a valuable tool that can help learners to become more autonomous and accurate language users.

Technology also offers a wide range of resources to support the learning of grammar (Erben et al., 2009). Software programs that focus on the role of grammar in spoken and written English have become increasingly sophisticated and have moved well beyond the error-correction features of earlier programs. Modern programs provide interactivity with learners as they guide them through the processes of decision-making, monitoring and evaluation that are involved in the use of grammar. The use of technology supported teaching for grammar instruction offers a number of benefits for teachers and students. It shifts the location of grammar-focused instruction from the classroom to the multimedia-learning centre, allowing the teacher to use valuable class time for other activities. It enables students to engage in form-focused learning online in their own time. It also provides a more stress-free environment to explore and practice grammar, one in which students can devote as much time to grammar as they feel they need to. Many teachers have experimented with digital games, webquests and social networking sites to encourage a focus on meaningful exchange of information, while asking students to pay attention to particular (formal) aspects of the language (e.g. forms of address on social networking sites, or requests for information in digital games). Software offers different

forms of support for grammar instruction, allowing grammar to be taught both deductively and inductively. Specific suggestions include:

- *Diagnostic testing*: Computerized diagnostic tests can be used to assess learners' grammatical knowledge.
- *Monitoring students' performance*: Teachers can create a database constructed from learners' difficulties and use it in curriculum planning.
- *Integrating grammar with other skills*: Grammar can be seen as it is used in different skills and text types, such as narratives and conversation.
- *Comparing the grammar of spoken and written language*: Learners can view clips of speakers using features of grammar in spoken and written language, or they can compare spoken and written versions of a text.
- *Using a concordancer*: Students can use concordancers to identify the rules behind the language they encounter.
- *Sentence and text awareness*: Activities that develop awareness of the grammatical and discourse organization of texts. Paragraphs may be presented with jumbled sentences that students reorder, or a whole text may be presented with jumbled paragraphs. Some software allows the reader to call up a visual presentation of how a text is organized or choose exercises that focus on such features as main ideas, topic sentences and conclusions.
- *Editing and revising*: Commercial software is available to assist writers in editing their writing and identifying errors of grammar and sentence organization. Interactive writing and grammar software also is available on coursebook CD-ROMs and on the Web. Students also can work collaboratively on writing assignments, either among themselves or with the teacher's guidance, with software that allows them to create a text jointly and display it on a whiteboard or other device. Software can prompt students when they reach a block. Students can choose images and sound effects to accompany stories or texts that they write. Also students can post their written work on websites that serve this purpose, allowing them to compare their compositions with students around the world. Writing can thus become an interactive and collaborative activity, rather than a solitary one, giving students a greater motivation to write.

(\*For recommendations on useful sites see [http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/vids\\_for\\_students.html](http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/vids_for_students.html))

## Conclusion

What we refer to as 'grammar' refers to multidimensional aspects of language knowledge and ability. Central to the acquisition and use of grammar is learning how grammatical choices reflect their role in texts and how texts reflect both their functions as well as the contexts in which they are used. A pedagogy for the teaching of grammar seeks to develop learners' awareness of the nature of texts and the functions of grammar within them, and to expand the grammatical resources learners make use of when they engage in the production of spoken and written texts. The teaching of grammar begins with an

identification of the kinds of texts learners need to master and awareness of their grammatical and discourse features. Both receptive and productive learning tasks are needed that provide opportunities for learners to explore how texts are organized and how they achieve their communicative effects. The use of corpora, the internet, as well as a bank of both student-produced as well as authentic texts can be used as a resource for practice in creating, using, comparing, and evaluating different kinds of spoken and written texts. The principles and practices we have described here seek to suggest how a pedagogy for teaching grammar can move beyond sentence-level grammar and incorporate a focus on grammar as an essential communicative resource.

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