

LANGUAGE SYSTEMS | GRAMMAR

INTRODUCTION

The **teaching** of grammar in the ELT classroom has always attracted considerable interest in **second language acquisition** research and it has gone through multiple paradigm **shifts**: some researchers have strongly **advocated** it, whereas others have adamantly **opposed** it.

The truth is that linguists are still studying the **impact** of grammar instruction on second language acquisition/learning and there is **no consensus** on the most **effective** way to enhance the process of acquisition/learning.

The following table simplifies **essential concepts** related to the teaching of grammar. Beliefs, attitudes and practices generally move along a **continuum** whose extremities represent the most radical positions.

POSITION	ZERO GRAMMAR	CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING	TOTAL GRAMMAR
	◀ ▶		
SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORY	Second language acquisition mirrors first language acquisition. Comprehensible input is the exclusive catalyst for acquisition. Explicit attention to grammar is unnecessary.	Second language acquisition shares similarities with first language acquisition, although the former benefits from attention to grammar as long as the focus remains on meaning and communication.	Second language acquisition is seen as the acquisition of any other skill. As such, explicit attention to grammar and grammar practice are necessary for acquisition.
IMPLICIT vs EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION	Grammar rules can be acquired via implicit (covert) instruction.	Grammar rules can be noticed via implicit (covert) and explicit (overt) instruction.	Grammar rules can be acquired by explicit (overt) instruction.
KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS	Explicit knowledge of grammar does not translate into implicit knowledge and the ability to use it.	Explicit and implicit noticing of grammar can push learners to upgrade their existing knowledge and ability to use it.	Explicit knowledge of rules can become implicit through practice and can develop into the spontaneous ability to use it.
GRAMMAR FOCUS	Emphasis on meaning	Emphasis on meaning and form	Emphasis on form
APPROACH TO INSTRUCTION	Inductive (from language use to language rule)	Inductive / Deductive	Deductive (from language rule to language use)
TEACHING & LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	Incidental (governed by needs/wants as they emerge during communication)	Incidental / Planned	Planned (governed by a fixed sequence of pre-selected grammar items)
TREATMENT OF ERRORS	Reactive (after errors occur)	Reactive / Pre-emptive	Pre-emptive (before errors occur)

Although the most extreme positions have been widely **criticized**, and anything in between is still being **debated**, researchers generally agree that **raising awareness** of grammar rules can have a **positive**, albeit modest, impact on second language acquisition/learning.

The truth is that the resilience of more '**traditional** approaches' to second language teaching, the **resistance** from publishers and educators to innovate, the **pressure** to have learners perform in **grammar-based** examinations and the **expectations** of teachers, learners and other stakeholders means that grammar usually takes **center stage** in mainstream second language education and teachers are left with no **option** but to devote a considerable amount of resources to the teaching of grammar.

Researchers advise not to seek the **best way** to teach grammar, but the **best conditions** in which grammar instruction can take place. They advocate a more '**bottom up**' approach that considers variables such as age, levels of language proficiency, structural difficulty of the target language, educational contexts, learner needs and wants, etc. They also remind that language is primarily a **meaning-making** tool and urge teachers to place the emphasis on **meaning and communication**.

OVERVIEW OF GRAMMAR

Grammar can be defined as a description of the **system** of a language, and how language units such as words and sentences are **combined** and **structured** to produce meaningful **sentences**. Grammar involves the **meanings, usages, functions** and **forms** of these language units in the system.

In order to learn how to teach grammar, it is important for teachers to familiarize themselves with the basic **components** of grammar and the **terminology** used.

The basic components of a sentence usually include a **subject** (the doer), a **verb** (the action) and an **object** (the receiver) or **complement** (a description of the subject). In English (unlike other languages – e.g. Japanese) this elements generally follow this particular **order**.

SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT	SUBJECT	VERB	COMPLEMENT
<i>I</i>	<i>ate</i>	<i>an apple.</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>hungry.</i>

Words can have different **forms**. Consider how the words 'own' and 'restaurant' change according to the **meaning** they convey.

PRESENT (with 'I')SINGULAR			PRESENT (with 'she')SINGULAR			PASTPLURAL		
<i>I</i>	<i>own</i>	<i>a restaurant.</i>	<i>She</i>	<i>owns</i>	<i>a restaurant.</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>owned</i>	<i>several restaurants.</i>

Grammar resources for teachers are usually organized according to **word classes**, groups of words which have a similar **function**. The following are the most common.

- **Articles** (e.g. a, an, the)
- **Noun** (e.g. table, love, bird, etc.)
- **Adjectives** (e.g. small, beautiful, surprised, etc.)
- **Verbs** (e.g. is, play, should, etc.)
- **Adverbs** (e.g. quickly, kindly, lovingly, etc.)
- **Determiners** (e.g. some, many, this, etc.)
- **Pronouns** (e.g. I, us, who, etc.)
- **Conjunctions** (e.g. and, but, however, etc.)
- **Prepositions** (e.g. in, on, with, etc.)

These word classes can be divided into different **sub-classes**, like for example *definite* and *indefinite articles*, *personal* and *possessive pronouns*, *coordinating* and *subordinating conjunctions*, etc.

A list of grammar reference books can be found in the **Grammar Books for Teachers** section of this handout.

In a typical language course, the **choice** of grammar structures to be taught at different levels is usually **pre-selected** by the institution, in most cases by the **coursebook** assigned to each class. Coursebooks generally **sequence** grammar points in order of **difficulty** (e.g. the present simple before the past simple) and **present** them unit by unit along with reading and listening **texts**.

This can help teachers include grammar instruction in their lessons, but it rarely takes into consideration the **real needs** of the learners. As language learning is not a **linear process** that reflects the way in which grammar points are **ordered** in coursebooks, teachers should carry out regular **needs analysis** (e.g. by keeping records of oral and written mistakes made by the learners) and **plan** some of their lessons in **response** to these needs.

TEACHING GRAMMAR

As outlined in the introduction of this handout, **approaches** to grammar instruction tend to follow **different** 'philosophies' and 'cultures' of teaching and learning. Two different approaches in grammar teaching are:

- a **deductive approach**, in which instruction starts with **study** of the language rule and it's followed by **use** of the same language rule;
- an **inductive approach**, in which instruction starts with **use** of the language rule and it's followed by **study** of the same language rule.

Imagine the target structure of the day was the *Past Simple* (e.g. I played, I went, etc.).

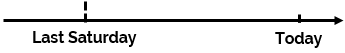
Following a **deductive** approach, the teacher would start the lesson with a **presentation** of the *Past Simple* and a **proactive** clarification of aspects of its meaning, use, form and pronunciation. After the presentation, learners would be encouraged to complete an activity designed to promote the **use** of the *Past Simple*.

Following an **inductive** approach, the teacher would start the lesson with an activity designed to encourage learners to **use** the *Past Simple*. After the activity, learners would be encouraged to **infer** aspects of meaning, use, form and pronunciation of the *Past Simple*. The teacher would provide **reactive** clarifications to fill emerging knowledge gaps.

Techniques for the **clarification** of language can be more **teacher-centered** (i.e. the teacher leads the clarification) or **learner-centered** (i.e. the learners work out rules for themselves).

Let's use the same example of the *Past Simple* as the target structure.

Following a **teacher-centered** approach, the teacher may start the clarification with an **anecdote** about his/her past weekend, write a **marker sentence** (i.e. an example sentence using the *Past Simple*) on the board along with a visual representation of the action (e.g. using a **timeline**) and start building up knowledge **dialogically** with the learners via **concept questions** and answers (i.e. **elicitation**) dealing with aspects of meaning, use, form and pronunciation. The teacher would simultaneously record information about the *Past Simple* on the **board**.

Last Saturday I cooked dinner for my friends.			
I cooked dinner 		MEANING & USE Teacher: Am I talking about the present, the past or the future? Teacher: Is the action completed? Teacher: Is there any connection with the present? Teacher: Do we know when the action happened?	Learners: The past. Learners: Yes. Learners: No. Learners: Yes.
▪ A completed action in the past. ▪ There is no connection with the present. ▪ I usually know when. E.g. Yesterday, last Saturday, in 2002, etc.		FORM Teacher: What do we add at the end of the main verb 'cook'? Teacher: What if the main verb is 'watch'. What do we say?	Learners: -ed. Learners: Watched.
Cook Cook ed /kukt/ /t/ Play Play ed /pleɪd/ /d/		PRONUNCIATION Teacher: Listen and repeat after me... Cooked /kukt/ Teacher: Watched /wɒtʃt/ Teacher: Played /pleɪd/ Etc.	Learners: Cooked. Learners: Watched. Learners: Played.

Following a **learner-centered** approach, the teacher may start the clarification by distributing a worksheet with the same **anecdote** along with a **grammar-focused task** that learners can complete **independently** in pairs or small groups. The task would feature similar **concept questions** to encourage learners to reflect on aspects of meaning, use, form and pronunciation.

Last Saturday I <u>invited</u> my friends to my house and we <u>celebrated</u> my birthday together. I <u>cooked</u> dinner for them, and after dinner we <u>talked</u> , <u>listened</u> to music and <u>played</u> some games.			
a.	Is the story about the present, the past or the future?	_____	
b.	Are the actions in the story completed or still happening?	_____	
c.	Do we know or don't know when the actions happened?	_____	
d.	Can you think of other time expressions similar to 'Last Saturday'? E.g. Yesterday, _____		
e.	Look at the verbs underlined. How is their spelling similar?	_____	
f.	Look at the verbs underlined. Which verbs end with a /d/, /t/ or /ɪd/ sound?	/d/ _____	/t/ _____ /ɪd/ _____

These kind of learner-centered awareness-raising activities are also known as **guided-discovery** tasks.

For more information on how to formulate and use **concept questions**, and design **timelines**, please refer to the following handout:

- **Conveying Meaning & Concept Questions**

For more information on how to design and use **guided-discovery** tasks, please refer to the following handout:

- **Guided Discovery**

PLANNING A GRAMMAR LESSON

A grammar lesson can often be sequenced using popular lesson **frameworks** like Practice-Production (PPP), Test-Teach-Test (T-T-T) or Task-based Learning (TBL).

For more information on Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) and how to plan a lesson using this framework, please refer to the following handouts:

- **Methodology | Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP)**
- **Lesson Frameworks | PPP**

For more information on Test-Teach-Test (T-T-T) and how to plan a lesson using this framework, please refer to the following handouts:

- **Methodology | Test-Teach-Test (T-T-T)**
- **Lesson Frameworks | T-T-T**

For more information on Task-based Learning (TBL) and how to plan a lesson using this framework, please refer to the following handouts:

- **Methodology | Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)**
- **Lesson Frameworks | TBL Speaking and Writing**

TEACHING TIPS

- Before teaching a grammar point make sure you are familiar with the descriptions of its meaning, form and pronunciation. Analyze the grammar point thoroughly so that you will be better able to cope with the unexpected challenges of the delivery (e.g. difficult questions from the learners).
- Adjust the depth of your grammar clarification (during the delivery) according to the level of ability of the learners. Teaching everything there is to know about a particular grammar point may be overwhelming and counterproductive. Decide which aspects of meaning and use match the lessons' aims and the learners' stage of development.
- Establish and clarify aspects of meaning and use before analysing aspects of form.
- Choose your approach to the teaching of grammar according to the level of ability of your learners: lower-level learners may find it easier to deal with grammar in a more implicit way whereas higher-level learners may be better equipped to analyse grammar explicitly.
- Try to give your clarifications some balance and use a combination of teacher- (e.g. elicitation) and learner-centered (e.g. guided discovery tasks) techniques.
- If you choose to approach a clarification stage in a more teacher-centered way, make sure you build up knowledge together with the learners using contextualized questions and elicitation. Avoid 'lecturing'.
- If you choose to approach a clarification stage in a more learner-centered way, make sure you take advantage of simple and unambiguous guided-discovery tasks.
- Avoid lengthy pre-emptive clarifications: use your knowledge of your learners to decide what grammatical aspects need to be clarified before the practice. Some aspects may be better clarified in a more reactive way after the practice in the feedback sub-stages.
- Use a combination of implicit (e.g. using reformulations) and explicit (e.g. writing a mistake on the board) feedback techniques to treat errors.
- Make sure you maintain a communicative focus in your grammar lessons. Teaching the 'simple past' for its own sake has less value. Aim at enabling learners to talk about a past holiday, party, funny event, etc. Try to make communicative practice tasks the real objective of your grammar lessons.

- Make sure grammar is presented in context. Choose a real-life situation in which a particular grammar structure may be needed and identify a 'marker sentence' which exemplifies the corresponding meaning and use.
- Avoid mechanical controlled grammar practice (e.g. de-contextualized gap-fills) whenever possible. Think of something more meaningful in which learners have to use their own ideas and experience. This will add an element of personalization and may make the learning experience more memorable.
- Remember that grammar instruction can have a positive but modest impact on second language acquisition. Avoid lengthy clarification stages. Invest most of the time in practice and reactive feedback.

GRAMMAR BOOKS FOR TEACHERS

COBUILD English Grammar 4th Edition (2017). London: Harper Collins Publishers.

Leech, G., Cruickshank, B. and Ivanc, R. (2001). *An A-Z of English Grammar & Usage. New Edition*. Essex, UK: Pearson Longman.

Parrott, M. (2010). *Grammar for English Language Teachers. 2nd Edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Swan, M. (2017). *Practical English Usage. 4th Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

GRAMMAR ACTIVITIES & GAMES

Gerngross, G., Puchta, H. & Thornbury, S. (2006). *Teaching Grammar Creatively*. Rum, Austria: Helbling Languages.

Hadfield, J. (2002). *Elementary Grammar Games*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.

Hadfield, J. (2003). *Intermediate Grammar Games*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.

Hall, N. & Shephard, J. (1991). *The Anti-Grammar Book*. Harlow, UK: Longman.

Obee, B. (1999). *The Grammar Activity Book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pennington, M. (1995). *New Ways in Teaching Grammar*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Rinvolucri, M. (1984). *Grammar Games*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thornbury, S. (2006). *Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ur, P. (1988). *Grammar Practice Activities. A practical guide for teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Watcyn-Jones, P. (1995). *Grammar Games and Activities for Teachers*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.

Zaorob, M.L. & Chin, E. (2001). *Games for Grammar Practice. A resource book for grammar games and interactive activities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

FURTHER READING

Brown, H.D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles. An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. Second Edition*. White Plains, USA: Addison-Wesley Longman. Chapter 20.

Bygate, M., Tonkyn, A., Williams, E. (Eds.) (1994). *Grammar and the Language Teacher*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall.

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Part 6.

Ellis, R. (1997). *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 9.

Ellis, R. (2015). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition. Second Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapters 10 and 11.

Hadfield, J. & Hadfield, C. (2008). *Introduction to Teaching English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 2.2.

Harmer, J. (1987). *Teaching and Learning Grammar*. Harlow, UK: Longman.

Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Harlow, UK: Pearson. Chapter 13.

Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 5.

Lightbown, P. M. & Spada, N. (2013). *How Languages are Learnt. Fourth edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 6.

Nassaji, H. & Fotos, S. (2011). *Teaching Grammar in Second Language Classrooms. Integrating Form-Focused Instruction in Communicative Context*. New York: Routledge.

Nunan, D. (2015). *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. An Introduction*. New York: Routledge. Chapter 9.

Richards, J.C. (2015). *Key Issues in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 9.

Scrivener, J. (2010). *Teaching English Grammar. What to Teach and How to Teach it*. London: Macmillan Education.

Scrivener, J. (2011). *Learning Teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan. Chapter 7.

Thornbury, S. (2000). *How to teach grammar*. Harlow, UK: Pearson.

Thornbury, S. (2005). *Uncovering Grammar. How to Help Grammar Emerge*. London: Macmillan.

Ur, P. (2012). *A Course in English Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 6.