

Grammar for Communication

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Seo, Eun Mi(1995). *Grammar for Communication. Linguistics vol. 3*. The main concern of researchers and English teachers in the world was how to deal with grammar effectively in English classroom. The knowledge of grammar has been considered as the successful element for students who are studying English as a foreign language.

However, it seems that grammar is less important in communication due to the current trend of communicative competence. The basic concept of communicative competence is that the speaker does not need to worry about grammatical errors as long as s/he gets across the meaning. It does not mean that grammar is not important. To provide solid background for communication, grammar cannot be discarded in language teaching. In this paper, I try to argue why grammar is necessary for communication.

1. Introduction

Most Korean students want to learn how to express and communicate well in foreign language. This is the primary goal in studying foreign language. Today, the world becomes smaller and English is now a tool to connect ourselves to other countries. As time passes, we need English more to communicate properly in a competitive global world.

The main concern of researchers and English teachers in the world was how to deal with grammar effectively in English classroom. The knowledge of grammar has been considered as the successful element for students who are studying English as a foreign language. In Greek and Latin times, the study of language was the study of grammar. Grammar was very important area in the academic world. As Batstone (1994) says, effective communication in a language would be seriously impaired without an ability to put grammars to use in a variety of situations. He argues that grammatical

knowledge is a must for successful communication. Nunan (1991) also supports that grammar exists to enable us to 'mean', and without grammar it is impossible to communicate beyond a very rudimentary level. To have more sophisticated communication in specific areas, the learner should acquire grammatical concepts or knowledge.

However, because of the current trend in communicative approach, grammar seems less important in communication. The basic concept of communicative competence is that the speaker does not need to worry about grammatical errors as long as s/he gets across the meaning. It does not mean that grammar is not important. According to Canale & Swain's communicative competence theory, grammatical competence is one of the four competences. To make solid background for communication, grammar cannot be discarded in language teaching.

The focus was on form in the traditional grammar. Students do not learn the second language in a linear way but in an organic way. That is why the focus in grammar should be on meaning. The problem with Korean students is that they know rules well but they do not know how to apply rules in real communication. When the students monitor rules too much, they can feel communication breakdown.

Form, function and meaning are equally important for communication. As Nunan (1991) said, structures are not learned in isolation but they interact with each other. The teacher's role is to make students interested in dealing with grammar in language classroom. We need grammar not only to communicate effectively but also to understand foreign language better. Grammar class can be fun as long as form, function and meaning are treated equally.

2. Grammar for Communication

2.1. What is grammar?

There are several definitions about grammar. Widdowson (1988) explains grammar in various ways. According to him, grammar is not just a collection of sentence patterns which do not signify anything. Grammar is a device for mediating between words and context. The device itself is very complex. For example, when the learner learns only the intricacies of the device without knowing how to put it to use, he is like someone learning about the delicate mechanism of a clock without knowing how to tell the time. That is, the learner should learn form and function in the context.

Language without grammar would be chaotic. A study of grammar (syntax and morphology) reveals a structure and regularity which lies at the basis of

language and enables us to talk of the language system.

Larsen-Freeman (1991) sees grammar as a three-dimensional framework: form, meaning and pragmatics. Three dimensions are interconnected. The details of three dimensions are as follows:

Form/Structure: Morphemes
Phonemic/graphemic patterns
Syntactic patterns

Mean/Semantics: Lexical meaning
Grammatical meaning

Pragmatics: Social context
Linguistic discourse context
Presupposition about context

A three dimensional grammar framework can be shown in the form of a pie chart as follows:

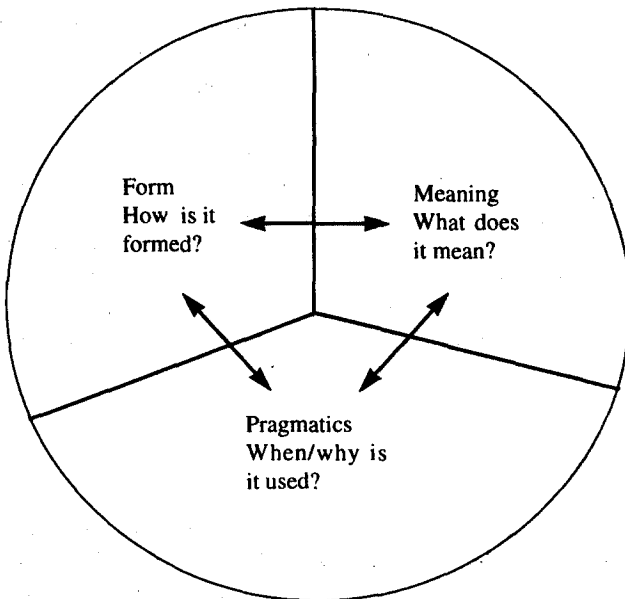


Figure 1. Three Dimensional Grammar by Larsen-Freeman

As we can see in the above figure by Larsen-Freeman, grammar gives us the form, But the form is not meaningful without second dimension and third dimension pragmatics. Pragmatics is the study of relations between the language about the context. Context takes into account such topics as:

- * who the speaker/writer is,
- * who the audience is,
- * where the communication takes place,
- * what communication takes place before and after a sentence in question,
- * implied vs. literal meanings,
- * styles and registers,
- * the alternative forms among which a producer can choose (Celce-Murcia, 1994)

Batstone (1994) explains about grammar as process. He emphasizes that grammar enables us to use language as we build up stretches of dynamic discourse in speech and unity. To support his arguments, he elaborates the following points:

1) Grammar and knowledge of the world

A thorough knowledge of the formal grammatical system is not sufficient to enable us to communicate. We need a knowledge of the world so that we can make sense both of language and with language. There are two kinds of knowledge such as schematic knowledge and systemic knowledge.

2) Grammar and shared knowledge: redundancy

Language serves a communicative, economizing purpose and it extends into other areas of grammar. There are occasions when only a few words are enough to communicate. For example, Widdowson gives an example of the surgeon performing an operation. In this case, only some professional medical words are used for communication because they already know what they want to say in the critical moments. There are some cases to use simple grammar such as:

A: Well.

B: Hmm. Yes, Interesting.

In this short conversation, A and B eventually built up a degree of shared knowledge which enabled them to talk in this brief way. The less we can account for shared knowledge, the more we need to call on grammar. The more shared knowledge we can assume, the more we can shift from grammar to lexis.

grammar & lexis----- lexis-----non-verbal
 (less shared knowledge) (more-shared knowledge)

Figure 2.

3) Needing grammar: unshared knowledge

Grammar plays an important role in language processing. We can not always rely on lexis or background knowledge for communication. The less we are able to rely on shared knowledge to come to our assistance, the more dependent we become on grammar. We need grammar to make our meanings clear and the less knowledge is shared, the more likely it is that grammar will become a necessary source for both parties.

4) Needing grammar: the social context

Language users may still need grammar to make their ideas clear in a social context. In people's gatherings such as social parties, language can serve important social functions in maintaining politeness and social relations.

2.2. The role of grammar in foreign language learning.

Traditionally, when we study foreign language, we first begin to learn target language grammar. Contrastive analysts showed that students' errors were due to the difference between the first language and target language grammar. According to them, negative transfer occurs when the first language and the target language are totally different. On the other hand, if there are similarities between two languages, the learner will acquire the second language easily because of positive transfer. However, their viewpoints were not enough to verify why students make errors in the second language.

The morpheme order studies by Dulay & Burt and other researchers showed that there is no need to teach grammar systematically. It is more important for learners to immerse themselves in communication in which the focus is in meaning rather than form. An other suggestion is that the syllabus should still be sequenced grammatically but the sequencing should follow the natural order. These two suggestions have problems. On the other hand, Long (1983) emphasizes the importance of instruction in a foreign language setting. According to him, instruction speeds up the rate at which learners learn in contrast with those who try and pick the language up naturalistically, without formal instruction. Foreign language teachers have great responsibility in teaching students more systematically.

2.3. Approaches dealing Grammar

It is important to overview the history of grammar in language teaching. Celce-Murcia (1991) lists six periods from Latin and Greek times to the current age. We can clearly see how grammar teaching has been developed so far.

1) Latin & Greek

The study of language was the study of grammar in Latin and Greek times. Language was a tool of scholarship. The grammar translation method was widely used. A structural linguist like Wilkins suggests that it is the aim of the linguist to reveal the system of the language, the langue, and of the language teacher to enable people to learn it.

2) Audiolingualism

It takes features from structural linguistics and the behavioral school of psychology. Language learning is habit formation and overlearning. Mimicry of forms and memorization of certain sentence patterns are important. Grammatical structures are sequenced and rules are presented inductively. The focus of instruction rarely moves beyond the sentence level.

3) Cognitive Code

The cognitive code approach was influenced by linguist Chomsky and psycholinguist Miller. In this approach, language learning was viewed as hypothesis formation and rule acquisition rather than habit formation. Grammar was considered important. Rules were presented either deductively and inductively depending on the preferences of the learners. Error analysis and correction were seen as appropriate classroom activities. The source of errors was seen not only as transfer from the first language but also as normal language development.

4) Comprehension Approach.

Learners should begin by listening to meaningful speech and by responding nonverbally in meaningful ways before they produce any language themselves. Grammar is presented inductively. Rule learning may help learners monitor what they do, but it will not help their acquisition or spontaneous use of the target language. Error correction is unnecessary since they feel that error will gradually self-correct as learners are exposed to even more complex, rich, and meaningful input in the target language.

5) Communicative Approach.

American anthropological linguist Hymes and British functional linguist, Halliday see language as an instrument of communication. Communication is the goal of a second or foreign language. Language instructions in communication approach are the following: content-based, meaningful,

contextualized and discourse based rather than sentence based.

The teacher's role is to facilitate language use and communication whether, when and how teachers should correct grammatical errors.

6) The Current challenge.

Some focus on form may well be necessary for many learners to achieve accuracy as well as fluency in their acquisition of a second or foreign language. However, a grammatical approach does not help students. It can lead to the development of a broken, ungrammatical, pidginized form of target language beyond which students rarely progress. In the current age, the trend is communicative grammar.

Leech and Svartvik (1994) emphasize the communication aspects of learning English grammar. According to them, most college students have grammatical background after several years of schooling. However, their ability to use language for communication is rather disappointing. They have even grammar fatigue because of failure in communication. Leech and Svartvik argue that students need grammar for real communication, that is communicative grammar. They try to present grammar in the eyes of the communicator in their book *A communicative Grammar of English*. Communication is not a single process. For better communication, they show four circles:

(a) First circle: Concepts.

It represents notional and conceptual meaning. It is the basic meaning categories of grammar. Words, phrases and clauses are the structural units.

(b) Second circle: Information, reality and belief.

It shows logical aspects of communication. The sentence carries an important unit.

(c) Third circle: mood, emotion, and attitude.

It is about the social dimension of communication. It relates grammar to the attitudes and behavior of speaker and hearer. At the speaker's end, language expresses attitudes and emotions. At the receiving end, language can control or influence the actions and attitudes of the hearer.

(d) Fourth circle: Meanings in connected discourse.

It deals with the organization of communication. It is very important to arrange our thoughts in order to communicate in the most appropriate way. Context plays a great role in communication because a sentence in isolation is not sufficient. Context means text or discourse.

2.4. The Grammar in Language Teaching.

In the grammatical syllabus, language is a grammatical system and that

learning a language consists of learning that system (Bell, 1981). Grammar is rule. Krashen says that grammatical structures will become internalized only if the learners are placed in a situation in which they need to use the structures for communicative purposes.

Krashen (1982) says that conscious knowledge of rules is not responsible for our fluency; it does not initiate utterances. Grammar is a synonym for conscious learning. It can be used in two ways. First, it can be used with some profit as a monitor.

1) Grammar for monitor: When the monitor is used.

The optimal monitor user utilizes conscious rules to raise his/her grammatical accuracy when it does not interfere with communication. When the learner has time and focuses on form, s/he can use conscious grammar to acquire the foreign language.

2) The deductive-inductive issue.

The deductive-inductive issue is always debatable in language teaching area. In deductive teaching, the rule is first and the explanation follows as in the grammar-translation method or cognitive-code approach. In other approaches, the learner tries to find out the rule later. Krashen says inductive learning is similar to acquisition. The following table shows the difference between inductive and deductive learning.

Table 1. Acquisition and inductive learning: similarities and differences

Acquisition	Inductive learning
Data first, rule follows	Data first, rule follows
Rule is subconscious	Rule is conscious
Focus on meaning	Focus on form
Slow process	May occur quickly
Requires large amounts of data	May occur after exposure to small amount of data

As we can see in the table, both deductive and inductive approaches are learning oriented, since the students' focus will be form rather than meaning. The teachers should use both methods appropriately to help students.

Leech (1994) says that the language teacher is required to have the following knowledge to be a successful teacher. The best language teacher is one who remains a student of language and languages. A model teacher of

languages should:

- (a) be capable of putting across a sense of how grammar interacts with the lexicon as a communicative system;
- (b) be able to analyse the grammatical problems that learners encounter;
- (c) have the ability and confidence to evaluate the use of grammar, especially by learners, against criteria of accuracy, appropriateness and expressiveness;
- (d) be aware of the contrastive relations between native language and foreign language;
- (e) understand and implement the process of simplification by which over knowledge of grammar can best be presented to learners at different stages of learning.

3. Pedagogical Grammar

According to the systemic functional linguistics, language exists in context. This approach advocates explicit grammatical instruction but it is different from traditional grammar teaching. They use the top down approach. When the teacher wants to focus on a particular grammatical item, that item is introduced within a particular context. They suggest that when learners are taught how language actually works at the level of text, there are a number of benefits. Without systemic knowledge of grammar, the learner can not communicate beyond a rudimentary level. In this sense, there is a need to look into pedagogical grammar, which is one of the current issues in grammar teaching.

Corder (1975) said that pedagogical grammar is for the use of teachers rather than learners. It is grammar for pedagogues. However, Corder's definition is too vague. Chalker (1994) takes a broad consensual view about pedagogical grammar as following:

- * Can be for reference or for course work (in either case, it may be graded to meet a particular user level);
- * Could be comprehensive, but will probably be more modest in its aims;
- * Will draw attention to rules, thus probably combining prescription with description;
- * Will help foreigners to learn a language and/or help mother-tongue speakers to understand their own language;
- * Can be either for learners or for teachers;

Like Chalker's view, pedagogical grammar is for the purpose of teaching and learning, syllabus construction, material development and so on.

4. Implication

Canale & Swain (1980) argued that communicative competence consists of four competences. Communicative competence is the ultimate goal of the foreign language learner.

* Sociolinguistic competence: The speaker/writer knows how to express the message in terms of the person being addressed and the overall circumstances and purpose of the communication.

* Discourse competence: The selection, sequence, and arrangement of words and structures are clear and effective means of expressing the speaker/writer's intended message.

* Linguistic competence: The forms, inflections, and sequences used to express the message are grammatically correct.

* Strategic competence: The speaker/writer has effective and unobtrusive strategies to compensate for any weakness s/he has in the above three areas.

Communicative competence provides what is perhaps a linguistic principle of learning and teaching. According to Brown (1994):

Given that communicative competence is the goal of a language classroom, then instruction needs to point toward all of its components: organizational, pragmatic, strategic, and psychomotor. Communicative goals are best achieved by giving due attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to students' eventual needs to apply classroom learning to heretofore unrehearsed contexts in the real world.

Grammar is an important factor for communication. As Long (1983) mentioned earlier, there are several reasons that grammar instruction can be beneficial for the learner. If the teacher teaches grammar effectively and appropriately, learners can get lots of benefits in foreign language learning. According to Celce-Murcia (1994), appropriate grammar focusing techniques:

- * are embedded in meaningful, communicative contexts.
- * contribute positively to communicative goals.
- * promote accuracy within fluent, communicative language.
- * do not overwhelm students with linguistic terminology.
- * are as lively and intrinsically motivating as possible.

Using a whole language approach to teach grammar can be very effective and innovative. The whole language approach follows what Ken Goodman

suggests. Language is language only when it is whole. The whole is always viewed as being greater than the sum of its parts, and it is whole that gives meaning to the parts. In grammar instruction, linguistic elements such as words, phrases, or sentences gain meaning when they are placed in context and used in conjunction with the whole. Compared with traditional approach, the whole language approach has better effects and benefits. In the following figure, we can see the difference and benefits of the whole language approach.

Table 2 Teaching of Grammar by Adair-Hauck & Donato (1994)

Whole Language/Guided Participation	vs. Traditional Approach
1. Whole language approach uses higher skills and language before moving to procedural skills	1. Sequencing of tasks from simple to complex
2. Instructional interaction between Teacher ("expert") and Students ("novice").	2. Little teacher/student interaction: teacher-directed explanation
3. Richly implicit explanation (guided participation)	3. Explicit explanation of grammar
4. Encourages performance before competence (approximations encouraged)	4. Students must master step before going to next step (competence before performance)
5. Students participate in problem-solving process (opportunity for learners' actions to be made meaningful)	5. Students are passive learners who rarely participate in constructing the explanation.
6. Language and especially questions must be suitably tuned to a level at which performance requires assistance	6. Few questions—mainly rhetorical
7. Lesson operationalizes functional significance of grammatical structure before mechanical procedures take place.	7. Oftentimes the functional significance of grammatical points does not emerge until end of lesson

A whole language approach contrasts with traditional explicit and implicit teaching. It is an eclectic approach, both implicit and explicit. This approach stresses discourse and encourages students to comprehend meaningful discourse from the beginning. A whole language approach invites the learner to use language functionally and purposefully through integrated discourse.

5. Conclusion

Traditionally, teaching has tended to dissociate grammar from context and to deal in separate sentences. Learners should realize the communicative value of grammar in the very achievement of meaning (Widdowson, 1988).

As Tonkin (1994) says, quoted in his article, grammar is back. If the learner does not attain a certain level of language proficiency, that means linguistic competence, s/he can not have successful communication. The students need to realize the importance of grammar for communication. When they use grammar appropriately, they will have confidence in foreign language. Teachers should develop effective teaching methods to help students.

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