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**TEACHING SKILLS: TEACHING GRAMMAR**

**Course Outline**

* Three Dimensions of grammar
* Grammar and discourse
* Emergent grammar
* Approaches to form-focused instruction
* Explicit presentation of forms
* Implicit presentation of forms
* Feedback on errors
* A lexicogrammatical approach
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Introduction Whether you are a language learner or teacher, grammar may mean many different things. One common idea to all of us may be that it is something significant we need to tackle by exerting a great deal of time and effort in order to “master” the language. Nevertheless, many learners and teachers often struggle with grammar, figuring out how to just “pick it up” or how best to instruct it. Michael Halliday (1978) says, “Language is as it is because of what it has to do” (p. 19). Understanding and explaining grammar may seem complex, and it is indeed complex because it has “to do all the things we make it do for us” (Halliday, 2004, p. 5).

1.Three Dimensions of Grammar Diane Larsen-Freeman (2003, 2014) argues that in order to help language learners use language accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately, we need to explain the three interconnected and non-hierarchal dimensions of grammar: form, meaning, and use.  
• The form dimension refers to observable structural components such as phonemes, graphemes, inflectional morphemes, and syntactic patterns.  
• Meaning refers to the semantic level of the structural items including lexical and grammatical meaning.  
• The use dimension accounts for meanings of utterances across different contexts and cohesion in discourse.  
Consider this example: The modal must is placed in front of a verb to mean obligation or necessity. However, if an English learner tells an American friend, “I must take my baby to the doctor,” the friend might find the sentence awkward, as it sounds too formal in the context (Savage, 2010, p. 8). Thus, in order  
to fully understand how to use the language correctly and appropriately, learners need to be aware of the use dimension of the target structure.  
The three dimensions are interconnected in the sense that a change in one dimension could change the others (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

Traditionally, language teaching methodology has focused on one dimension while ignoring others. The Grammar Translation Method and the Audio-lingual Method focus on form, somewhat on meaning, but ignore use almost completely. The Natural Approach on the other hand, focuses on use and meaning, but mostly ignores the form dimension. Learners of any language must learn *all three* of these components. Grammar is not only about form; it is about “what forms mean and when and why they are used” (Larsen-Freeman,  
2014, p. 269)

**2.Grammar and discourse  
 Form, meaning,** and use of language are context-sensitive and are co-constructed by the members of a particular discourse. Therefore, teaching language through discourse is inevitable. Celce Murcia and Olshtain (2014) define **discourse** as “an instance of spoken or written language with describable internal relationships of form and meaning (e.g., words, structures, cohesion) that relate coherently to an external communicative function or purpose and a given audience or interlocutor” (p. 427) in a particular context. In other words, context defines the way we use the language, and we need to take into account such factors 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 versus literal meanings,  
• styles and registers,  
• the alternative forms among which a producer can choose.

It’s important to grasp the significance of the interconnectedness of all features of discourse, as the patterns of language forms emerge out of discourse and are shaped by an ongoing process (Hopper, 1998; Bybee, 2006; Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2009)

**3.Emergent grammar** According to Hopper (1998), the patterns of language emerge through repeated use and become “sedimented” (p. 158) as fixed or semi-fixed patterns that may look stabilized. From this perspective, grammar is not the source of understanding and communication but “a byproduct of it” (p. 156). Earlier, Hopper (1988) argued that grammar is “a real-time activity, whose regularities are always provisional and continuously subject to negotiation, renovation, and abandonment” (p. 120). We are tentatively making meaning and making sense with patterns that have been previously used and that are familiar to us. Therefore, the patterns of linguistic rules are based on *frequency* (Bybee, 2006; N. Ellis, 2012). For instance, originally, the proper noun *Google* was used to refer to the online search engine, and now also functions as a verb to mean “to look up information online.” We often hear people saying, “Why don’t you google the word so that we know what it is.

To capture this dynamic, complex, and adaptive nature of language, Larsen-Freeman (2003) proposed the term *grammaring*, which shifts the focus from the product of learning static grammar rules to the process of using grammar in real world communicative contexts. The notion of *grammaring* helps us move away from the usual traditions of teaching grammar as a body of knowledge and instead treats grammar as a *skill* to develop. Grammaring also refers to the organic process of using “grammar constructions accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately” (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 264).

**4. Approaches to form-focused instruction**

R. Ellis (2012) defines **form-focused instruction** (FFI) as “any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form” (p. 271). FFI approaches vary from traditional structure-based focusing primarily on form to more communicative approaches with attention to form while students are engaged in activities that are meaning-focused.  
 A glance through the last century of language-teaching practices reveals mixed opinions about the place of teaching language **forms**, depending on the method or era. In the Grammar Translation and Audio-lingual Methods ,formal aspects of language received central attention. In the Direct Method and the Natural Approach, overt focus on form was almost forbidden. Some manifestations of CLT, especially indirect approaches, advocated only a brief attention to form, while other proponents of CLT injected healthy doses of form-focused techniques into a communicative curriculum.

Nowadays only a handful of language-teaching experts advocate *no* focus on form (“zero option”) at all, a prime proponent of which is Krashen (1997) with his **input hypothesis**. Current views of L2 classroom methodology are almost universally agreed on the importance of some **form-focused instruction** within the communicative framework, ranging from **explicit** treatment of rules, to **noticing** and **input enhancement** (Polio, 2007; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; R. Ellis, 2012), to **implicit** techniques for structuring input to learners. This consensus, of course, still leaves open a wide range of options from which you must choose, depending on your students, their purposes, and the context. In other words, we need to consider an *informed eclectic* approach to form-focused instruction (Savage, 2010).

**5.Explicit presentation of forms** Explicit instruction attempts to help learners develop metalinguistic awareness of a rule that can be carried out *deductively* or *inductively* (Ellis, 2014). In a deductive explicit presentation, the teacher begins a lesson by announcing the grammar focus: “Today we’re going to learn about the present progressive.” The teacher might then write examples of the target structure on the board or show a grammar chart or table in the textbook (e.g., “I *am* look*ing* for my cellphone.” “She *is* buy*ing* a house.”). Afterwards, the teacher would follow up with an explicit explanation of the rule in detail, including the form, meaning, and use,saying something like: “The present progressive tense is formed with a present form of *be* (i.e., *am*, *is*, or *are*) and the present participle of the main verb. The present progressive is used to mean ongoing action at the time of speaking or for future events” (Cowan, 2008, pp. 362–363).  
 When providing an explicit presentation *inductively*, the teacher tries to elicit information from the students by presenting example sentences, sometimes by using input enhancement techniques such as **consciousness-raising** (e.g., highlighting or bolding the target forms):

It **is** rain**ing** now.  
You **are** study**ing** English now.  
She **is** sleep**ing** now.  
They **are** hav**ing** lunch now.

**Teacher:** Can you see how we can form the present progressive tense?  
**Students:** Use is, are, + verb –ing.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **T:  Ss:** | What time words do we use with this tense? This moment, right now. |

In addition to deduction and induction, *abduction* can be another approach to obtaining linguistic knowledge. Introduced by C. S. Peirce at the end of 19th century, *abduction* refers to the exploratory process of trying out tentative solutions to problems or facts to figure out what may happen, to see if they work, or to experience something new (Cunningham, 2002). According to van Lier (2007), unlike *inductive* (i.e., data-driven, extracting rules and patterns from examples) or *deductive* (i.e., rule-driven, from rule-learning to rule application) reasoning, in abductive learning learners come to understand hidden rules of language use through the process of exploring hypotheses and inferences.

Language teachers can start with abduction, taking experiential and exploratory approaches (e.g., puzzle-based learning) and then move on to either inductive or deductive tasks as relevant, followed with further exploration at a wider or deeper level. Consider the following example (adapted from van Lier, 2011a, p. 13):  
***5.1.Abduction in the L2 classroom*****1.** Choose an authentic text that incorporates some features you want to highlight. *Possible option: Input enhancement, relative* **2.** Design an activity that focuses on these features. *Example: Relative  
clauses embedded into an information-gap map activity.***3.** Students work in groups and note the grammatical features or patterns  
they observe.  
**4.** Students report their findings to the class.  
Expansion:  
**5.** Inductive: Students collect further examples illustrating the pattern(s) found and formulate a general rule.  
**6.** Deductive: Teacher and students formulate a rule, check it in a grammar book, and look at examples that illustrate the rule.  
 The use of grammatical explanation and terminology must be approached with care. Following a few rules of thumb may enhance any grammatical explanations you undertake:

***5.2.Suggestions for enhancing grammatical explanations***• Keep your explanations brief and simple. Use the students’ L1, if your context permits it, to help students to comprehend more easily.  
• Use charts and other visuals whenever possible to graphically depict grammatical relationships.  
• Illustrate with clear, unambiguous examples.  
• Do not get yourself (and students!) tied up in knots over so-called “exceptions” to rules.  
• If you don’t know how to explain something (for instance, if a student asks you about a point of grammar and you are not sure of the rule), do not risk giving false information (that you may have to retract later, which will cause even more embarrassment). Rather, tell students you will research that point and bring an answer back the next day.

**6.Implicit presentation of forms**  
 In an implicit approach to grammar instruction, the teacher does not employ structural analysis or technical terms to explain the linguistic rules. Instead, the target form is used in the utterances made to communicate with the students.  
 The context of the utterances helps them to understand the meaning and sustain the communication (Savage, 2010). Consider the following examples provided in authentic context drawing on (a) the teacher’s and students’ current actions, (b) their personal lives, or (c) visuals (Savage,2010):

**a.** I am speaking now. I am not reading.  
Suji is sitting on a chair now, not standing on it.  
We are studying English now. We are not watching TV.  
**b.** I am living in the U.S. now. I was living in Canada before.  
Tom is taking a cooking class these days.  
**c.** In this picture, what is this little girl doing now?  
Is she running or swimming?  
In this movie, to whom is the man speaking?  
Is the man speaking to the police or to his friend?

* **Focus on Form**

A **focus on form** (F on F) approach attempts to induce learners’ incidental learning by drawing their attention to target forms while they are engaged in communicative activities. The emphasis is on the learners’ noticing their knowledge about grammatical features, which is necessary for successful target language use and has been influential in task-based approaches to grammar instruction.  
 **Noticing** refers to “the process of the learner picking out specific features of the target language input which she or he hears or reads, and paying consciousattention to them so that they can be fed into the learning process” (Cullen, 2012, p. 260). Noticing is a natural process, but one considered to be essential to language acquisition (Schmidt, 1990) when learners are exposed to sufficient input.  
 A F on F approach can be considered more appropriate because:  
• it is more in keeping with natural language acquisition (where rules are absorbed subconsciously with little or no conscious focus).  
• it conforms more easily to the concept of interlanguage development in which learners progress, on variable timetables, through stages of rule acquisition.  
• it allows students to get a communicative “feel” for some aspect of language before possibly being overwhelmed by grammatical explanations.  
• it builds more intrinsic motivation by allowing students to discover rules rather than being told them.

FonF usually occurs reactively when difficulties of the learner’s performance are identified after or during the completion of a given task in which students use the grammatical knowledge available to them rather than particular grammatical points preselected and pre-presented by the teacher. The posttask stage is an important part of the process of acquiring necessary forms because it is this stage where learners compare their performance with correct forms such as in a reading text, or a transcript of a conversation.  
 Then it becomes the consciousness-raising (Sharwood-Smith, 1981) stage of the lesson: the teacher’s role at this stage is to help students notice and pay attention to the gaps between their utterances and the correct forms by giving corrective feedback with further explanation, exemplification, and follow-up practice as required. A variety of tasks can be implemented for this stage such as dictogloss, jigsaw, and text reconstruction tasks.

**7.Feedback on errors**

Existing research on corrective feedback supports the importance of feedback for successful acquisition of oral communicative competence. The practical question is determining which specific type of error correction is most beneficial and under what circumstances, the answer to which is unclear and has not been resolved (Loewen, 2012). Therefore, it is desirable to employ a variety of feedback options such as recasting, self-correction, and metalinguistic explanation (Loewen, 2012; R. Ellis, 2012; Larsen-Freeman, 2014). The important point to keep in mind is that we should adhere to principles of maintaining communicative flow, of maximizing student self-correction, and of sensitively considering the affective state and linguistic stage of the learner.

The treatment of grammatical (and discourse) errors in writing is a different matter. In process writing approaches, overt attention to **local** grammatical and rhetorical (discourse) errors is normally delayed until learners have completed one or two drafts of a paper. **Global** errors that impede meaning must, of course, be attended to earlier in the process. Studies have shown (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014) that certain attention to errors does indeed make a difference in final written products.

**8**. **A lexicogrammatical approach** The term **lexicogrammar**, originally coined by Michael A. Halliday, represents a view that lexis and grammar are two inherently connected parts of a single entity and should not be treated separately. Grammar is considered as “a meaning-making resource and to describe grammatical categories by reference to what they mean” (Halliday, 2004, p. 10). From this view a grammatical structure may be lexically bound and lexical items also have grammatical features (Liu, 2013). This approach has been supported by corpus research, which illustrates strong connection between contextual patterns

**9**. **Principles for teaching grammar** As discussed so far, varied opinions on how to teach grammar can be found in the literature on language teaching. The overall consensus in recent communicative methodology is that judicious attention grammatical form is not only helpful, if appropriate techniques are used, but essential to a speedy learning  
process (Loewen, 2011; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Ellis, 2014). The question is what the optimal conditions are for teaching grammar, and what degree of overt attention should be included in such form-focused instruction. van Lier (2011a) noted that “grammar activities can be along a continuum from implicit to  
explicit, and at any point along the continuum inductive and/or deductive work may be carried out” (p. 13). A lesson may start with a more implicit focus, which may then shift to becoming more explicit, or vice versa.  
 Following are some principles that underlie effective grammar teaching, taken from the current literature (Loewen, 2011; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; van Lier, 2011a; Ellis, 2014).

***Principles for teaching grammar***  
• All three dimensions of grammar—form, meaning, and use— should be emphasized.  
• Take a lexicogrammatical approach to presenting new linguistic items to students

• Learners need to have the opportunity to practice and use forms in communicative tasks.  
• Attend to both input-based (comprehension) and output-based (production) grammar and vocabulary.  
• Deductive, inductive, and abductive approaches can all be useful, depending on the goals and emergent needs of the learner in a particular context

•Incidental focus on form is valuable in that it treats errors that occur while learners are engaged in meaningful communication.  
• Corrective feedback can facilitate acquisition if it involves a mixture of implicit and explicit feedback.  
• Explicit grammar lessons and implicit grammar integrated into communicative activities (FonF) are both viable, depending on the context and learners’ needs.  
• Instruction needs to consider learners’ individual differences.  
•Try to cater to their different needs by involving a variety of learning activities.Make use of learner-training materials to help make them aware of their own approaches to learning and encourage them to alternate different strategies

**10**.**Grammar techniques** Following are some sample techniques for teaching grammar, especially for helping learners notice and pay attention to grammatical features they need for the completion of given tasks.

**10.1.Charts, objects, maps, and drawings** Some practices for calling students’ attention to grammatical forms have been around for decades and still serve as effective devices (Thornbury, 2006; Azar & Hagen, 2011; Saslow & Ascher, 2011). There is always a useful place for a *chart*, for example, that requires a student to notice and check off certain forms.

Likewise, *objects* (or pictures of objects), *maps*, and other *illustrations* help to make focus on grammatical forms somewhat concrete. A page full of common articles of clothing, for example, could aid in the noticing of possessives:  
This is *my* jacket.  
These are *Oscar’s* glasses.  
Are these *your* shoes? No, they are *Lucy’s*

*Maps* are traditionally favorite aids in introducing and reinforcing certain grammatical and lexical features of language. Asking for directions (“Where is the post office?”) and responding (“Go down this street, turn right, walk about half a block, and it will be on your left”) are among a number of possible formal elements that can be included.

**10.2. Dialogues and conversations** For over half a century *dialogues* have been successfully used to focus learners on form and meaning simultaneously. For beginners, they provide models for practice while injecting some meaning and reality, even if *all* the lexical and grammatical components are not completely understood. For intermediate learners, dialogues and other conversations give learners a chance to confidently produce language, and then to vary the models with their own creative additions

**10.3. Input enhancement** A more recent common technique involves highlighting (or boldfacing) certain target grammatical forms in a reading text or stressing (or slowing down, or using hand gestures) certain forms when speaking.

**10.4. Input flood** Another technique presents texts that contain a target structure that appears frequently or repeatedly, and is therefore more salient. This may trigger syntactic priming, as speakers tend to “produce a previously spoken or heard structure” (Mackey & Gass, 2006, p. 173).

**10.5. Input processing** Because it may be difficult for learners to attend to meaning and form in the input at the same time, a more explicit technique, input processing, was proposed by Van Patten (1996). It is important that the text used for input remain reasonably natural, and that the learners make the necessary connections between form and function in authentic contexts of L2 use.

**10.6**. **Dictogloss** Dictogloss, a variation on the *dictocomp* technique , is a task-based procedure designed to help L2 learners internalize certain grammatical elements that are built into a text (Wajnryb, 1990). Through the reconstruction of a text, students come to notice certain grammatical features.

* **Main Resource**

Brown,H.D and Lee,K.(2015) *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy (4th ed.).*White Plains,NY: Pearson Education.

