

LESSON 2

Issues of Grammar Teaching and Assessment

TOPICS

- Why should we teach grammar?
- Pedagogical Issues
- Sequencing
- Choice of Methods
- Patterns and Reasons, Not Rules
- From Structuralism to Transformational Generative Grammar
- Fossilization

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the lesson, the students should be able to:

- Justify the occurrence of the issues identified in teaching and assessing grammar;
- Deduce the relevance and implications of understanding issues in grammar teaching

When we teach and assess grammar in a language classroom, it is already presupposed that we will encounter issues. The recurrence of such issues are both disadvantageous and advantageous – disadvantageous in a way that we will encounter the same issues but in different context while at the same time advantageous because its recurrence already testify that these were already and will always be addressed.

Hence, this lesson will discuss the issues in teaching and assessing grammar. Specifically, the discussion will emphasize why should we teach grammar, pedagogical issues, sequencing, choice of methods, patterns and reasons not rules, from structuralism to transformational generative grammar, and fossilization.

WHY SHOULD WE TEACH GRAMMAR

Mart (2013) elucidated the imperativeness of teaching grammar in a language-learning classroom. Accordingly, people should be taught about grammar because:

- Grammar skills will help learners to organize words and messages and make them meaningful.
- Without grammar, speech would be meaningless.
- Grammar provides knowledge about how language works.
- Grammar skills greatly contribute to language competence.
- Grammar helps learners to discover the nature of language.
- Language acquisition without grammar is confusing.
- Grammar teaches us comprehensibility and acceptability.

However, he highlighted that grammar should never be taught in isolation; thus, he promotes teaching grammar in context. He pointed out that proficiency in grammar,

without its application in communication, is worthless because language is culturally and socially loaded – language contains knowledge and information grammar alone could not suffice. Integrating context to learning grammar definitely connects grammar proficiency to actual usage of the language.

As cited by Mart (2013), Thornbury quoted the importance of teaching grammar in context: if learners are going to be able to make sense of grammar, they will need to be exposed to it in its contexts of use, and, at the very least this means in texts (p. 126).

PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES

Larsen-Freeman (2009) claimed that the pedagogy of grammar is very ambiguous because its very definition is vague. She stressed out that is ‘multidimensional’ because it could be grammar instruction includes “both implicit and explicit grammars, universal and language-specific grammars, the way that language ‘ought to be used’ and the way it actually is used, theoretically exclusive grammars and more eclectic ones, etc.” (p. 518).

In discussing how to teach grammar, she enumerated three major points:

- Language are equally complex, the problem arises to where their complex varies.
- The challenge of learning grammatical complexity differs based on starting points.
- The knowledge of other languages can influence the acquisition of grammar.

Aside from the enumerated major points, Larsen-Freeman emphasized that pedagogical approaches in teaching grammar differs across countries not only in complexities but also in traditions. Furthermore, the pedagogy has always been torn between explicit and implicit approach to teaching grammar. Accordingly, explicit approach could use deductive or inductive approach while implicit approach gives no reference to rules or patterns. Individual differences also account as an issue in teaching grammar. Of course, “who the students are will also affect grammar instruction” (p. 530). The most controversial among the issues is error-correction or feedback. Larsen-Freeman noted that while others perceive this as anxiety-inducing, most research promotes giving feedback in an affectively-supportive way – the question now lies to which correction/feedback technique is the most effective? Correction or feedback could be done through recasting and prompting.

There are also pedagogical issues when it comes to assessing grammar as specified by Larsen-Freeman:

- Redefinition of the construct

The expansion of grammar beyond forms is the very first attempt in redefining its construct. The shift of grammar from the traditional bounds of forms and functions to its imperative role in the authentic context and pragmatics displays the significance of grammar beyond the rules of language construction.

- Partial scoring

Purpura forwarded that “scoring grammatical items polytomously would yield information about learners who have an intermediary knowledge of grammar, rather than being treated as if they have no knowledge at all.

- Social dimension

Grammar has now shifted to considering the social dimension in using language.

- Target standard

The issue of what the target standard should be in grammar teaching and testing has been a focal point in the pedagogy. The target standard is synonymous to objectives since this will steward the pedagogy of grammar in language classrooms.

SEQUENCING

Larsen-Freeman (2009) posited there are various principles in sequencing the structure of grammatical syllabi. Naturally occurring developmental sequences, U-shaped learning curves, backsliding, and restructuring have also been established to challenge the sequencing of traditional grammar structures in instruction. Developmental readiness is also an issue in sequencing. While others argue that one cannot learn beyond one's current processing ability, others claim that a step ahead of their current ability accelerates their language's acquisition rate.

CHOICE OF METHODS

Kruřicová (2015) cited Larsen-Freeman's and Anderson's classification of methods in teaching and assessing grammar:

- Grammar-Translation Method

This method heavily emphasizes reading and writing – specifically vocabulary and grammar. As the name implies, the main activities of the method are translation and grammar exercises. The teacher has the superior authority in the class.

- Direct Method

As a response to GTM, the direct method is to utilize the target language in acquiring it. Hence, language here is used orally and the teacher is a partner of students and not an authority.

- Audio-Lingual Method

Audio-lingual method targets language utilization through communication. Thus, listening and speaking skills are focused here. The main goal of ALM is the production of language. Like GTM, this method treats the teacher as an authority.

- Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP)

This method is a sub-branch of audio-lingual method. The chief feature that distinguishes PPP from ALM is the significance of context in grammar teaching and learning.

- Total Physical Response Method (TPRM)

As the name implies, learners respond through actions first until they are comfortable enough to speak in the target language. The main goal of this method is to develop oral fluency.

- Communicative Language Teaching

The core of CLT is to prepare students for communicative situations in diverse social contexts. Community language teaching centered on using authentic language in a real context. The teacher is a facilitator and the activities employed here are role-plays and problem-solving tasks.

- Eclectic Approach

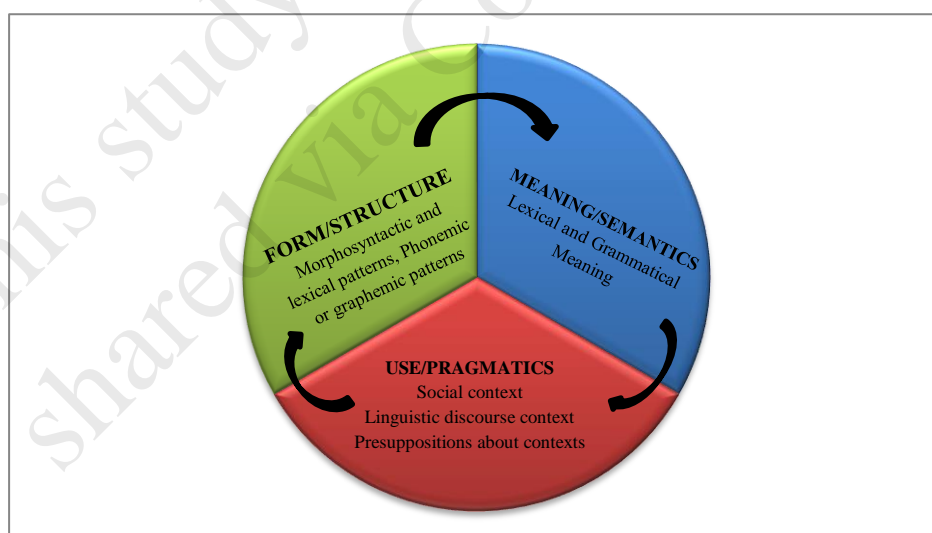
Eclectic approach stands for the amalgamation of the “best techniques of all the well-known language teaching methods into the classroom according to the fact what of is the most suitable for specific situation and group of pupils” (p. 35).

PATTERNS AND REASONS, NOT RULES

Davis (2015) stated that grammar pedagogy should not only focus on grammatical forms but also on grammatical meanings to present an exploratory perspective. He argued that when one analytically explores grammar acquisition, one can consistently which grammatical forms are appropriate and what do they mean.

Thus, contemporary grammar pedagogy posits that the emphasis is now placed on the patterns and reasons of teaching and assessing grammar, not on the grammar rules. This shift supports the trend that grammar should always be taught and learned for authentic communication.

Larsen-Freeman (2009) also claimed that, “Grammar is about form and one way to teach form is to give students rules; however, grammar is about much more than form, and its teaching is ill served if students are simply given rules” (p. 251). Accordingly, “grammatical structures not only have form, they are also used to express meaning in context-appropriate use” (p. 252). To understand this, let us view the Three-Dimensional Framework below:



As what the chart implies, the three dimensions are interconnected; hence, a change in one of these dimensions means a change for the other two.

FROM STRUCTURALISM TO TRANSFORMATIONAL GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

The pedagogy of grammar was first established by structuralism. Structuralism is introduced by a Swiss philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) to account that language is made up of structures/frameworks where phonology and morphology were the primary focus (Britannica, 2021).

Forstall (2019) enumerated four skills that Structuralism forwards:

- Understanding the grammatical structures
- Speaking properly, according to the rules of proper grammar and mechanics; using proper sentence structure
- Reading properly, according to rules of comprehension
- Writing properly, according to the rules of proper grammar and mechanics; using proper sentence structure

However, this theory was opposed by Noam Chomsky. Chomsky (1957) argued that languages are not unique. He believed that languages share some ‘formal and substantive universals’ in his theory of Transformational Generative Grammar. According to Britannica (2021), Transformational Generative Grammar “recognizes the relationship among the various elements of a sentence and among the possible sentences of a language and uses processes or rules (some of which are called transformations) to express these relationships.” This theory believes that grammar is composed of two structures: deep structure and surface structure.

The shift from structuralism to transformational generative only implies that language is more connected than we ought to believe for a hundred of years. The universality of language entails that language learning is not an impossible task for a language enthusiast.

FOSSILIZATION

British Council (2021) defined fossilization as the “process in which incorrect language becomes a habit and cannot easily be corrected.” A fossilized error can never be corrected unless the learner is self-motivated to learn and the role of teacher is very crucial in motivating learners to correct their fossilization.

ACTIVITY**Class Symposium**

The class will be assigned each with a topic about the issues of grammar teaching and assessment. Each reporter should highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the issue and what is the issue's implication in grammar teaching and assessment. Do not forget to include in-text citations and reference using APA format in your presentations.

Scoring Rubric:

Criteria		Points	Comments
Content	The report presentation provides relevant, appropriate, and accurate discussion of the topic with correct usage of grammar and mechanics.	/5	
Organization	The report presentation is organized clearly and logically.	/2	
Evidence	The report presentation provides example/s that is/are specific, relevant and clearly elaborates the presenter's topic.	/3	
Delivery	The report presentation is delivered loudly and clearly. The presenter speaks confidently and shows mastery of the topic being presented.	/3	
Design	The report presentation is clear, neat, and pleasing to look at.	/2	
Total		/15	

ASSESSMENT**Analysis Paper**

Create an analysis paper that justifies the issues of grammar teaching and assessment and propose approaches that address each issue. Do not forget to include in-text citations and reference using APA format in your presentations.

Scoring Rubric:

Criteria		Points	Comments
Content	The analysis paper provides comprehensive, strong, and solid arguments about the topic.	/10	
Organization	The analysis paper is organized clearly and logically.	/5	
Evidence	The analysis paper provides evidences that are specific, relevant and clearly supports the argument.	/4	
Grammar and Mechanics	The analysis paper shows correct usage of grammar and mechanics.	/3	
Originality	The analysis paper is the original work of the student. Ideas from sources are properly cited and referenced.	/3	
Total		/25	

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