

## SPOKEN GRAMMAR AND ITS ROLE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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### **Rezumat**

*În prezent se pune tot mai mult accent pe predarea limbii comunicative și pe autenticitate, recunoscând în acest fel rolul gramaticii vorbite. Acest articol tratează problemele cheie întâlnite de profesorii ce țin să încorporeze în cadrul lecțiilor de limba engleză gramatica comunicativă și evidențiază cele șase trăsături specifice gramaticii comunicative. Prezenta comunicare încurajează utilizarea gramaticii comunicative în predarea unei limbi străine și accentuează necesitatea includerii celor șase trăsături menționate mai sus chiar și în programele de studii.*

Traditionally, formal descriptions of English grammar are typically based on standards of written English; recent, though, particularly as a result of analysis of large corpora of spoken data and an emphasis on spoken communication, researches and linguists have begun to focus on describing features of spoken grammar and to question the appropriateness of applying written-based standards of grammatical descriptions of spoken English. Because of current trends emphasizing communicative language teaching and authenticity, recognizing the classroom role of spoken grammar is more important than ever before. Learning about characteristics of spoken grammar and ways to teach them empowers you to improve your students' overall fluency and face-to-face conversation, increases the authenticity of your speaking lessons, and prevents your students from speaking English of a textbook.

### **Features of Spoken English**

Although many grammatical features of everyday, unplanned conversation are judged incorrect by standards of written English, these features of natural conversation should not be regarded as incorrect derivations from standard English. Unlike written English,

spoken English is usually spontaneous and unplanned and produced in real time with no opportunity for editing. This spontaneity produces some distinct features, as speakers deal with and adapt to pressure of real time processing, resulting in a step-by-step assembly of speech. In addition, speech usually occurs face-to-face, resulting in highly interactive situation with a shared context. Thus, the nature and characteristics of conversation of conversational English itself lead to several distinct grammatical features of spoken English as speakers try to fulfill the interpersonal and interactive functions of spoken language in real time [3, p. 363].

Not learning features of spoken grammar can impede students' ability to speak English fluently and appropriately [5, p. 144]. The following six features will help language instructors to understand what spoken grammar is and to provide classroom instruction and activities that advance their students' development of spoken grammar knowledge and overall speaking skills. The six features of spoken grammar are the following:

**Ellipsis** – the omission of elements normally part of a certain structure and is found in both spoken and written English. Face-to-face nature of spoken language allows speakers to leave out information that is easily retrievable from the situation, which in turn helps them to cope with the real-time pressure of conversation by speaking in shorter phrases.

**Heads** – ways to introduce and orient listeners to a topic before giving information on the topic. Heads are both an act of sensitivity to the listener and a reflection of the exigencies of face-to-face interaction and real time nature [4, p. 273]. Heads allow speakers to highlight the topic they want to talk about before commenting on it, giving both the speaker and the listener more processing time in real time communication.

**Tails** – comments that are added at the end of a phrase. This can be a whole phrase as in the example “It’s very nice, that road up through Skipton to Dales” or they can consist of just one word “It’s a

serious picture, that” [2, p. 141]. Tails have a range of functions, including clarifying a comment, expressing personal attitude or judgement of an item, or serving an interpersonal function [6, p. 242].

**Fillers and backchannels** – fillers are words and utterances that do not have a specific meaning but rather fill time and allow the speaker to gather their thoughts. Backchannels, on the other hand, are words and utterances that are used to acknowledge what the speaker is saying and encourage him or her to continue. Both are common in English conversation because they serve important communicative and interpersonal functions, and it would be both difficult and awkward to have a conversation without them [7, p. 150].

**Phrasal chunks** – fixed words or phrases that can combine with other elements but act as ready-made lexical units of language, just as words do. Because of the pressure of real-time processing, speakers rely on a relatively small number of fixed words and phrases to fill particular grammar functions. Cullen and Kuo cite different functions for different phrasal chunks, including terms to create vagueness (“sort of”, “kind of”), modify and show politeness (“a bi”), and mark discourse structures (“you know”, “I mean”).

### **Pedagogical issues**

Even among researches who advocate teaching specific characteristics of spoken English to EFL students, there is no consensus on the approach teachers should adopt or the extent to which they should teach features of spoken grammar. Among some of the issues for teaching spoken grammar are: (1) the need for authentic materials, (2) the necessity of teaching spoken grammar for developing students’ spoken communication skills in all contexts, and (3) the question of whether to teach production or focus on the recognition of spoken grammar characteristics. Teachers who want to incorporate spoken grammar activities into their own classes must

consider these issues in the light of their own specific teaching context.

A major goal of communicative language teaching is to develop students' abilities to communicate in meaningful contexts. As Basturkmen points out, recent methodology often focusses on activities to get students to speak, rather than on providing them with the means to interact [1, p. 7]. It only makes sense, then, that in order for our students to communicate effectively in spoken English, they need to both recognize and use these features of spoken grammar, even in an EFL context [5, p. 137].

With English increasingly being used to communicate in international contexts, it is more important than ever that students be taught conventions and features of spoken English that will allow them to become effective communicators.

### **Bibliography**

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