

GRAMMAR TEACHING APPROACHES FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Eugenia BABĂRĂ, dr., conf. univ.,
Ilgin TANER, doctorand,
Larisa USATÎI, doctoranda

Rezumat

Articolul prezent tratează problema învățării gramaticii limbii engleze prin aplicarea diferitor metode și procedee pentru dezvoltarea competenței comunicative. Competența comunicativă este definită ca relația, legătura și interacțiunea dintre competența gramaticală, adică cunoașterea regulilor gramaticale și competența sociolingvistică, ori cunoștințe de utilizare a limbii.

To communicate effectively in English, students must develop pragmatic competence alongside other language skills and knowledge. Grammar is an important device that relates phonology and semantics or sound and meaning according to Leech G. [10, p. 3-4]. Grammar is a living resource that allows us to communicate our ideas and feelings and to understand other people [13, p. 65]. Vocabulary knowledge is not enough when mastering a foreign language. Individual words do not convey meaning without grammar. To use language accurately, grammatical knowledge holds an important place in the foreign language learning process, since without it comprehension does not occur. Grammar enables learners to see how language works.

English is a Germanic language and it belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. During the Old English period Britain was divided into seven small kingdoms that spoke different dialects with their own grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Grammatical items of Norse, Scandinavian, dialect were borrowed by the English language.

After the Norman conquest, due to the pronunciation of French, unstressed vowels began to disappear in English. This brought about great changes in English grammar. English changed from a synthetic language into an analytic one. These changes manifested in: the loss of inflections; loss of grammatical gender; loss of case system; less freedom in word order; greater use of prepositions.

Owing to printing press, standardization came to English. London dialect became the standard and spelling and grammar became fixed.

Grammar teaching in foreign language instruction has been much debated. Some linguists consider that grammar teaching does not contribute to language learning to a large extent others say that grammar is an enabling skill, a motivator and as a means of self-efficacy [12, p. 6]. This means, that the more learners progress in language, the more knowledge they need pertaining to grammar. Grammar allows learners to structure their learning of the language, states Batstone [1]. Proficiency in English and development of language skills should be supported by grammar.

Grammar instruction has been classified into three approaches, states Long [11, p. 39-52]. They are: focus on forms, focus on form and focus on meaning. As far as focus on forms is concerned, it mostly gives attention to language forms rather than to their meanings, consider Burgess J. and Etherington S. [3, p. 434].

The second approach, on the other hand, emphasizes meaning and form in overall context of communication, errors being corrected in communication activities. The last one, the third approach, gives to meaning but almost no attention is given to forms when we convey meaning.

There exist many approaches for teaching grammar, such as grammar-translation method, the direct method, the audio-lingual method, the natural approach and the communicative one. The above-mentioned methods put stress on the correct use of the target language. But recently, the communicative use of the language, rather than its structural analysis has become more common.

In what follows, we shall try to determine the advantages and some disadvantages of the enumerated methods and approaches.

Translation, vocabulary and grammar were given great attention to while using the so-called classical method, i.e. the grammar-translation method. Students were engaged in this case in learning a foreign language as a tool to be used in getting to know the literature and culture of other countries.

Learners were given the possibility to understand grammar in order to gain accuracy in the target language. Thus, that was the main purpose of learning a foreign language. This means that concentration is on grammar skills, grammar being presented to learners deductively, grammar rules are given for students to memorize [2].

In the direct method, the purpose of language learning is communication. Grammar is presented through examples in the target language, inductively according to Larsen-Freeman D. [9]. Grammar rules are not presented explicitly but implicitly, that is, learners make generalizations from what they learn inductively. Applying this method, grammar acquisition was through practice, priority being paid to grammatical accuracy.

Reading comprehension is the most significant skill in the reading method, grammar has a minor role, its teaching being ignored, learners recollect structures only when it is necessary and useful for reading.

To give the students the possibility to use the language for communication purposes, the audio-lingual method is used. Grammatical phenomena are included in dialogues and examples. Learners should induce grammar by themselves as teachers do not talk directly about grammar. Though this method aimed at developing all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), speaking skills received more emphasis. Three components included audio-lingual instruction: the presentation of a dialogue, its repetition and drills application. Grammar is taught inductively not deductively, thus grammar items are trained through drills so as to increase communication skills.

This method was used in the USA, but meanwhile the situational method was developed in England. Grammar is taught from simple to complex, thus creating realistic situations for the students to practice in the target language. It follows that spoken language is aimed at in the application of this method.

Communicative language teaching also referred to as communicative approach was developed in the 1970s. Less attention is given to the presentation of grammatical rules. It is a means to help students transmit their intended meaning appropriately [9, p. 132]. Grammar is taught either deductively or inductively.

The natural approach was developed by Krashen S. and Terrell T.D. [8]. Grammar is not central in the natural approach. Communication in the real life environments is the goal of this method.

The authors of the mentioned approach state that grammatical items are provided within input and are acquired through communication activities. If the students are involved in such activities but not focusing on grammar they are exposed to language acquisition more.

Explicit learning is conscious learning and the knowledge is provided explicitly. Knowledge is presented through explanation and observation. Implicit learning, on the other hand, is subconscious learning. It has been thought that language is too complex to understand in a conscious way, so learners are exposed to language in use.

Students are not very willing to do grammar tasks. Effective tools that encourage them to carry out tasks are games. Hadfield J. [6] defines game as an activity with rules, goal and an element of fun. Games motivate learners and create stress free learning environment. They can increase learners' achievements and communicative competence.

Today technology has advanced and has become popular in learning and teaching. It has been used in all aspects of education, its application makes great contribution to foreign language learning. It holds an important place in the development of language skills. CALL (computer-aided language learning) is less teacher-centered, that is why students gain more self-confidence. Learning grammar is a dull process, but computer strategies are good opportunities for students to develop their proficiency level. A novelty in teaching a foreign language, grammar including, is the Interactive Whiteboard, consisting of a digital board, a computer and a projector. It promotes teaching and learning through creating interaction and conversation environment in the classroom.

Grammar should be provided for learners to achieve communicative competence, a term first introduced by Hymes D. in 1972 [7] in reaction to the concept of "linguistic competence" by Chomsky in

1965. Later this idea was developed by Canale and Swain who defined it as "the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of rules of language use" [4, p. 6].

Their model was improved by Celce-Murcia M. [5, p. 7] detailing it as follows:

- a) grammatical competence – the knowledge of grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, etc.;
- b) sociolinguistic competence – appropriate application of vocabulary, politeness and style in a given situation;
- c) discourse competence – the ability to combine language structures into different types of cohesive texts, e.g. political speech, poetry;
- d) strategic competence – the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which increase the efficiency of communication.

All the above-mentioned competences are necessary components for communicative competence. Integration of grammatical competence into the communicative one is a good means in foreign language learning. Grammar is considered as a major part of the language learning process, it is essential to master a foreign language. Learning communication in a foreign language is a useful way of mastering grammar.

Language competence without grammar cannot be effectively developed. The main objective of grammar instruction must be the development of communicative competence, in other words, the students need to develop their ability to understand and use the grammatical structures in oral speech. When learners interact with each other using grammatical phenomena, they have learning, they practice in the target language, they use the language in a natural environment. The students master grammatical rules not to increase their linguistic knowledge but their communicative competence which has to do with social interaction.

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