Teaching Grammar Pedagogically and Communicatively

Nuwara Imssalem
Garyounis University

Abstract: *Pedagogical grammars have always been a mirror reflection of descriptive grammars. This situation has led to different degrees of emphasis placed on grammar in language teaching. The position of grammar in language teaching has swung from grammar driven audio-lingual methods to communicative approaches which consider grammar as something peripheral. The purpose of this paper is to outline briefly the historical development which has led to this situation and suggest a framework for teaching new grammatical items pedagogically and communicatively.*

1. Linguistics and Language Teaching

Linguistic theories have affected pedagogic practice, past and present, especially as far as grammar teaching is concerned. This is mainly due to the fact that grammar, to many linguists and language practioners, is the core of linguistic study and the central focus of language teaching. Johnson (1982:10), for instance, comments that *". . . language teaching has never at any point of its history been able to ignore the teaching of structures and the only thing which characterises the recent past is the degree of emphasis that has been placed on this aim"*. Rutherford (1987: 16) also argues that " . . . the unstated assumption of many language teaching professionals, past and present, has long been that an essential part of language teaching is the 'teaching of grammar'.

Descriptive grammars seek to describe the properties of the grammatical system that native speakers possess as part of their grammatical competence. Pedagogical grammars, on the other hand, purport to present the rules of the language in a way which enables learners to produce correct grammatical sentences. In the past, pedagogical grammars sought to present an existing linguistic model (structural, generative, or functional) in a form thought to provide the teacher and the syllabus designer with access to the theoretical insights of descriptive grammar in order to form the basis of language learning syllabuses and materials. The scope of pedagogical grammar has widened over the years, and today it involves more than presentation of a particular linguistic model. Before we discuss this development, though, let us summarize the relationship between linguistics and language teaching as this relationship has had a great influence on the concept of pedagogical grammars past and present:

1- Language teaching has always been and still is dependent on the theoretical capacities of parent disciplines such as linguistics.

2- It seems that linguistic theory and any changes in it affect our view of the nature of language and the learning process, which in turn has an impact on the content and methodology of our teaching.

3- Language teaching has been influenced by the types of units identified by the linguist: e:g. sentence, text or discourse.

4- Although Chomsky has disclaimed any prescriptions for foreign language teaching, a large body of work on language teaching has been informed by the development of his linguistic theory.

2. Pedagogical Grammars : A Historical Perspective

Below is a brief discussion of the developments that have taken place over the years with regard to the concept of pedagogical grammar.

2.1. Sweet's contribution

Since ancient times, Greek and Arab grammarians sought to write the rules of their languages in order to teach people to speak/write better Greek or Arabic. It was Sweet (1899), however, who first proposed a clear distinction between pedagogical and descriptive grammar:

> As regards fullness of treatment, there is an obvious distinction to be made between, a grammar - whether for beginners or advanced students - which is to be assimilated completely so that the learner at least practically knows it by heart, and the one which is only for reference. The latter will aim at being exhaustive wherever reasonable and practicable, and will perhaps give information on a variety of subjects which would be omitted altogether in the learner's grammar. (139)

From the above quotation, we see that Sweet made a distinction between what he called "reference grammar" (linguistic or scholarly grammar) and "practical grammar" (pedagogical grammar). Corder (1988:129) rightly argues that Sweet was "a revolutionary in his own day in recognizing that it was not only in scope but also in presentation that what he called a 'practical grammar' should differ from a ' reference grammar'."

2.2. The Edinburgh group

Other work which carried the concept of pedagogical grammar from a mere conversion of a descriptive grammar to something broader is the contribution of "the Edinburgh group of applied linguists", particularly Corder and Widdowson. To quote Corder (1974:167) on this matter,

> All agree that the form that the linguists' statements take make them inaccessible to most learners, that they cannot readily use them to discover the facts of the language. It is therefore proposed that these same facts should be organised and presented in a form which does make them accessible. Such an organisation and presentation of the linguists' facts is called pedagogic grammar.

Thus, Corder views pedagogical grammar as the organisation and presentation of

the linguistic facts in such a way that they become accessible to learners.

Widdowson's work, on the other hand, represents a new direction in pedagogical grammars. While Corder views pedagogical grammar as organizing and presenting the facts about language which have been described by theoretical linguistic in a way that will be accessible to learners, Widdowson sees the role of grammar as a mediation between words and context rather than a specification of the permitted sentences patterns as conceived by Corder. One of Widdowson's important arguments is the need to contextulize grammatical items:

> traditional teaching has tended to disassociate grammar from context and to deal with in separate sentences. A pedagogy which aimed at teaching the functional potential of grammar . . . would have to get learners to engage in problem- solving tasks which required a gradual elaboration of grammar to service an increasing precision in the identification of relevant features of context. In this way, learners would realize the communicative value of grammar in the very achievement of meaning. (Widdowson, 1988:154)

2.3. Second language acquisition (SLA) research

SLA research has provided insights into the development of the concept of pedagogical grammar; it has investigated issues related to the place of grammar in language learning. Some of these are the early 1970's empirical investigation into learners' language development. These studies are generally known as the 'morpheme order studies'. Their principal purpose was to find out whether there is a 'natural ' sequence in the order in which second language learners acquire the grammar of the target language. Three other arguments can be seen to be relevant to SLA and the learning of grammar.

1- Dulay and Burt (1973) published an article entitled '*should we teach children syntax?* '. The conclusion was that we should not teach children syntax. We should leave the learning to the children and redirect our teaching efforts to other aspects of language.

2- Krashen (1981, 1982) argues that syntax cannot be taught and he denies that learned   knowledge (the learning of grammar) has any relation to acquired knowledge.

SLA research by other linguists has also provided some pedagogical insights. For instance, Corder (1982) speculated that learning may be unsuccessful if the learner is taught what he is not ready for. From this it is natural to conclude that the order of acquisition determines the order of presentation. Similarly, a study carried out by Pienemann (1986) on the acquisition of German word order on Italian speaking children concluded that teaching can only promote acquisition by presenting what is learnable at a given point in time. Items in a syllabus therefore need to be taught in an order in which they are learnable.

The SLA research has given rise to the following questions as far as grammar teaching is concerned:

(i) Should we teach grammar?

(ii) Should the learner be taught rules or given explanation?
(iii) Why do we need grammar?
(iv) Where does grammar fit in?

2.4. The 1990s grammar fever

The 1990's witnessed a new revival of interest in grammar teaching; it witnessed a wealth of articles and books about pedagogical grammar. The main debate was over how learners can best acquire the target grammar and the role of explicit grammatical instruction in understanding and producing the target language. Some other important questions were: What does grammar teaching entail? Why do learners need grammar? What is the role of grammar? And How do we teach grammar communicatively?

Grammar teaching in the 1990s, however, still involved teaching formal rules at sentence level. Generally speaking, the majority of syllabuses (structural, functional, communicative) and the 1990s grammar books and course books still treated grammar the same way it was treated in a normal descriptive grammars. Those syllabuses and textbooks did not take into consideration the authentic usage of the grammar which illustrate the normal communicative behavior of forms.

The writer of this paper has compared the treatment of grammar in some 1990s textbooks (e.g. *The New Cambridge English Course I* ; and *Changes: English for International Communication*) and some 1960s ones (e.g. with *Situational English*) and has come to the conclusion that there is a great resemblance between the 1990s treatment of grammar and that of the 1960s . The so called 'communicative textbooks' claim that they include much learner involvement. The examination of their grammatical exercises, however, reveals that they are mechanical, decontextualized and teacher-centred. There is also an increasing emphasis on structural drills in which sentences are practiced in isolation.

3. Toward a Communicative Pedagogical Grammar

Nowadays, there is some sort of agreement amongst applied linguists that we need a pedagogical grammar which reflects both language usage and use; i.e. for a pedagogical grammar which takes discourse as the basic unit for description. There is also an overall agreement that linguistic or descriptive grammar can provide some insights into language teaching. But that pedagogical grammar need not be a reflecting mirror of linguistic or descriptive grammar. Chomsky acknowledged this as long ago as 1973.

> . . . principles of psychology and linguistics, and research in these disciplines may supply insights useful to the language teacher. But this must be demonstrated, and cannot be presumed. It is the language teacher himself who must validate or refute any specific proposal. There is very little in psychology or linguistics that he can accept on faith. (1973:236-237).

Within the field of applied linguistics and language teaching, the need for discourse based grammar has been called for (in theory) since the early 1970s. This need has been argued by applied linguists who thought that information provided by formal grammars could not enable learners to attain the fundamental objectives of modern language learning, the acquisition of a mechanism for communication. To quote Christopher (1983:75) on this matter,

> adequate pedagogical grammar cannot be limited to sentences but must act as interpreter to discourse, and as such its requirements are more onerous than existing linguistic grammars. It must deal not only with the grammaticality and acceptability of sentences but the pragmatics of language use.

If the principal concern of communicative language teaching (CLT) is to provide opportunity to view language as communication, grammar teaching should be consistent with this principle. There is, therefore, a need to find the role of grammar in communication. According to McEldowney (1975; 1994), the nature of an act of communication involves passing information from one person to another, and this process is effected by the use of a code held in common by those taking part in the exchange. In the case of communication by means of language, it is the grammar of the language involved which encodes and decodes messages. That is grammar is the tool for producing effective messages and also the tool for understanding messages. In other words, grammar is seen as the tool by which we listen, read, speak and write. In view of this role, grammar should be taught communicatively. This means that we need a pedagogical model which views grammar learning as a cognitive activity leading to discovery and communicative use of forms.

4. A Tentative Communicative Model

4.1. Basic principles
Many applied linguists have argued the need for a communicative model of grammar teaching which reflects the following:
(i) The need to challenge the dominant paradigms in which the description of grammar tends to concentrate on decontextualized units of language.
(ii) Grammar teaching should be informed by the descriptions of grammar which are based on discourse.
(iii) Grammar needs to be taught through engaging learners in meaningful activities. Grammar teaching requires paying attention to form and meaning and at no time should one make the other redundant

The above features have been taken in consideration in constructing our tentative model, which reflects the following features:
(i) Language is viewed as discourse.
(ii) Discourse is the basic unit of grammatical description.
(iii) The main function of language is communication.
(iv) Grammar is the tool for communication

This model involves three cycles of learning. Each cycle shows the inter-relationship between the teacher and the learner activities in the form of receptive(R) and Productive (P) tasks.

4.2. Cycle One of Learning

4.2.1. Receptive tasks

In the first cycle of learning, receptive tasks developing language awareness according to communicative purposes aim at familiarising the learners with a bundle of linguistic features (verb form, verb type, sentence patterns, discourse organisation) which are appropriate for given communicative purposes. For instance, narrative tasks pivot around a sequence of a stem+*ed* dynamic verbs, which are then used to build up a set of appropriate sentences. These are handled in ways which make learners aware of their communicative appropriateness and effectiveness. The following are the main features of these language awareness tasks:

(i)   Learners develop an awareness of the significance of each grammatical item as they are to be able to apply it consistently in their speech and writing.

(ii)   Learners are led to make an effort to discover meaning for themselves. In so doing, their attention is directed towards the use of the communicative tools appropriate for understanding and producing different types of discourse.

(iii) The learners are guided to move from the original input text to the summary in note form which facilitates the practice of comprehension or cognitive skills. For example, tasks which direct the learners to identify and sequence a list of dynamic verbs promote the practice of the cognitive skills of identifying and sequencing

(iv) The tasks are cumulative. Each piece of information identified is added to what has already been found. The result is a holistic summary of the original information and illustrates the cluster of linguistic items which reflect the speaker or the writer's original purposes. In this way learners are led to understand the importance of a whole communication rather than features of the tasks just outlined.

To provide the data for the type of tasks described above, input is provided through reading or listening and is relatively sophisticated linguistically. Input provides a body of information for integrating learners' receptive and productive skills. In the suggested model for teaching and learning grammar, the input provides a contextualisation of the language forms.[1]

4.2.2. Productive tasks

Productive tasks aim at using forms in spoken/written form. Any productive task therefore involves the learner in choosing grammatical and content items which are appropriate in style, mode and communicative purpose. By using them correctly and by organising the information appropriately, learners are led to communicate in a suitable manner.

The learner's first output is a simple version of the main information at a level appropriate for the learners involved in both spoken and written form. This output is not a mere parroting of what has been heard or seen but it represents the learner's own reformulation of the basic input information. This output may ignore certain grammatical forms and vocabulary items which occur in the original text. That is the learning tasks are selective as a means of developing the skill of ignoring information irrelevant to given tasks.

4.3. Cycle Two of Learning

In the first cycle of learning, little attention is consciously paid to meaning. Concentration is on linguistic form in order to provide enough practice of the new form as a means of next identifying the relevant meaning. That is, form is being used as the tool of communication. Learners are then in a position to discover the meaning of anything new to them and to confirm what they already know. Cycle Two consists of Input 2, Input 3, receptive and productive tasks and Output 2. The second input is in note form. This includes the significant information identified as relevant to understanding different types of discourse. Learners first use Input 2 to reformulate the basic information in spoken form. Then they use Input 2 (transition notes) to label an appropriate visual representation of the information. This leads us to the third input, visuals, where learners are guided by appropriate tasks to label visuals.[2]

4.4. Cycle Three of Learning

In Cycle Three, tasks enable learners to consolidate information already experienced. In this cycle, each learned grammatical item is used again in another context devised to introduce a new item.

Before we look at examples of contextualisation and presentation of selected areas of grammar, let us review the points which are relevant to the realisation of the model outlined above:

- Discourse is central to the process of communication.
- It is possible to isolate various communicative purposes and describe them.
- It is essential that teacher and course designer are skilled in analysing discourse in order to develop efficient learning materials.
- Grammatical simplicity has been defined as discourse which expresses one communicative purpose at a time and in which each sentence component contains only one idea.
- Learning is measured by means of tasks that elicit natural language behaviour rather than by tasks that elicit grammatical judgments.
- Grammar learning is a cognitive activity which leads to discovery and the communicative use of forms.

The two appendices at the end of the paper show actual examples of suggested learning materials for the first two cycles proposed in this model:

5. Concluding Remarks

To conclude this paper, in order to understand the concept of communicative grammar teaching in this model is to see how the role of grammar in real communication is reflected in language discovery tasks.

According to communication theory, there must be an information source, a transmitter, a receiver and an information destination. Messages travel backwards and forwards by means of a code which is mutually comprehensible to people communicating. Both information source and information destination hold the code in store. There must also be information to communicate. The communicator who is in control of the code is interested only in the information exchanged.

Although there is a need to parallel normal communicative behaviour in materials designed either to give an opportunity to learn to communicate or to give an opportunity to learn through communication, the role of communication is not the same for the experienced user of the language as it is for the learner of the language. Therefore, learners must use communication to build up their knowledge of the code as well as to exercise the normal behaviour of exchanging messages.

This has implication for learning. In the first part of the transition stage little attention is consciously paid to meaning as a way of controlling learners' perception of the grammar of the language and of leading them towards correct prediction of the grammatical forms to use for particular purposes. After adequate practice of linguistic form, attention can be overtly shifted to meaning, One way of doing this is to introduce appropriate visual representation of the information in such a way that learners will be able to discover the meaning of anything new to them or reconfirm meanings that they have encountered previously. Therefore, in labelling tasks learners are led to match linguistic forms with their referents. That is, they have used the grammar of the language to find meaning in ways that parallel the normal process of communication.

Notes

1   In carrying out the receptive tasks, the learners collect information from the input in the form of notes. The way that information is displayed in note-form depends on the communicative purpose of the original text. For example, in stative description, the notes can be arranged either in a grid or as a tree diagram. In narrative or instruction a flow chart can be used to show the sequence of occurrence. The following are the main features of notes: 1. They illustrate the appropriate linguistic forms and discourse organisation for the type of communicative purposes illustrated; 2. They are a way of controlling learners' perception of the grammar of the language and are a way of leading learners towards a correct prediction of the grammatical forms to use for particular purposes; 3. Tthey develop learners' awareness of the sentence patterns in a systematic way without the need for stating the rules; and 4. They provide a controlling framework for the learners' collection of information (comprehension) followed by controlled reformulation of information (speaking and writing). Therefore, these notes can function as input (2) for the learner's output (1) .

[2] (a) Visual Receptive Tasks: Visual receptive tasks lead learners to discover meaning. In the labelling task, the learners are led to match linguistic forms with their referents and to visualise the relationship between them. That is, they have used the grammar of the language to find meaning in a way that parallels the normal process of communication; (b) Visual Productive Tasks: Visual receptive tasks aim at the use of the visual in the production stage for speaking and writing. For instance, using visuals, learners are able to speak and write a set of instruction for preparing a slide; (c) Output 2: Learners give a suitable spoken or written discourse using labelled visuals.

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Appendix I: Cycle One of Learning

Input 1: Listening: The teacher delivers the information from notes. He/she speaks with the normal characteristics of speech, that is, with repetitions, hesitation etc. The teacher input may be as follows. *Today I am going to talk about three [er] friends. They are John, Bill and Ali. mm-they live in the same house. John, Bill and Ali have vehicles. But*

they have different ones. John has a car and it is red. Ali has a motorcycle and it' s blue. Finally, Bill- he has a bicycle and it is green.

Receptive Tasks:
Task I. Identifying the people.
     T. Listen and find out the names.
     Task 2. Identifying the vehicles and matching them with people.
     T. Listen again and find the names of vehicles.
     Task 3. Identifying the colours and matching them with the vehicles
     T. Listen and find the colours.
After the learners collect the information according to the receptive tasks, the teacher writes the information on the blackboard.

Names	Vehicles	Colours
John	a car	red
Ali	a motorcycle	blue

R. Task 4: T. Listen again and find how many times you hear the word *has*.

Productive Tasks: The notes on the blackboard are used as Input 2 to use *has* in the productive stage.
     T. (gives a model) pointing to John.
       This boy is John.
       He has a car.
       It is red.
     T. Tell me about Bill.
Then the teacher rubs everything off the board and says:
       This boy is John.
       He has a car.
       It is blue.
     T. Tell me about Bill.

Appendix II: Cycle Two of Learning : Visual Input 3

Several pictures are needed. For instance, 2 or 3 pictures of a person driving a car, a person riding a bicycle etc. The vehicles involved should be of different colours.
Visual Receptive Tasks:
T. (Puts the pictures on the blackboard and numbers them. Then gives a description for one of the pictures.)
  - This boy is John. He has a car. It is red.
     T. Tell me the number.
     L1. (says the number of the picture which corresponds to the description.)
     T. Tell me about number 3.
     Ls. This boy is ------
       He has ------
       It is ------
This is carried out with different pictures and repeated with many learners. The learners' Output 2 is as follows.

- John, Bill and Ali are friends. They live in the same house. They all have vehicles. John has a car. It is red. Ali has a motorcycle. It is blue. Ali has a bicycle. It is green.

Cycle Three of learning uses stative description of people to introduce *-ing* adjectives in a specific context including colours and possession introduced earlier. First *-ing* adjectives are introduced without a complement, for example: *Mary is playing.* Later *-ing* adjectives with complements can occur.

1. a complement with *a/an*: **e.g.**, *drawing a picture; eating an apple.*
2. a complement with other determiners: **e.g.**, *drinking his tea; eating his dinner.*
3. a complement with /s/ plural: **e.g.**, *picking some flowers.*

<u>Uncomplemented *ing*</u>:

Input 1: Listening (the teacher delivers the input from the notes in spoken form.)

Today, I am going to describe three [er] girls, Mary, Ann and Amina. The first girl Mary, **her hair is brown and her dress is black. Okay. The second one is Ann. Her hair is blond and her dress is red. Now, we come to Amina, her hair is black but her dress is blue.**

Receptive tasks:

        T. Listen and find the names.

        T. Listen and find out about Mary (her hair, her dress) find the colour.

        T. Listen and find out about Ann.

After the learners collect the information according to the receptive tasks, the teacher writes the information on the blackboard.

Her Name	Her Hair	Her Dress
Mary	brown	black
Amina	black	blue

Productive tasks: Notes used as Input 2

T. (gives a model)

.   T. This girl is Mary.

     Her hair is brown.

      She has a book.

      She is reading.

T. Tell me the number

      Her hair is brown.

      Her dress is black.

T. Her hair is black.

     Her dress is blue.

     Tell me the name.

T. This girl is Ann

     Her hair is blond.

     Her dress is red.

     She has a ball.

     She is playing.

T. Tell me the number.

T. playing. Tell me the name.

      L1. Ann.

T. reading.

      L2. Mary.

T. writing. Tell me the name.

      Ls. Amina.

T. Mary is ---

      L1. reading.

- Then the teacher adds this information to the notes on the blackboard so we now have:

Her Name	Her Hair	Her Dress	Her Action
Mary	brown	black	reading
Amina	black	blue	writing

- T. (Gives a model pointing to Mary.)

  This girl is Mary.

  Her hair is brown.

  Her dress is black.

- T. Tell me about Ann.

 - This will be carried out with different pictures and repeated with many learners.

* This is learner's Output 2.

Complemented ing:

We might use *ing* adjectives without complements to introduce them:

This boy is Ali.   This girl is Mary.   This boy is John.

He has a pen.   She has a brush.   He has a book.

After many tasks similar to the preceding ones, we end up with the following notes:

John	a book	reading
Ali	a pen	writing

- The teacher gives the following model:

This boy is John.

He is reading a book.

- T. Tell me about Mary.

      L1. This girl is Mary.

          She is painting a picture.

- T. sticks pictures on the blackboard and gives a model:

This girl is Mary.

She is painting a picture.

- T. Tell me the number.

      Ls. Number e.g., 4.

- T. This boy is Ali.

  He is writing a letter.

  Tell me the number.

      Ls. number e.g., 3.