The Importance of Grammar in ELT

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Abstract: With the advent of the Communicative Approach in ELT, grammar has been marginalized as the focus has shifted from accuracy to communicative competence. Yet an obvious decline in written proficiency has been noticed due basically to poor grammar. If a high written proficiency is required at the academic level, could this be achieved without grammar instruction in the foreign language? This paper will investigate on this issue by addressing the following questions: (i) To Teach or Not to Teach Grammar: a Controversy? (ii) How to Teach Grammar: Is there a miraculously effective method? What are the implications on the Grammar-Writing interdependence?

Introduction

Grammar teaching has recently witnessed a revival despite a relative eclipse between 1950-1980 due to some ELT trends rather reluctant to include an explicit grammar syllabus in the English curriculum. Indeed, a glance at any existing ESL/EFL textbook shows that grammar still has its place in the curriculum. The ebb and flow of the attitudes for or against grammar teaching have been influenced by the changes in language teaching methods and approaches. For grammar proponents, it may be unconceivable to teach a foreign language without teaching its grammar- just like teaching music without teaching music theory. But for grammar opponents, it can be argued that one can learn a foreign language without learning its grammar. The latter view a foreign language as a skill to be acquired through use not through grammar rules. Consider, for example, immigrants who become very fluent in a foreign country just by exposure to native speakers, or natives who pick up a foreign language only through close contact with tourists in some developing countries where tourism is a key economic sector. In the same way, if you are naturally gifted for music, you may become a virtuoso without knowing one single music note. However, the issue in the present study is not addressed to amateurs but to professionals. The teaching of grammar is not intended to be a simple tool for everyday communication, but an important component of language competence to be acquired by academic students who need to achieve a high level of proficiency and accuracy. More precisely, the target students in this paper are Arab undergraduates learning English, most of whom are estimated to become English professionals. This paper will, therefore, discuss to what extent grammar can help to achieve that goal.

In the first part we shall address the controversial question: To Teach or Not to Teach Grammar? If we decide to teach it, then the question is : How to

teach grammar effectively? In this second part we shall propose some didactic ways to teach grammar by relating it to academic writing

1. To Teach or not to teach grammar?
Rationale

After more than two decades of teaching grammar, trying all trends and choosing a variety of teaching materials, we have a feeling of non-achievement when we see the number of errors students make when they speak English, and more particularly when they write in English, where errors become more visible. Actually, grammar teachers are implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, the object of blame by teachers of other language skills. We often hear remarks such as:" What on earth are you doing in grammar if students are not even able to ask a question correctly?" The answer to such a remark is not at all evident and would call the teaching process including teachers, methods, and course books into question.

First, making errors is a normal phenomenon in any learning process: we learn by trial and error. According to Error Analysis Theory, errors indicate the student's strategy of language learning and acquisition. They are considered as evidence of the learner's strategy to build competence in the target language.

Second, not only grammar is to be blamed. Other language skills may not be less blamable. For example, however effectively you teach pronunciation, students will make errors in speech particularly in stress; however successful a course in study skills may be, students are not able to use a dictionary properly or to include sources and references. While such errors are perfectly normal in foreign language acquisition, the following pertinent assumptions may, nevertheless, cross the mind of any ELT specialist:

1. The more we teach grammar the worse learners write.
2. Grammar is useless if it is just for the sake of it.
3. Grammar is only a memorization of a set of rules.
4. Can we do without teaching grammar?

As a matter of fact, a higher institution where I worked during the 1980s, attempted for one year this grammarless approach following the comprehension trend marking that period based on the Natural Approach (see Literature Review further). It was argued that students had had seven years of English before starting college, and were supposed to know all the basic rules of English grammar. All they needed was a remedial grammar, that is for the teacher to go over and recall a grammar point whenever a mistake occurred. The anti-grammar decision was almost unanimously acclaimed and the grammar course, formerly taught for two hours a week for four semesters, was simply withdrawn from the curriculum. Few teachers, and the author was one of them, were rather skeptical. We feared that if with two hours of grammar for four semesters, students still made errors, what if we did not teach them grammar at all? Our skepticism was well founded: the students' performance got worse, and all the teachers who voted for the decision were demanding more grammar to be

introduced. Since then, grammar has been re-included in the English curriculum and would most probably remain there for a long time.

Proponents and opponents
Before a vote for or against grammar can be taken, I invite the reader to ponder on the opposed views below.

FOR	AGAINST
It's not conceivable to teach any language without teaching its grammar	Teaching grammar is a waste of time
Without grammar I cannot really communicate	I can communicate with only a few words, no need to learn grammar
I cannot progress without grammar	You can teach grammar and nothing but grammar, but students will still make basic mistakes e.g, verb agreement and asking questions
I know how to speak but I cannot write one single correct sentence	Don't teach me how a bike works, teach me how to ride
I expect you to teach me grammar; I want to know how this foreign language is different from my own language	I can acquire L2 in the same way I acquired my mother tongue; just immerse me in an L2 cultural environment

Let us see now some adverse opinions from renown scholars and linguists.
Arguments for grammar
1. Sentence-machine argument
Chomsky's theory of *creativity and productivity* demonstrates that grammar is a set of finite rules that can generate an infinite number of sentences, so a knowledge of these rules is essential to achieve language competence**.**

2. Fine-tuning argument
Grammar is the vehicle of meaning and coherence. Consider the following sentences produced by some ESL learners:
*Last Monday I will be boring in my house
*Five years ago I would want to go to India
How can the learner be shown the incoherence in the above sentences without some knowledge of grammar?

3. Fossilization argument
The principle of L2 learning based on ''Pick it up as you go along'' can possibly work. But to what extent? It can be argued that learners will reach a *plateau* beyond which they cannot progress. Their competence will therefore freeze and get fossilized and only grammar can help get beyond that level.

4. Discrete items argument

Any L2 seen from outside is considered as a huge new entity. How can it be taught or learnt as *a mass*? Grammar has the advantage of dividing language into discrete items such as tenses, pronouns, articles, modals etc., which can be taught in a very clear, straightforward, structured way. Such a discrete items division, conventional as it might look, can be very helpful especially at the early stages of ELL

5.Learner's expectation argument

Some L2 learners may feel disappointed when using self-study materials, or learning through immersion. So they often enroll in L2 courses and expect to learn grammar to see how the foreign language functions. If grammar is not there they may feel frustrated.

Arguments against grammar
1. Language as a skill argument

Some grammar opponents think that language is a skill not a set of rules. So they advocate the principle of "Learn it by *doing* it not by *studying* it". They compare L2 learning to riding a bike, or learning computer skills. They relate their argument to the learners ' failure to translate what they learn to skills. A sound proof for this is the discrepancy between grammar and the writing output. The majority of students can reach a good performance in a grammar test, but fail to perform well in writing making those very mistakes they were tested on in the grammar test. The grammar opponents also base their argument on the difficulty for a student with a loaded knowledge of grammar to interact easily in everyday situations, such as calling a taxi, interacting in the post office or asking for directions.

2. Communicative language teaching argument

As a counter reaction to the audio-lingual method, CLT founds its theory on the principle that language is a communicative competence. Grammar , then, is only viewed as a tool to achieve that goal. Grammar is an instrument to appropriate interaction in a *social* context. Two schools have emerged form the CLT approach: the shallow-end and the deep-end tendencies. The shallow-end tendency sees grammar as instrumental: it is the *learn to use* method which encourages teaching grammar in lifelike situations and authentic context. Most of current popular grammar books have chosen this trend. In most ELT curricular, titles such as "grammar in use" or " grammar in context" are quite common .The deep-end trend, however, views grammar as a *use to learn* tool. Proponents of this approach believe in the experiential method: learn grammar unconsciously by using it. In this case, teaching grammar would be irrelevant and useless.

3. Acquisition argument

Stephen Krashen's Acquisition Theory (1981) is based on the principle which distinguishes *learning* from *acquisition*. Learning means a conscious formal instructional process; while acquisition is an unconscious experiential expository process through which L1 is acquired. He argues that L2 can be acquired in the same way as L1by immersing the learner in an L2 stress-free environment and let innate learning capacities be triggered. He goes further to assert that success in L2 is due to acquisition not to learning. This approach, consequently, rejects the formal study of grammar.

4 . Natural order argument

This argument is based on Chomsky's Universal Grammar Theory, which argues that we are all born with the faculty to learn languages and that there are similar grammatical patterns shared by all grammars like the positive negative statements. As an illustration, any learner of English as SL or FL, whether he/she is Chinese, Nigerian, Omani, Indian, will naturally say :*I not speak English* at the early learning stages and would learn to say *I don't speak English* much later. In fact the dummy do is a difficult concept to learn so to hammer it down with strict rules and constant error correction, at the early stages of learning, is often doomed to fail .The natural order method suggests, then, to let learners acquire language naturally: they will make mistakes and start with simple language patterns at the beginning and later acquire more complex ones. In the same way as L1 acquisition which develops naturally from baby talk fragments to more complex adult like discourse.

5. Lexical chunk argument

Another recent trend in ELT is Lewis' Lexical Approach (1993)**.** This theory explains that learning language is learning *chunks* of language which are more than words and less than sentences. For example, phrases, idioms, collocations, stereotyped expressions, etc. So instead of teaching grammatical rules, it is better to teach formulaic expressions like:

> Excuse me.
> So far so good.
> Here you are.
> Have you ever been?

This method can prove to be very useful for effective communication.

6. Learner's expectation argument

Learners of English as L2 have an ambivalent attitude vis-à-vis grammar. They may demand it as we saw in argument(5) for grammar above, or they may think it is useless. In both cases they show a sense of frustration; and adult or ESP learners tend to see formal grammar as a waste of time: "Don't teach me grammar teach me how to communicate" is often heard as an argument against learning grammar.

The current debate: A grammar revival
Despite all the opponent tendencies against grammar, we have lately witnessed a revival of grammar. "*If grammar ever went away, it's only for a short time and not very far"* as Thornbury (1999) asserted. Indeed, in most ELT curricular, even at tertiary level, there is often room for a grammar course and if it is not there the curriculum may be the object of criticism
Let us then see the reasons which have contributed to this revival

1. Fluency vs. accuracy
For decades since 1970 the influential CLT approach has eclipsed grammar in favour of communicative competence. The result is a focus on *fluency* more than on *accuracy*. Consequently, learners are able to talk but cannot write properly, which can be a serious impediment to university students for whom formal academic writing is a significant outcome.

2. Unconscious vs instructional learning
The Natural Approach, the Deep-End Approach, and Krashen's Acquisition Theory have all short-lived. However pertinent they sounded, they proved to be more *idealistic* than *pragmatic and realistic*. Indeed the L1= L2 theory is the object of a very fierce and hot debate. Opponents to this theory argue that if some learners may reach near native competence by simple immersion in L2 culture, *these are exceptions rather than the rule***.** Furthermore, there is sound evidence that without raising attention to L2 grammar rules, the learner cannot go beyond the level of basic communication. Therefore, grammar is now revisited: with a focus on *form* and *conscious raising*. The current tendency advocates the theory that learning is enhanced when the learners' attention is directed to the features of the grammatical system.
Hussein and Fotos (2004) mentioned that extensive research conducted on learning outcomes in French immersion programs showed that ''despite substantial long-term exposure to meaningful input, the learners did not achieve accuracy in certain grammatical forms. Thus , communicative language teaching by itself was found to be inadequate''
        In the same vein Ellis (2002b) showed that current research is strongly in favour of a provision for instructional grammar forms and recommends a combination of form focused instruction and meaningful communication. The notion of *awareness* has been illustrated by Ellis (2001) as allowing the learners to consciously "notice" formal properties of the language in the input to be able to form an explicit representation of the target form and thereby to develop explicit knowledge.

In summary, it seems evident that the balance is pointing more towards teaching grammar. Nevertheless, even if this paper is in favour of conscious grammar teaching, grammar should not be the single goal of teaching: it is not an end in itself. We still want the learners to be communicative, so a focus on form alone is far from being sufficient. Grammar should be a tool or a resource to

meaningful discourse. Grammar is necessary because it may improve writing or at least explain the mechanisms of language structural rules and train the learners to make use of these rules in language production. Now, how students use what they have learnt in practice is the heart of the matter. The question is, therefore, no longer "to teach or not to teach grammar?" but *how* to teach grammar effectively, and more precisely how to bridge the gap between the learners' receptive and productive skills.

2. How to teach grammar effectively

In the present study, we shall attempt to advise how grammar can be taught more effectively. It would be too pretentious and unrealistic to think that one approach can be ideal and that students will miraculously stop from making grammar mistakes. In fact foreign language teachers have ultimately realized that a radical method to remedy language teachinh and learning problems is simply utopic.. The aim is only to try and reduce the recurrence of errors chiefly in relation to academic writing. Indeed, what is strikingly noticeable is that students can achieve quite well in grammar tests, but perform poorly in writing. We will attempt therefore, to point out to a tentative solution which can relate grammar to writing and can enhance the learners' awareness about their grammatical errors.

Historical overview

Before we discuss a tentative method, we thought it useful to review some methodological trends since the second half of the last century discussing the merits and demerits of each approach.

The audio-lingual method

With the advent of linguistics, the audio-lingual approach dominated ELT teaching for over two decades overthrowing the traditional grammar-translation method thought to be impractical as it focused solely on written accuracy. Up to the mid 1970 and for several years after, the audio-lingual approach had marked the structuralist / behaviourist school. Language was thought to be a system of stimulus-response based on mimicry and memorization. Language learning was habit formation and overlearning. Grammar was presented as a set of language patterns to be extensively and inductively practiced through a variety of drills. To minimize learners' errors, teachers were told to correct systematically all students' mistakes. Grammar structures were carefully sequenced from basic to more complex using formal traditional terminology such as nouns, pronouns, articles, adjectives. Errors were the results of interference from the first language and were considered as bad habits which had to be systematically corrected to be prevented. The method of instruction was linear and hardly went beyond sentence level. However useful this method could be for learning language mechanisms, it was reproached for isolating grammar from context and for lacking authenticity. It rarely stimulated students' creativity and ultimately widened the gap between grammar and writing. Learners were quite

able to perform at the sentence level but as soon as they moved to paragraph writing, the mistakes which they had been trained to avoid reappeared.

The cognitive approach

The 1970s were marked by the cognitive approach which came as a reaction to the behaviourist audio-lingual school. Largely influenced by Chomsky (1959), this approach viewed language as hypothesis formation and rule acquisition rather than habit formation. Grammar was considered important and rules were presented inductively or deductively. Errors were considered as a by-product of language learning and had to be constructively used by the teacher and the learner in the learning process. They were considered as appropriate classroom activities where peer and self correction was greatly encouraged. The source of errors was not only a transfer from the mother tongue but also a normal development in the language learning process , similar to L1 errors, and are due to the complexity of the foreign language. Nevertheless, grammar was still taught on the sentence level, not based on context and thereby not relating grammar to writing.

The comprehension approach

The comprehension approach, influenced by the Natural Approach, marked the period between the 1970s and the 1980s. Introduced by Krashen & Terrel (1983), this method defended the view that the experience of L1 acquisition is similar to that of L2. The notion of comprehension is, therefore, primary and should precede any production. The pedagogical implication of this method is to delay production in the target language by encouraging the learner to use meaningful non verbal responses to demonstrate comprehension. Some advocates of this approach carefully sequence grammar in the instruction programs and thus present it inductively. Others propose that all grammar instruction be excluded from the curriculum as they believe that it does not facilitate language acquisition; instead they propose that the learners should only become familiar with the forms they use. Consequently, error correction becomes unnecessary, may be thought of as unproductive, since errors will gradually be self corrected by the learners when they are exposed to a more complex , rich and meaningful input in the target language.

 The above approach did not seem to receive any enthusiastic feedback from English practitioners because it lacked structural methodological basis even if it contained a sound theory on language acquisition.

The communicative approach

 A more revolutionary trend: the Communicative Approach to Language Teaching or CLT has marked ELT since the 1970s. It originated from the work of Hymes (1972) and Halliday (1973), who viewed language as primarily a tool of communication This philosophy, still very popular, was applied to language teaching by Widdowson (1978) and Wilkins (1976), who claim that communication is the goal of ESL and EFL learning. The grammar course,

should, therefore, be organized not according to the traditional segmented formal method but according to subject matter, tasks, semantic and pragmatic functions. This school brought about a new approach to language instruction and more particularly to grammar which moved from being sentence based to context and discourse based, replacing traditional formal notions by meaningful, functional, contextualized concepts. The teacher's role is thus to facilitate language use and communication leaving error correction in a secondary position. An influential grammar book epitomized this school: *A Communicative Grammar of English* by Leech and Svartvik (1975), which is so trendy that it deserves a whole section to be described and assessed.

Description of CGE
The originality of this comprehensive reference book strikes the reader from the first glance. Standing out from previous grammar materials it is presented with two major innovations. First, it introduces grammar in use where grammatical structures are systematically related to meanings, uses and situations. Second, and may be for the first time, there is a focus on speech and a comprehensive treatment of different language registers, i.e the difference between written and spoken forms, formal and informal style, BrE and AmE varieties of English. The approach to learning grammar is also different form the conventional method of memorizing and applying a set of rules. In their introduction to the book the authors explain clearly their objective: "Given that students want to communicate certain meanings in certain situations or contexts, which grammatical forms and structures can I use?'..

The CGE method is clear and consistent: different grammatical categories are not presented in the formal traditional way - nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, modals, etc- but are grouped together under the same semantic concept. For example, under Section A: concepts, all noun categories are treated: objects, substance, materials, count, uncount, abstraction, mass with all the related components to the noun notion: amount or quantity, definite and indefinite meaning, restrictive and non-restrictive meaning, genitives etc. In the same way, the part on verb phrase is treated under the concept time including tense, aspect, auxiliaries, verb phrases, prepositions and prepositional phrases, adverbs and connectives all related to the same notion of time. So CGE's approach focuses on *meaning* first, to which the appropriate grammatical form is matched

Evaluation of CGE
However original and innovative the book looks, it seems confusing to me, as too many notions are treated at the same time and in the same place. The reader, particularly the student, may not easily find a logical link between the different paragraphs. Besides, there is inevitably much overlap and repetition as the same grammatical structure will be found under different grammar concepts. Indeed, the authors always refer the reader backward or forward to a description of the same structure in another section of the book For example, relative clauses, adjectives, prepositions can be found in the four sections. Modals are included

both in section B and section C. Quantifiers in Section A and Section D, etc. It can be argued that this is what is meant by the communicative approach: the same grammatical category changes meaning according to different situations. While I agree with the approach I still find the book rather puzzling to unveil. It may be very useful as a reference book mainly for teachers or teacher trainers, but it appears rather mazy for students. We have the impression that if a student used to the traditional approach to grammar learning is plunged in this book it is like throwing him/her in deep water without a leading thread to emerge. The learner will discover a wonderful kaleidoscopic world indeed, but how much will be retained when out of water?

In short, CGE has remained so popular because for the first time it presents grammar as an effective tool of communication including style, speech, context and meaning through a novel approach. But it remains chiefly a comprehensive reference book, therefore more valuable for teachers than for learners.

Talking about grammar: Highly recommended

CGE has gained a more pragmatic dimension with a very original and challenging workbook: *Talking about Grammar*, Bower, et.al (1987). Firmly based on Part Three of CGE: Grammar in use, TAG is designed in the form of questions (with a key) to help the teacher and the students explore CGE more deeply and " to develop a greater awareness of how the communicative potential of English can be exploited", the authors explain in their introduction to the book. The main objective is to make a reference book meet the needs of the classroom for more pedagogical efficiency. The book is made up essentially of questions referring to the different paragraphs in CGE. The questions are deliberately brief and subtle, i.e the answer is never automatic, it requires a moment's thought and sometimes leads to different answers. One example is a case in point: one question referring to phrasal verbs reads: *I thought of you and smiled; I thought about you and smiled,* which is the more flattering? This is intentionally stimulating for the student to read the appropriate paragraph of GCE and find the correct answer. Totally different from conventional grammar exercises, this method requires a variety of skills from the learner. First, the student has to read the paragraph to skim and scan for the information. When the relevant answer is found, the student should discuss it with a peer before suggesting it to the teacher. This is a very productive and stimulating activity which involves a great deal of interactive skills. If there is a general consensus on the right reply, it will be accepted, if not, which is quite often the case, it yields a very lively class discussion. For the final check, we can go to the answer key, where some of the answers are deliberately left blank. This approach clearly highlights the fact that grammar is not a set of rules to be memorized, it is much more complex than that and could become a very lively and creative activity. Apart from reading and speaking skills, TAG relates grammar to writing by asking the students to complete sentences or to give a true example of a given notion. Consider the following examples on tenses

1. I posted the letter, but up to now…"
   How will you finish the sentence?

<div align="center">Q.21, p. 6</div>

2. Give a true example of
   a present state
   a present habit

<div align="center">Q31-32, p. 7</div>

TAG brings another innovation: it relates grammar to translation to touch upon the spiny issue of L1 transfer. Very often translation questions come last after the students have well grasped the concept under discussion Consider this very demanding question referring to prepositions:

What expressions would you use in another language to
label the five basic spatial concepts   .

<div align="center">Q. 40, p. 21</div>

The examples chosen are specimens of the whole book's approach and demonstrate the originality of TAG

TAG's usefulness

TAG is highly recommended for advanced learners, graduate or post-graduate students, teachers and teacher educators. As its title indicates, TAG is not a grammar exercise book, it does not teach/ practice grammar rules, but it "talks about grammar", that is it enhances the learner's awareness of the functional meaning of different grammatical patterns. Nevertheless, a pre-requisite to TAG would be a grammar course to upper-intermediate students where the approach will be conceptual and the method communicative but with perhaps more drills and practice exercises. TAG is excellent not only because of its innovative approach but also because it includes all language levels: written, spoken, formal, informal. It involves a variety of skills: reading, speaking, writing and translation- it even includes a few refreshing mental calculation tests. In short, it is a highly instrumental grammar book, stimulating, lively and thought-provoking,

Which method to choose?

None of the approaches described previously proved to be totally conclusive. Do students trained in one method or the other perform better? Unfortunately, existing research has proved that ESL/ EFL students especially in writing are still producing broken, ungrammatical, even pidginized forms of the target language**.** Nevertheless, for pedagogical efficacy, it seems that a focus-on-form method is more appropriate for intermediate to upper- intermediate university students, whereas a focus- on- meaning and function is better suited for more advanced learners. In any case, the recent trends show a preference of the communicative context/content- based approach over the traditional linear sentence based method. An inductive, student-centered didactics is also favoured to a deductive teacher-based one.

A proposed solution
It can be argued, in the end, that no book or method is claimed to be better or more efficient than another. Therefore, there is currently a predominant tendency to focus more on the *outcome* than on the input. The best approach, in my view, is left to the teacher's discretion, in collaboration with the course designer and language planners to choose the most appropriate method and material bearing the following selection criteria in mind:

- students' level and abilities
- students' needs and interests
- students' learning outcomes
- students' cultural background

The case being so, it seems very difficult to find a grammar book that would meet all the above conditions. This is where the teacher's role becomes fundamental: compile a special course to meet specific needs by selecting material from different sources and working on work- sheets rather than on ready-made textbooks. The task may sound too demanding to be carried out solely by the teacher, especially in the case of novice teachers whose role is limited to implement what has been chosen by the course planners, at a governmental level, and the course designers, at a pedagogical level. In my case, during my long teaching experience, I have very often acted as two-in-one: a teacher and a course designer. Actually, tenured teachers at university level are commonly granted a great deal of latitude to plan and design their own courses to meet the specific needs of their learners. The leading thread should be: to select material from different sources, adopt what looks appropriate from diversified methods and approaches, then model a personalized grammar course. In addition, one needs to be innovative, open to change, and always trigger the learner's productive and creative skills.

Bastone (1994) notes that, for effective grammar learning students have to "act on it, building it into their working hypothesis about how grammar is structured". This can only be achieved by exposing the learners to extensive noticing activities as well as ample opportunities for producing the target form in the appropriate context.

The grammar –writing connection
The goal of the present paper has become clear by now: for an effective use of grammar teaching there should always be a connection with writing. Whenever a grammatical aspect is taught it should be put in practice in a written task. For instance, if the lesson is on tenses and more precisely on the past tense, the students should be asked to write a short paragraph on a memorable event/story or dream. To practice the present tense they can write a description of their home town or country. For the present perfect, a conversation can be engaged on the best film/book the students have lately seen/read. It should be noted here that the present perfect is better practiced at the spoken level as it is a tense more

used in conversation than in written discourse. The learners' awareness to this fact should be drawn so that the present perfect is used with more caution in writing. For better didactic purposes the grammar and writing courses should not be dissociated. The conventional method, which teaches grammar and writing separately, can explain the existing flaw. Ideally, it would be more effective to design a grammar course adopted to writing and spoken skills rather than the other way round. To design a writing course as a thematic typified process moving from descriptive, narrative paragraph to argumentative essay will possibly teach writing mechanisms but will not solve the poor grammar performance, for which the students can be heavily penalized in academic writing.

Hinkel (2002b) notes that grammar teaching is usually treated separately from the teaching of writing. She, therefore, recommends that instruction in L2 writing include explicit instruction on grammar lexical forms and rhetorical patterns as exemplified by authentic text and discourse.

Conclusion
Despite the controversial attitudes towards grammar in ELT, if our target learners are advanced university students and if the focus is on high proficiency level and written accuracy, it seems imperative to enhance students' awareness to the grammatical forms of English. It is also very important to put in practice what they have learnt in theory. The method proposed is to teach grammar in close relation to writing. To start with a focus on form at the starting level and move to a functional, conceptual approach at a more advanced level. In other words, and to avoid overlapping, repetitive and monotonous grammar lessons it is recommended to teach formal instructional grammar at the beginning, then move to *talk* about grammar as it is suggested in the TAG book mentioned earlier. Whatever the method, approach or textbook chosen, it has to be communicative, interactive, and inciting learners to productivity and creativity. The traditional, but never ineffective method, to make students read then write will always be valid. A maximum exposure to the English written and oral texts then writing about them in forms of summary will naturally improve the students' proficiency. To be effective, grammar should always be taught in context with authentic situations and presented in an innovative enjoyable way. Nothing can be more demotivating than a boring grammar lesson.

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