

2. Learning and teaching grammar

2.1. Before reading this chapter

Exercise 1.

1. What does grammar mean to you? What does grammar consist of? Give examples.
2. Why do you, as a future teacher, need to learn grammar?
3. Why do your learners need to learn grammar?
4. Which of these options do you feel is the best way to teach grammar?
 - a. As a part of a normal language lesson?
 - b. In separate lessons?
 - c. Inductively when the learners discover the rules for themselves?
 - d. Deductively when the teacher presents the rules and the learners use them afterwards?
 - e. Other ways? Argue your case.
5. How do you perceive the connection between grammar and language acquisition?
6. How were you taught grammar? How would you describe this experience?
7. Why do you think many teachers teach grammar the way they were taught themselves, even if this wasn't the best approach?
8. Imagine you are teaching English. Arrange the following structures in the order in which you will teach them. What will this order depend on?¹
 - a. Articles (*a* and *the*)
 - b. Basic word order of Subject and Verbal (x-o)
 - c. Negative sentences with the verb *to be*
 - d. Possessive pronouns (*my, your, her*)
 - e. Singular and plural nouns
 - f. Subject pronouns (*I, you, he, etc.*)
 - g. The present continuous perspective (*am/is/are ...ing*)
 - h. The verb *to be* (present tense: *am - is - are*)
 - i. Yes/No-questions with the verb *to be*

Eye opener 1

1. Below is an excerpt from the written exam after Year 9². Do the exercises in the same way that the learners were instructed to:

Write the missing nouns in the plural.

Example:

- The old (lady) ladies are afraid to go out late in the evenings.
- Remember to brush your (tooth) teeth every day.

Karen Lassen Bruntt
Ulla Bryanne

HANDBOOK FOR LANGUAGE DETECTIVES

LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Samfundslitteratur

- It is autumn and the (leaf) _____ are falling from the trees.
- The (deer) _____ in the national park are protected by law.
- How many (passer-by) _____ have you seen during the last half hour?
- How many (potato) _____ should I peel for dinner?
- The tourists have taken many (photo) _____ of the castle.

Cross out the other ten mistakes and correct them.

A Meeting on the Beach

Over the years I have offend met English people. Some years ago I met a married cobbler from Scotland. They were both great fun. They were in our country for the first time.

My best friend and I worked on a beach selling cold drinks.

One afternoon Alex, the husbands, ordered two cokes in funny English and we started talking. He tolled me that my English was excellently. I explained to him that I had studied it for nearly six years. He himself didn't spoke a foreign language so he and his wife were so surprise to hear my English. I know I am quiet good, but not that good. I was too lazy to practise really hard when I was at school.

2. Discuss what is demanded of the learners (e.g. regarding level, language used for instruction etc.)
3. As future teachers you will not only be expected to do the exercises and hear what sounds right, you must also be able to explicitly explain grammar. Do the exercises again; but this time you also need to explain your answers as teachers.
4. Discuss the differences between being a learner and a teacher of English.

Eye opener 2

Have a look at the two exercises below. They deal with the same grammatical feature, the past tense, but they do so in different ways. Explain the difference. Which one do you prefer and why?

Exercise A

Fill in the blanks with the correct forms of the verb in brackets:

When Jane arrived, John _____ (leave – past tense)

Exercise B

Here are four words. Place them in a sentence that fits to the two situations below.

arrive Jane leave John

Situation 1: You know that John doesn't like Jane

Situation 2: John and Jane are good friends but Jane is feeling ill

In exercise A the learner will only have to fill in a specific form of a verb without thinking of the meaning of the sentence. There is no context. In contrast, ex. B includes two

specific contents and the learners have to add the necessary grammar to express a specific meaning.

Exercise 2.

Discuss exercise 23 at the end of this chapter.

2.2. The role of grammar

For many years, studying a foreign language was mainly a question of analyzing grammar and translating written texts. People primarily studied ancient Greek and Latin, and the aim was to be able to read classic works of literature. It was thought that analyzing grammar enhanced people's intellectual development.

When modern languages were introduced into Danish schools, this approach to language teaching was maintained. The ancient languages had gained high status, and to obtain the same status the teachers of modern languages adopted not only the teaching method of the ancient languages but also the same way of analyzing language.

THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD

The main purpose of this method was to enable learners to read literature written in the target language because written language was considered superior to spoken language. The classroom language was Danish, and the lessons mainly focused on grammar and vocabulary. Comparative studies comparing grammatical structures of the target language to Danish played an important role. The method was very teacher-centred with the following typical structure: reading aloud a text prepared at home, translating it into Danish, and answering comprehension questions. Grammar teaching was deductive; the learners were introduced to the grammar rules and afterwards they applied these to other examples, by filling in drills or translating sentences containing the grammatical issue.

This teaching approach is called the Grammar-Translation Method (see box). Even today this is still practiced in some Danish classrooms. It is quite understandable that many teachers still resort to it, because it is easy to use. Teachers can plan grammar lessons well in advance or simply follow a book. This method can also produce a false sense of achievement when a teacher can simply tick off another grammatical item on the syllabus.

This is the way many teachers were taught themselves, and there is a tendency for teachers to fall back on the way they were taught at school. However, recent research on language acquisition makes it clear that teaching grammar separately from the context of what learners are learning will not provide the communicative competences that are needed today. Drills that ask learners to fill in certain structures, such as "Fill in forms of to be: is/am/are in the following sentences", very often do not result in learning since the learners do not use any active cognitive processes. They do not connect meaning, form and use. Meaningless drills will not ensure that grammar is stored in the long-term

memory. This way of teaching grammar is an example of what we call 'Presentation, Practice, Production' (PPP). The exercises and grammatical issues are invariably completely out of context.

Another approach is not to teach grammar at all. This was practiced in many Danish classrooms in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of Stephen Krashen's Non-Interface Hypothesis.

Krashen had an enormous influence on early communicative pedagogy. He emphasises that language is only learnt if learners are exposed to a considerable amount of input in a meaningful and relevant context, which is the same way that children learn their mother tongue. Krashen points out that an affective filter can block the acquisition if learners do not feel comfortable or motivated to learn the language. This insight has been one of the key reasons for using a communicative approach.

Krashen also distinguishes between *acquisition* and *learning*. 'Acquisition' is the natural, unconscious way a person picks up a language when exposed to it, and 'learning' is the conscious result of explicit teaching. In his Non-Interface Hypothesis, which has later been criticized, Krashen claims that 'learning' cannot become 'acquisition': grammar taught and learnt in the classroom will never be an integrated part of the learners' language usage. According to Krashen, explicit teaching of grammar must be avoided, but if the learners are exposed to an abundance of language, or input, they will pick up the grammar themselves in the same way they learnt their first language.

It is true that input is very important, and when it is combined with ample possibilities to use the language (output) in interaction, it will ensure fluency, enabling learners to communicate freely. However, this is not necessarily enough to guarantee *accurate* use of the language. Modern communicative language teaching acknowledges that learners also need to work specifically on accuracy. The process of foreign language acquisition will be very slow if teachers do not focus the learners' attention on their language to make them aware of the differences between their own interlanguage (see below) and the target language. There is a risk that the learners' language will remain at the same level, or *fossilize*, if these differences are not highlighted. This does not mean that teachers should return to the grammar translation method. It is important that form-focused activities are based on or imbedded in a communicative context to make sure that the learners realize that learning grammar is meaningful.

2.3. Grammar and language acquisition

Learning the grammar of a language is part of the learner's language acquisition. Knowing how to use grammar can be considered a skill just like the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Some modern grammarians even talk about 'grammar-ing' to underline the dynamic aspect of the grammar process.

Traditionally, studying grammar meant studying a system of *forms*, but there is much more to language than that: Teachers should take language *use* into consideration, so learners realise how to convey a certain *meaning* in a way that is appropriate in the particular context. Seen this way, grammar is something that is *done*, rather than something that is *known*.

Exercise 3.

- Which of the following sentences would be appropriate to use if you have been waiting for a long time to be served?
 - A pint of lager, please.
 - A pint of lager.
 - Can you give me a pint of lager?
 - Could I have a pint of lager?
 - Could you give me a pint of lager, please?
 - Give me a pint of lager.
 - I want a pint of lager.
 - I'll have a pint of lager.

2. Finish the sentences below:

- He stopped to do his homework because...
- He stopped doing his homework because...
 - I tried to call you, but...
 - I tried calling you, but...

Which of the grammatical structures (*to* + infinitive or *-ing* form) goes with events that are real or fulfilled, and which one goes with events that are unfulfilled?

➔ For more details on the use of *to* + infinitive or *-ing*-form, see 7.3.

Grammar is also used in the decoding process; when listening to somebody or reading something, it is not always sufficient to understand the individual words. To make sense of what is heard or read, the connection(s) between the words must also be decoded. 'Grammar-ing' is essential to attain a full understanding.

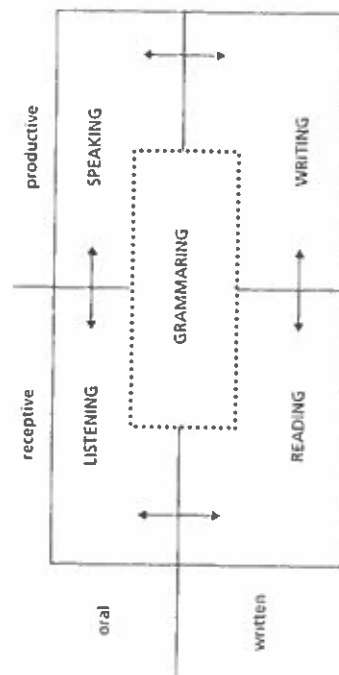


Fig. 2.1. The four skills turned into five. The arrows indicate that the skills are most often used in interaction. We have added a fifth skill, grammaring, overlapping the usual four because it is a part of each of them and all of them.

2.3.1. Interlanguage

Language acquisition is today understood as the development of learner interlanguage. This is a learner's version of the target language at a given time; it is never static but is constantly developing towards the target language. It is a process language. Before the notion of interlanguage was applied, learner language was compared with the target language and the shortcomings were corrected. In the modern classroom learners gradually build up their language and errors are perceived as necessary steps in the right direction. The two ways of viewing learner language can be listed like this:

INTERLANGUAGE ANALYSIS	
TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the target language • Compares learner language to the target language • Focus on product • Points out mistakes • Focus on the things the learner cannot do • Summative assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the learner language • Sees learner language as a language in progress • Focus on process • Points out progress • Focus on the things the learner can do • Formative assessment

Fig. 2.2. Differences between the traditional way of assessing learner language and the interlanguage analysis.

The theory of interlanguage has revolutionised the teaching of languages. It has changed views on learner language completely: instead of regarding it as a defective target language and seeing the learner as a pupil making lots of mistakes, learner language is now seen as a language of its own with systems and grammar. These systems may not always be in accordance with the systems of the target language, but the learner is experimenting with his language to make it more and more similar to the target language.

The learner's language, the interlanguage, develops when the learner, consciously or subconsciously, forms and tests hypotheses about the form and usage of the language. This hypothesis forming and testing is both a cognitive and socio-cultural process. The learner uses his prior knowledge; his knowledge about the target language; his knowledge about languages in general including his mother tongue; his knowledge about the world at large, the socio-cultural knowledge; and his knowledge about the communicative context, the pragmatic knowledge, to form hypotheses about particular grammar in the target language. These hypotheses will be tested either receptively when the learner compares his hypothesis to what other people say or write, or productively when the learner uses the grammatical units in his own speech or writing and notices the other person's reaction or feedback.

Here is an example: The learner has noticed, consciously or more likely subconsciously, that when people talk about past events, they add the sound /d/ or /t/ to the verb: *He walked down the street*. The learner therefore forms the hypothesis that to express a past event, he should make the verb end in this sound. So he tries, "*I failed my maths test yesterday*", and people seem to understand him. The hypothesis seems to hold up. Next time he tries, "*I killed you this already*" – and people look puzzled.

Exercise 4.

Would you consider this an error or a step in the right direction? Why?

Traditional language teaching would consider it an error because the learner's invention *telled* does not correspond with the native speakers' language. If, on the other hand, you assess the learner's attempt to form the past tense of the verb *tell* from a learning perspective, you will agree that though *telled* is not correct, it is a step in the right direction. The learner surely has a notion that the past tense can be formed with the use of *-ed*. This notion is a correct part of his existing interlanguage though he still has to find out that it is not valid for all verbs.

Exercise 5.

Your job as a teacher will be to figure out how to support this learner in continuing in the right direction. How could you do this?

The hypotheses formed by the learners do not only focus on grammar, but can be formed about all aspects of the target language: is this the right word? What does she mean when she uses that expression? Is it in this case that *-ly* is added to the end of the word? Vocabulary, grammar and all the other aspects that belong to the form, meaning and use of a language are involved. Sometimes phrases are learnt as unanalyzed chunks without the learner noticing how they are formed. They are learnt by imitation because that is obviously what is said in a given situation, like *What's your name?* or *Don't look!* The hypotheses formed in these cases only concern the meaning and the use of the expressions, not their form.

TERMINOLOGY

Unanalyzed chunks of language are also called **formulaic patterns** or **formulaic language**.

Exercise 6.

As mentioned above, learners form their hypotheses on the basis of their existing knowledge of the world in general, of their mother tongue, of English and other languages. Which hypotheses might the learners who wrote these sentences be working with?

- My boyfriend may not come tonight.*
- My grandmother is on the hospital.*
- She had a stomach ache because she had ate a lot of ice cream.*
- The cats were chasing the mouses.*
- When they got married, she became a beautiful wedding ring.*
- I think you where mil.*

When errors like these are appreciated as signs of development, of hypothesis forming and testing rather than simple mistakes, teachers are more likely to encourage their learners to be risk-takers and to use all of their knowledge and proficiency when speak-

ing or writing English. There is no reason to ask them to simplify their language to avoid mistakes: making mistakes is a way for them to learn English, the feedback from the teacher and others will tell them whether they were right or not.

The action of forming and testing hypotheses is a necessary step when learning a language, but alone it is not enough. Afterwards the issues in question must become internalized through extensive practice. It takes a long time and a great effort to learn a language. Once the items have become automatized and stored in long-term memory, the learners will not have to be conscious of them anymore and their cognitive resources will be able to meet new language challenges. It is important that the cognitive work, the hypothesis forming and testing, comes before the practice, the 'drilling'.

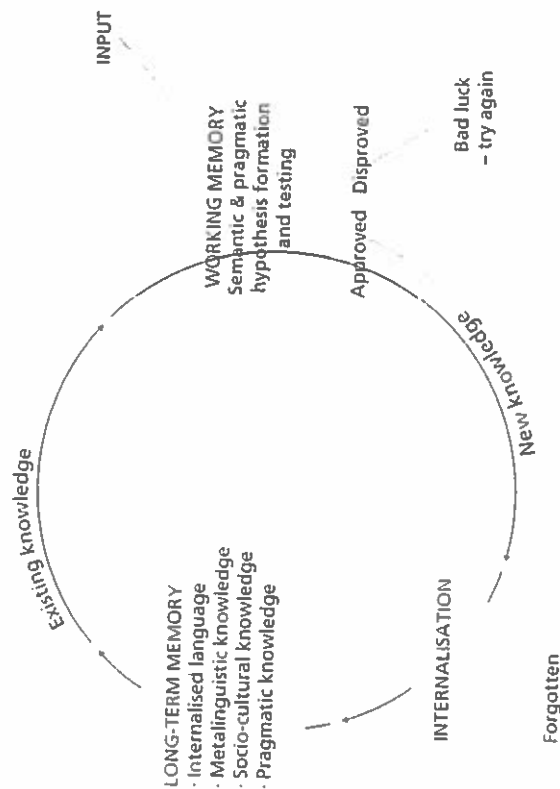


Fig. 2.3. Language acquisition seen as a process of hypothesis forming and testing based on existing knowledge and new input.

The teacher can support the learners' process by using inductive grammar exercises that invite the learners to deduce grammar from examples such as text excerpts and dialogues rather than presenting grammar deductively to learners as we saw in the traditional Grammar-Translation Method. Inductive exercises encourage the learners to think for themselves. The connection to constructivist learning theories is obvious.

Formerly we have taught grammar through written exercises alone, but also interactive *oral* exercises are essential if learners are to

- internalize grammar and make the structures available for use in spontaneous language production
- understand the difference between spoken and written English (see chap. 3)

Exercise 7.

1. Take a second look at exercise B in the exercise called 'Eye opener 2'. Why is this inductive?
2. Think of a specific grammatical issue: how could you teach this inductively and deductively?

2.3.2. Interlanguage development

The development of interlanguage is an irregular process. Sometimes it may take a major step forward and at other times, it stagnates or even backtracks. The learners use a linguistic system from the beginning, and simple or incomplete though it might be, it is still a system. It is continuously revised up to the point when it finally approaches the standard of the native speakers' language. Sometimes learners focus on vocabulary or language structures, at other times they are concerned with what to say in a particular situation or they might think about the difference between, e.g., *spend* and *spent*.

The process is complex and depends on the linguistic and communicative challenges that learners meet. Nevertheless, it can be convenient to divide the process into three stages⁴:

1. Lexicalization: collecting meaningful words.
2. Grammaticalization: putting words together in a meaningful way.
3. Sophistication: being more precise about the nuances of meaning expressed by vocabulary and grammar

2.3.2.1. Lexicalization

TERMINOLOGY

Lexis means vocabulary; *lexicalization* is the process of building vocabulary.

At the first stage, lexicalization, learners collect the most essential words necessary for communication. They are mainly words that carry a lot of meaning. *Daffy funny* – meaning *Daffy* is *funny* or perhaps *I think Daffy is funny*. For the speaker it is essential to say who or what he is talking about (*Daffy*), and what is so important about Daffy, namely that he is *funny*. The two words alone carry the essential meaning.

At this stage communication is often supported by the non-verbal context and to a large extent there is a one-to-one relationship between the words and the things they denote in the real world. The words carry a lot of meaning or content and are called content words. They are mainly nouns and main verbs.

Learners at this point are not ready for explicit grammar teaching. They learn new things from the target language as words or unanalysed chunks of language (e.g., one says *Here you are* when one gives somebody something). It does not mean that grammatical features cannot be dealt with at this stage, only that they must be introduced as vocabulary: Teachers can easily make the learners aware of the fact that one uses the word

apple when there is only one, but the word *apples* when there are more than one without using an abstract, grammatical explanation.

2.3.2.2. Grammaticalization

At the second stage, grammaticalization, more and more grammar is added, and the learners gradually come to understand and use the more abstract systems of language. Whereas during the lexicalization stage words were simply placed next to each other, they now start to be placed in the right order. It becomes obvious what is the Subject and what is the Object; questions and statements become separated by word order and not only by intonation: *Is Daffy funny?* or *Do you (also) think Daffy is funny?* instead of *Daffy funny?*

Not only are the words placed in the right order, they also start to be 'glued together'. The 'glue' – or the 'mortar' that holds the content words, or 'building bricks', together – is the inflectional endings (e.g. *-ed*, *-er/-est*) and the grammatical words (e.g. articles and auxiliaries). In the sentence *Daffy must be a funny dragon*, the two grammatical words, *must* and *a*, glue together the content words, *Daffy*, *be*, *funny* and *dragon*.

➔ For details on content and grammatical words, see chap. 4.

During the grammaticalization stage the pragmatic meaning becomes clearer. The use of modal auxiliaries like *can*, *may*, *must* and modal Circumstantials (e.g. *certainly*, *under no circumstances*) makes it clear whether the learner intends to make a promise or a threat. The connections between sentences become increasingly clear by means of cohesive devices like *therefore*, *because of*, *on the other hand* and *but*.

The time system also becomes more elaborate by means of time Circumstantials like *yesterday*, *until last year*, *next Friday*, and also by the use of tenses.

In addition, the vocabulary develops and becomes more varied. Instead of having only one favourite word, *nice*, the learners are able to choose from more words which show different aspects of 'being nice': *great*, *perfect*, *terrific*, *lovely*, *marvellous* etc.

Exercise 8.

1. Try to change the following into a text as it would be told by a learner in the lexicalization stage. You could:

- leave out most of the grammatical words
- remove the inflectional endings
- simplify the vocabulary

But make sure that the basic meaning remains the same.

When I got to the police station they made me take the laces out of my shoes and empty my pockets at the front desk in case I had anything in them I could use to kill myself, escape or attack a policeman with.

The sergeant behind the desk had very hairy hands and he had bitten his nails so much that they had bled⁵.

2. Is there part of the information in the text that cannot be expressed with this limited language? Try to explain why it is impossible.

3. Why is it important for teachers to be able to simplify their language when they are teaching beginners?

During the grammaticalization phase, it is important to ensure that the grammatical words and the inflectional endings become internalized in order to make the learners' cognitive resources available for the more sophisticated communicative and academic challenges they will meet later during their education.

2.3.2.3. Sophistication

Most English teaching in Danish elementary schools will take place at the previous two stages. Some children might have finished a part of the lexicalization phase before they start learning English at school, whereas others have hardly begun. This means that English teachers are often met with the challenge of teaching mixed classes from the very beginning.

In the lower secondary years, at least some of the high achievers will start the third stage, sophistication. This stage is characterised by an increasing complexity of both content and language. For learners entering the sophistication phase frequent reading and writing can help them notice the difference between their interlanguage and the target language and encourage them to understand and to use a more complex and varied language. Although learners have more time to express themselves when writing, they also have to be linguistically more accurate. The spoken language is less demanding because it is possible to express meaning in many ways such as pointing, asking for help, paraphrasing or using unfinished sentences etc. Often inaccuracies are not noticed or at least they are tolerated because they do not hamper communication. However, when it comes to writing, language alone must convey the meaning and this demands a much higher level of precision. The structures of written language differ a great deal from the structures of the spoken language, as they are more complex. So when writing or reading advanced texts, the learners will notice the need for a better command of the target language.

Other learners will never get that far, perhaps because they do not feel a need to improve their language. To a certain extent they manage to express and understand basic English. If they are not challenged in school or elsewhere, their interlanguage will remain at this level and not develop any further.

It is important to note that this explanation of the three stages is a model for analyzing the development of the interlanguage. It does not claim to be an exact description of language acquisition. The process is not linear as the description may indicate. Most learners will probably be at several stages at the same time. They will have internalized certain issues while struggling with others. It also often happens that learners seem to forget what they once knew. Though they used to use a grammatical structure correctly,

all of a sudden they start to use it incorrectly. This can happen if their cognitive resources are busy with new issues and if the old structure has not been properly internalized.

Exercise 9.

Now refine the language of the text from exercise 6 by using more precise vocabulary, more complex sentences etc.

2.3.3. What is easy or difficult to learn?

In the previous description of the development of the interlanguage, we saw that learners start by using words that have an immediate reference to an existing thing or person in a given situation. When children are learning to speak their mother tongue, the same process takes place. When very young children return home from the kindergarten, they have difficulties explaining what they experienced. The events are too distant for them to recall and they only master the here-and-now language. It is only when they grow older, they can relate what they did at the kindergarten. This is connected with both their cognitive development and language acquisition.

Second and foreign language learners have an advantage over first language learners in that they are, usually, cognitively more developed and they already have experience with one language, their mother tongue. But learners still find it easier to express events that are close to them compared to abstract or remote events. The more remote or abstract the subject matter is, the more we depend on the language to convey the meaning.

Exercise 10.

1. Compare these texts:

- This photo shows my family: this is my mother, my grandmother, and here are my father and my younger sister, and this is me.*
- Photojournalists record history in the making. The images they create shape our memory and history. They inform our lives, leaving indelible impressions, and become artefacts to be reinterpreted again and again.*

2. What can you say about the language used in the two texts? You may think of

- words that point out of the text
- which of the two texts is more dependent on the context

When there is a direct one-to-one relationship between the grammatical structure and the real world, the specific structure will be learnt easily and quickly. These issues are called text-external, they point out of the text.

Other facets of language are different, they only make sense inside the text, they are text-internal. In the example *Daffy must be a funny dragon* the words *must* and *a* cannot be explained by drawing them or pointing at something in the real world. They belong to the linguistic system. Most of the grammatical words and endings are text-internal.

Exercise 11.

Using what has been said above, explain

- Why is it much more difficult for learners to learn to use the 3rd person -s on verbs (he sings) than the plural -s on nouns? (song - songs)
- Why is it likely that inversion in questions (*Are you happy?*) is learnt sooner than inversion after negative restrictive adverbs (*Hardly had I got home before the phone rang*)?
- And why is it easier to write a story or a narrative than an argument or a discussion?

Text-internal issues are much more difficult to learn than the text-external ones; they require that the learner has reached a more advanced cognitive level of development. This is why the 3rd person -s is more difficult to learn than the plural -s. The plural -s refers to real objects in the world; you can draw them and show whether there is one or more of them. The 3rd person -s, on the other hand, cannot be visualized the same way, and if you forget it, it usually does not hamper the communication. At the beginner's level other things are more essential to concentrate on. Learners do not ask, *When should I add -s to a word?* Rather, they ask, *How do I make it clear that I mean more than one thing?* So it is the meaning and the use of language they are interested in, not the form.

Likewise it is more meaningful for a learner to be able to ask concrete questions and use inversion to express questions than to use inversion due to abstract grammatical rules. It does not hamper communication if you forget the inversion after negative adverbs but it does if you forget inversion in questions.

Exercise 12.

Why will sentence a be learnt sooner than sentence b?

- Yesterday I play soccer with my friends*
- I played soccer with my friends*

Salience is another factor that can make certain things easier to learn than others. The word *yesterday* is a much clearer, or a more salient indicator of past-ness than the inflectional ending -ed. It is easier to connect a meaning with a word than with an ending. Again, learners do not ask, *When do I add -ed to a verb?* They ask, *How do I express that what I want to say happened some time ago?*

At text level certain things are more noticeable than others. The structure of a letter or a recipe is much more obvious and therefore easier to understand than a newspaper article. All the factors mentioned above have to do with what is called learnability. There are still many issues that are unknown within this field.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO LEARNABILITY

The interference from the mother tongue (L1) was always thought to be very important, especially by the Behaviourists whose Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis said that differences between L1 and L2 meant interference from L1 on L2. This was thought to be the main cause of the problems of learning L2. This hypothesis was discarded when the theory of the interlanguage was developed because this is just one among many factors that influence learning. This does not mean that similarities and differences between L1 and the target language do not influence language acquisition. Today it is known that learners transfer knowledge from Danish and base some of their hypotheses in English on this knowledge in the grammaring process, but there are other factors that influence the learning process. It may be quite difficult for a learner to notice that a grammatical structure found in Danish does not exist in English, especially when communication is not disturbed if a learner uses it wrongly, and therefore it is difficult to learn. An example could be the false comparative (see 10.6.4), which is used in Danish but not in English: Danes are likely to transfer this from Danish: *(We had a better dinner at) (her) restaurant)*. Consequently, it is important to point out similarities and differences when presenting various grammatical issues.

Another strong position was held by researchers who tried to outline developmental sequences which all language learners from different first language backgrounds allegedly go through. They believed that everybody would learn the negation in this typical order:

1. *no + verb*: No understand
2. *don't + verb*: He don't can swim
3. Auxiliary + negation: He don't say
4. Analyzed *don't*: He *don't* say

Recent research, however, shows that the semantic and pragmatic functions of a grammatical structure are of much greater importance for learnability.

To sum up the factors that influence learnability, the following can be included:

- Is it important for the communication?
- Does it carry much meaning?
- Is it related to things, persons or events in the real world outside the text?
- Does the context support the understanding?
- Is it salient?
- Is it frequent in English?
- Is it similar to Danish (or another mother tongue (L1))?

It is not a question of either – or, either a certain issue is easy to learn or it is difficult. It is more a relative question; certain things are easier than others. As a result, there is a continuum from easy to difficult. If more factors combine, if for instance the issue in question is both salient and important for communication, the issue becomes easier to learn.



Fig. 2.4. Continuum from easy to difficult learnability⁶.

2.3.4. Language levels

The factors which influence learnability are found at all levels of language. Often it is convenient to distinguish between three levels:

1. morphological level: below-sentence level (morphemes – inflections) (cf. “Ord-bøjning”)
2. syntactic level: sentence level (the order of words) (cf. “Ord-føjning”)
3. discourse level: text level

In exercise 11 we saw examples of all three levels. The 3rd person/plural -s issue is at morphological level. At the syntactic level we have the example with inversion and finally we saw that at discourse level a story or a narrative is easier to write or tell because it relates to events that took place in the real or imaginary world. An argument or a discussion, on the other hand, is constructed around statements inside the text itself. You agree or disagree with the previous statement or you try to approach the topic from another angle etc. So the structure is determined by elements within the text.

Exercise 13.

1. Think of a grammatical issue that you find is difficult to learn yourself. Can you explain why it is difficult?
2. How can you use this awareness that certain things are easier/more difficult to learn than others in the planning of your teaching?

2.4. Three dimensions: FORM, MEANING and USE

As mentioned above, learners are more interested in the meaning and use of language, rather than the form. They want to know how to express a certain message in a specific situation. It is the meaning and the use of a grammatical structure that motivate language acquisition, not the form. The form is only a way of expressing this message appropriately.

It is important to be aware of the semantic and the pragmatic dimensions of language when teaching grammar. The semantic dimension refers to the meaning of the language, whereas the pragmatic dimension refers to how language is used in different situations.

Being able to use grammar structures does not only involve using the forms accurately; it also entails using them meaningfully (semantics) and appropriately (pragmatics).

The three dimensions of grammar, FORM, MEANING and USE, can be visualized with this pie chart:

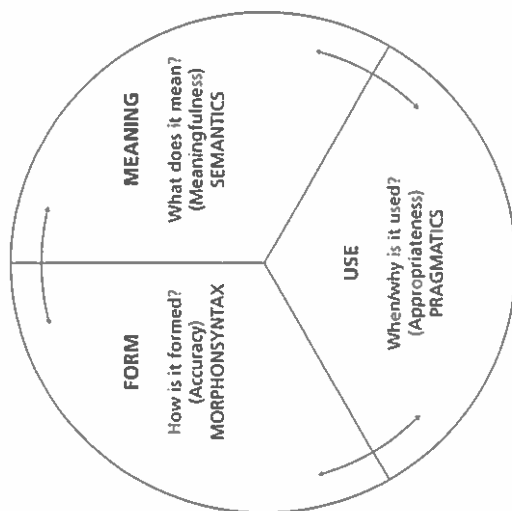


Fig. 2.5. The Three Dimensions of Grammar: FORM, MEANING & USE.⁷

TERMINOLOGY

Many other presentations use either form-meaning (cognitive linguistics) or form-function (functional linguistics) oppositions; the model presented here is from Diane Larsen-Freeman.⁸

We will use the three dimensions throughout this book. When there is special focus on one or more dimensions, it will be marked in the margin.

2.4.1. FORM

The FORM dimension examines how grammatical aspects are constructed. It focuses on the features that can be either seen or heard. It consists of both 'morphology', the forms of words, and 'syntax', the forms of sentences and texts. This means that inflectional endings such as *-ed*, *-er/-est* and grammatical words such as the articles *a* and *the* belong to this category.

Traditional grammar, as seen in the Grammar-Translation Method, only dealt with this category, whereas the extreme version of communicative teaching influenced by Stephen Krashen's Non-interface Hypothesis (see 2.2.) completely ignored this dimension.

An example: When working with the FORM dimension of language, features such as how the modal auxiliaries *may* and *might* are constructed (followed by a bare infinitive, do not take the 3rd person -s, etc.) are examined.

2.4.2. MEANING

When focusing on MEANING, it is necessary to know what a particular grammatical structure means. 'MEANING' may refer to a dictionary definition, for example *run into* means 'meet by chance' or it may refer to the grammatical meaning of a structure, for example *am/are/is* followed by *-ing* means 'an action in progress'. Other examples are probability, time (past, future, duration etc.), space (location, distance, motion, size etc.) or degree.

An example: Working with grammar from a semantic point of view offers the possibility of examining the different forms with which probability can be expressed in English: *Maybe I will come; Perhaps I will come; I may come; I might come* etc.

2.4.3. USE

When examining language in terms of USE, focus is placed on the way language is used in a particular situation or context. It involves the choices that people make when applying the forms of language in communication. When a certain grammatical structure is used and *why* this structure has been chosen instead of another one is explored. In other words, what is appropriate in the given situation? Appropriateness is socially constructed and context-dependent: In certain contexts it would be correct to say *Give me a pint of lager*, whereas in others it would be perceived as very impolite and *I'd like a pint of lager, please* would be the more appropriate form.

The social functions are called speech acts and they include being polite, promising, apologising or agreeing.

Furthermore, at the text level we also find pragmatic issues such as style and genre and also cohesive devices (see chap. 3).

A pragmatic mistake will often be judged harshly by native speakers. Consequently, it is very important to know when to use a particular form. This should always be part of the language lessons from the very beginning and not seen as fine-tuning to be dealt with at advanced levels.

When working with grammar from a pragmatic point of view, possible forms are chosen for expressing different functions or moods.

Asking for permission can be used as an example. The modal verbs in a-c are more polite than the imperative in sentence d and the particular modal verb *might* is more formal than e.g. *may*, so depending on the particular situation we choose how to express our intention:

- a. *Might I possibly borrow your car, Headmaster?*
- b. *Could I borrow your car, Mr. Jones?*
- c. *May I borrow your car?*
- d. *Lend me your car, mate.*

In principle, every grammatical structure can be examined from all three dimensions, FORM, MEANING and USE. However, such an approach is not often helpful when teaching, as there is not time enough for this. What is important is to examine which of the three dimensions need particular attention.

Exercise 14.

For each of these grammatical structures, which of the three dimensions do you think Danish learners will have most problems with: how it is formed, what it means, or when and why to use it?

1. Phrasal verbs (e.g. *My boyfriend ran up a huge phone bill*)
2. The Simple or continuous perspective (e.g. *She painted/was painting the house*)
3. The -ly of adverbs (e.g. *She took it very seriously*)
4. The Irregular plural (e.g. *mouse – mice*)

Learning is made easier if the learners understand the reason why there are different forms. So explaining how the meaning changes when a form is altered will help learners acquire the structures. If teachers only work with the FORM dimension, the end result will be a list of rules. Understanding the reasons why language behaves the way it does, nurtures the learners' linguistic awareness.

However, certain forms are impossible to explain in relation to MEANING, and these belong to the text-internal parts of language. These structures, such as the 3rd person -s, are part of the abstract linguistic system and they must be taught and learnt differently.

Exercise 15.

Explain the MEANING, USE and FORM of the three modal auxiliaries *will*, *may* and *might* in:

- a. *I will come tomorrow*
- b. *I may come tomorrow*
- c. *I might come tomorrow*

2.4.4. Learning and teaching the three dimensions

Working with all three dimensions will help the learners reach the targets set by the Ministry of Education which are to encourage them learn to use the forms accurately and in a meaningful and appropriate way. The three dimensions support each other and together they form a unity. That is what the double-headed arrows in the pie-chart (fig. 2.5) indicate.

Exercise 16.

Examine the CKF areas (Centrale kundskabs- og færdighedsområder) in *Fælles Mål – engelsk* in relation to FORM, MEANING and USE.

It is important that language teachers realize that the three dimensions are learnt in dif-

ferent ways and consequently must be taught in different ways. We will examine this now.

The FORM dimension, and especially the text-internal parts, is best learnt through frequent and varied use.

Communicative activities with repetition are therefore useful when dealing with this dimension. E.g. "Twenty questions" is an activity that trains questions and answers with *to be* and the indefinite article: "*Is it a/an...?*" – "*Yes, it is*" / "*No, it isn't*."

Exercise 17.

Can you think of other games that combine the communicative aspect with repetition, one that trains the 3rd person singular -s perhaps? What other parts of language are trained in the games?

CLASSROOM LANGUAGE

When we want to make the learners focus on the MEANING and USE dimensions, and not only the FORM, the language we use to talk about grammar is 'normal' language, not a technical language with a lot of grammatical terms. Therefore the teaching of grammar can be in English. There is no reason to send out a signal that this is so difficult that Danish must be used.

Form-focused task-based learning (see box) also caters for the FORM-dimension when the pre-task and/or the after-task phase focuses on language form.

TASK-BASED LEARNING (TBL)

The basic principle of task-based instruction is that language is best learnt in meaningful interaction. So, teachers should establish classroom activities in which learners must complete a task together and use the language in problem-solving negotiation.

Often the term 'task' is simply used in this sense for a meaningful, communicative activity that encourages that the learners speak more English. When used this way, TBL has been criticized for not focusing enough on the formal dimension of language.

In Denmark, when we use the word 'task', we usually mean what in Anglo-Saxon literature is called 'form-focused tasks'. The form-focused task focuses on the formal dimension of language as well as the semantic and pragmatic ones. It is usually in three parts: At the core is the task itself, which is preceded by a pre-task phase and followed by an after-task phase.

In the pre-task phase the teacher must elicit the learners' prior knowledge about the topic of the task: concepts, facts etc. In addition to this, the teacher must make sure the learners have the language they will need to do the task, both regarding content and the communicative framework within which it is set.

The task itself can be any communicative activity. Many of the exercises in this book can be used here.

In the *after-task* phase the teacher can again help the learners turn their attention to specific language features from the task. The learners may have noticed a gap between their own interlanguage and the language needed to complete the task. Maybe the teacher had noticed areas of language that the learners could not cope with. The teachers should use these opportunities to explain the language structures.

Frequent use is not so important when it comes to the **MEANING** dimension. Here learners need to make an association between a given linguistic form and its meaning. Using English as classroom language provides many opportunities to establish the connection between form and meaning, for example the imperative form of verbs: *Take out your books, please!* – *Please, open your books on page 5...* and *Be quiet!*

Many games have the same element of combining language and actions, in other words form and meaning in use.

Dictogloss (see box) is also an efficient way to work with the form-meaning relation.

DICTOGLOSS

The word 'dictogloss' is a combination of dictation and glossary.

Use a short text that is not too difficult for the learners; preferably one with a final punch line. Read the text once at normal speed and ask the learners to concentrate on the meaning of the text. Read the text once again while the learners jot down words and expressions from the text. The learners now try to reconstruct as much as possible, first individually, then in pairs. When they have come as far as they can, they are allowed to steal words and phrases from the other pairs in the class. They sit down again and combine their fragments into a coherent and cohesive text. The aim is not necessarily to end up with the same text as the one the teacher read, but with a cohesive text that conveys the same meaning.

Exercise 18.

Explain from a learning perspective how a dictogloss differs from a traditional dictation.

The **USE** or pragmatic dimension requires that learners can make the appropriate choice to fit with the situation. How should the learner express himself without giving offence? What kind of language should be used in a fairy-tale for children? The learners must be confronted with situations where they have to choose the appropriate form, taking into account all the aspects of the communicative situation.

Role-play is a good method for this purpose. When the learners write the lines themselves, they will have to consider what is appropriate to say in this situation. This work can be enhanced further if the role-play is inserted in the task structure: In the pre-task phase the teacher can talk with the learners about the ways in which a character might express their feelings, for example. In the after-task phase the class can then discuss if the chosen form was correct and appropriate.

Other activities could include altering the genre of a piece of text, for example by

changing a short story into a newspaper article, or turning a romantic story into a horror story whilst discovering how the language changes.

Exercise 19.

Think of a variety of language teaching methods you are familiar with

1. Do they focus on all three categories of the pie chart (fig. 2.5)?
2. Is any dimension completely ignored?

Teachers must realize that they must be selective and prioritize the most important areas of language. In order for teachers to know what to select, it is important to have an understanding of all the dimensions of language, and the pie chart can be a helpful tool for visualizing this.

When selecting what grammar to teach, teachers can consider the following points (see more details on "Learnability" in section 2.3.3):

- a. Is it a frequent structure in English?
- b. Is it a structure that the learners will need in their future use of English?
- c. Is it easy or difficult to learn?
- d. Which dimension, **FORM**, **MEANING** or **USE**, is most important to spend time on and why?

2.5. When learners become teachers

Exercise 20.

A learner writes *Yesterday was I hate again*. Why is this sentence incorrect in English? How would you help this learner?

Exercise 21.

A learner in Year 9 asks his teacher why he cannot write *Kylie Minogue look wonderful*. Discuss the following situations and consider the advantages and disadvantages in relation to the teacher's help.

Situation 1

The teacher answers, "Can't you hear that 'looks' sounds better?"

Situation 2

The teacher answers, "You need to find the *Verbal* of the sentence. Yes, 'look'. Who looks? Yes, 'Kylie Minogue', so she is the *Subject*. You need to consider the connection between the *Subject* and the *Verbal*. If the *Subject* is the 3rd person singular so that you can replace it by 'he, she or it', you should add -s to the *Verbal* when we are dealing with what happens today".

Exercise 22.

Think of yourself as a learner of English and as an English teacher. What should the teacher know that the learner does not necessarily need to know?

Learners should learn to express themselves accurately in a meaningful and appropriate way by 'grammaring' just as they learn other skills (cf. fig. 2.1). Teachers must also learn grammaring as it is extremely important that they are qualified to act as role models so the learners receive correct input. Furthermore, explicit knowledge about the FORM, MEANING and USE of the grammatical structures dealt with in the primary and lower secondary grades is essential for teachers to enable them to explain how language works, to consult other grammar books and dictionaries, and take part in discussions with colleagues. Therefore they must be able to describe and discuss language in meta-linguistic terms, also in more precise terms than the terms they will use with learners. Obviously, they must also be able to adapt their knowledge into a meta language that makes sense to the learners at several levels. Here is an example: In professional terms when we discuss grammar with colleagues we may talk about a *finite verb* whereas when we talk to learners we may say *a verb that shows the present or the past tense or even a verb that shows whether it happens today or yesterday*.

Implicit knowledge of the grammatical structures taught in the later stages of secondary education is also necessary for an English teacher at the primary and lower secondary school. It is our belief that the inductive consciousness-raising activities in this book can help speed up the development of the trainee teachers' explicit knowledge. We also support the development of their metalanguage by offering post tasks that focus on the terminology.

Grammar teaching can take place in at least two different ways: either planned beforehand or as a reaction to learner language. Reacting to learner language immediately after a task can give teachers a good opportunity to ensure that learning actually takes place. Teachers can seize the "teachable moment" in which a learner is aware that there is a gap between his own interlanguage and what he wants to be able to do with the language. However, for a teacher to analyze oral communication to find out exactly what it is each learner is struggling with demands a very good command of grammar. So, although this is probably the most efficient way of learning for the individual learner, the inexperienced teacher may prefer to:

- concentrate on helping the individual learner either in his writing process or by analyzing the written product of the individual learner to consider what to help the learner with and how. (See chapter 16 on the analysis of learner language).
- plan the grammar teaching beforehand. Again it can be useful to think of grammar as a skill. When we focus on teaching the other four skills, we usually create a communicative context. Likewise, when we focus on the skill 'grammaring', we must embed it in a communicative context.

Finally it is very important that the teacher is conscious about how grammar was taught when he went to school. The many years of "indoctrination" often overshadow what he learns at college about language acquisition with the result that he might reproduce old-fashioned ways of teaching grammar. Thinking consciously about the MEANING and the USE dimensions of grammar and not only the FORM can be a great help to avoid falling into the trap of mere reproduction.

2.6. Exercises at text level

Exercise 23.

Below is an excerpt from an article¹⁰ about a report¹¹, summarized in *Fælles Mål* 2009, engelsk¹². Discuss the excerpt in relation to your own linguistic competences and those of your future learners.

WE ARE RED, WE ARE WRIGHT
- MEN VIER KNAK SA GODE TIL AT SKRIVE DET

Danskerne er overbeviste om, at de er enormt gode til engelsk. Det passer bare ikke, og utilstrækkeligheden bliver udstillet, når vi forsøger os på skrift. Selvsikkerheden hjælper dog, når vi skal tale sproget. [...]

Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (EVA) præsenterede i går en undersøgelse af de danske folkeskole- og gymnasieelevers engelskfærdigheder, hvoraf det fremgår at det især halter med det skriftlige. [...] Der, hvor det især går galt, er manglende ordforråd og svigtende grammatik – og det afsløres hårdt og brutalt, når engelsk skal ned på skrift.

[The article then mentions some examples of "false friends":]
'Eventuelt' betyder måske, mens det engelske 'eventually' faktisk betyder det modsatte, nemlig 'før eller siden' [...]. Det misforstår mange danskere [...]

2.7. After reading this chapter

Exercise 24.

Test what you have learnt in this chapter by doing web activity 1.

Exercise 25.

Test yourself as an English teacher by correcting the learner's text in web activity 2.

Exercise 26.

Apply what you have learnt in this chapter by working on web activities 3-5.

Literature

Celce-Murcia, Marianne & Larsen-Freeman, Diane, *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course*, Heinle & Heinle, 1999. A grammar book meant for English teachers based on the three dimensions: form, meaning and use.

Ellis, Rod, *The Place of Grammar Instruction in the Second/Foreign Language Curriculum*, in: *New Perspectives on Grammar Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*, ed. by Eli Hinkel & Sandra Fotos, ESL and Applied Linguistics Professional Series, 2002. The article considers a number of reasons why grammar should be included in second/foreign language curriculum – and how.

Geist, Hanne & Dorthe Frisrup, "Nye skolegrammatikker ønskes", *Sprogforum* 27, 2003.