Second Lecture in S2 (04.02.2026)
1. What Is Grammar?

Grammar is the systematic study of the form and structure of language. It provides the framework that enables speakers to construct meaningful, coherent utterances.

"Grammar is the business of taking a language to pieces, to see how it works."
> — David Crystal

Modern perspectives emphasize that grammar is:

- Not a fixed set of prescriptive rules, but a dynamic system that emerges from actual language use.
- Context-sensitive, reflecting how language functions at a given point in time and evolving as usage changes.
- Meaning-enhancing, adding layers of interpretation that cannot always be inferred from immediate context alone.

Example:
✅ We are not at home. (Grammatical)
✖ We are not At home Acceptable. (Ungrammatical due to capitalization errors and misplaced modifier)

2. The Three Dimensions of Grammar

Effective grammar instruction addresses three interconnected aspects:

Dimension	Description	Example
Form	The structural pattern (syntax, morphology)	*The car was stuck.* → Passive voice construction
Meaning	The semantic contribution of the structure	Focus shifts to the *car* (patient) rather than the agent
Use	The communicative function in context	Used when the doer is unknown, irrelevant, or intentionally omitted

> ⚠ Teaching only form without meaning and use leads to mechanical, decontextualized learning.

3. Key Challenges in Teaching Grammar

Challenge	Description	Illustrative Example
Abstract Rules	Learners struggle to internalize invisible structural patterns	*I had finished my homework* vs. *I had finished my homework before my friend **came*** (tense sequencing error)
Contextual Variation	Same structure may be appropriate or inappropriate depending on register/situation	*I don't know anything* (standard) vs. *I know nothing* (more emphatic/literary)
Learner Engagement	Grammar drills often feel disconnected from real communication	Repetitive worksheets without meaningful context reduce motivation
L1 Transfer	First language interference causes persistent errors	Spanish speakers: *"I have 20 years"* → *"I am 20 years"* (calque from *Tengo 20 años*)

4. Major Theoretical Approaches to Grammar

Approach	Key Proponent(s)	Core Principle	Pedagogical Implication
Prescriptive vs. Descriptive	Traditional grammarians vs. modern linguists	Prescriptive: "rules for correctness" Descriptive: "patterns of actual usage"	Balance accuracy norms with awareness of language variation
Generative Grammar	Noam Chomsky	Humans possess an innate *Universal Grammar* enabling infinite sentence generation	Focus on underlying competence rather than surface performance

Approach	Key Proponent(s)	Core Principle	Pedagogical Implication
Functional Grammar	M.A.K. Halliday	Language structures serve communicative functions in social contexts	Teach grammar through purposeful tasks (e.g., persuading, narrating)
Cognitive Grammar	Ronald Langacker	Grammar is inseparable from meaning and grounded in human experience	Use conceptual metaphors and embodied cognition to explain structures

5. The Debate: Explicit Grammar Instruction – For and Against

✅ Arguments FOR Explicit Grammar Teaching

- Provides a clear structural framework for accurate sentence formation
- Helps learners notice patterns and avoid fossilization of errors
- Supports self-monitoring and autonomous error correction
- Mitigates negative L1 transfer through contrastive analysis
- Enhances comprehension of complex texts and academic language
- Most effective when integrated with communicative practice (focus on form)

💡 Best practice: Embed grammar within meaningful tasks rather than isolating it.

✖ Arguments AGAINST Overemphasis on Grammar

- May inhibit fluency by prioritizing accuracy over communication
- Can generate anxiety and fear of mistakes, reducing risk-taking
- Decontextualized drills fail to develop pragmatic competence
- Natural acquisition occurs through comprehensible input (Krashen's Input Hypothesis)
- Young learners especially benefit from implicit learning via immersion
- Excessive focus detracts from cultural and communicative dimensions of language

> 💡 Balanced view: Grammar knowledge supports—but does not replace—communicative competence.

6. Evolution of Grammar Teaching Methodologies

Traditional Approaches (Grammar-Centered)

Method	Role of Grammar	Limitations
Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)	Central focus: rule memorization & L1↔L2 translation	Neglects speaking/listening; no communicative practice
Audio-Lingual Method (ALM)	Habit formation through pattern drills	Mechanical repetition; limited creativity or meaning focus

⚠ These methods often failed to develop learners' ability to use language spontaneously.

Communicative Approaches (Use-Centered)

Concept	Proponent	Principle
Communicative Competence	Dell Hymes	Knowing *when*, *how*, and *to whom* to say what—not just grammatical correctness
Input Hypothesis	Stephen Krashen	Acquisition occurs via *comprehensible input* (i+1), not explicit rule teaching

Concept	Proponent	Principle
Focus on Form	Michael Long	Brief attention to grammar *within* communicative tasks—not isolated drills

> ✅ Modern best practice: Integrated approach—grammar emerges from and supports meaningful communication.

7. References & Further Reading

- Celce-Murcia, M., & Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999). The Grammar Book (2nd ed.). Heinle & Heinle.
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