

Торайғыров университетінің
ҒЫЛЫМИ ЖУРНАЛЫ

НАУЧНЫЙ ЖУРНАЛ
Торайғыров университета

**ТОРАЙҒЫРОВ
УНИВЕРСИТЕТІНІҢ
ХАБАРШЫСЫ**

Филологиялық сериясы
1997 жылдан бастап шығады



**ВЕСТНИК
ТОРАЙҒЫРОВ
УНИВЕРСИТЕТА**

Филологическая серия
Издается с 1997 года

ISSN 2710-3528

№ 4 (2020)

Павлодар

НАУЧНЫЙ ЖУРНАЛ
Торайгыров университета

Филологическая серия
выходит 4 раза в год

СВИДЕТЕЛЬСТВО

О постановке на учет, переучет периодического печатного издания,
информационного агентства и сетевого издания

№ 14213-Ж

выдано

Министерством информации и коммуникаций Республики Казахстан

Тематическая направленность

публикация материалов в области
лингвистики и языкознания

Подписной индекс – 76132

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д.ф.н., профессор

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При использовании материалов журнала ссылка на «Вестник Торайгыров университета» обязательна

<https://doi.org/10.48081/IMVN6091>

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GRAMMAR TEACHING OF EFL LEARNERS IN CONTEXT AND THROUGH DISCOURSE APPROACH

In this article, the author analyses the teaching of grammar to students as a foreign language in the context and with a discursive approach. The author argues that this approach is a very important and necessary part of the process of understanding and perception, since the contextual meaning of a sentence tends to include much more than the literal meaning of the sentence. Therefore, a comprehensive study of this issue will help teachers improve grammar teaching methods in context and through a discursive approach. Moreover, scientists tend to side with the language socialization hypothesis and hold that grammar in a first or second language is acquired through the learner's repeated and meaningful experience with contextualized discourse, in which grammar is a structural resource that may or may not get explicitly analyzed by the learner as she or he observes and/or engages in meaningful interaction. In this regard, the author has made thorough research on teaching grammar as a foreign language and aims to address practical teaching issues and to help teachers find the possible ways to benefit students.

Key words: grammar, discourse, approach, contextual knowledge, comprehension, teaching.

Introduction

All naturalistic learning of first and second languages takes place in context and at the level of discourse rather than the abstract sentence level. When learners can comprehend and reproduce an utterance such as I'm hungry, the contextual meaning generally involves much more than the literal meaning of the sentence. If a child utters this to his mother on coming home from school, it is a request for food. If the same child utters it after having completed his lunch, the utterance is a complaint and a request for additional food. A beggar uttering these words in the street is requesting money rather than food. If a guest says these words on arriving for dinner, it may well signal an indirect compliment, I've eaten very

little today in anticipation of a wonderful meal, in addition to conveying the literal meaning of the utterance.

These differing interpretations of one surface utterance demonstrate that knowing the literal and decontextualized meaning of an utterance and being able to produce it with grammatical accuracy are only a part, (some would say a small part) of being able to use the utterance appropriately in a variety of communicative contexts. One needs contextual knowledge (pragmatic knowledge regarding participants, purpose, topic, etc.) in addition to knowledge of grammar and lexis to be able to do this.

Contextual knowledge often interacts with another type of knowledge – discourse one – which takes into account what has already been mentioned and what is most likely to be mentioned next. Knowledge of the unfolding discourse (or context) interacts with contextual knowledge when speakers choose articles in English, for example. Speakers make different presuppositions about what listeners know and share with them when they choose between utterances like Examples 1 and 2:

1 I saw the dog outside just now.

2 I saw a dog outside just now.

The first utterance presupposes that there is one specific dog that both the speaker and listener(s) can identify because of knowledge they share. The second utterance presupposes that the dog the speaker saw is unfamiliar either to the speaker, or the listener, or both of them. If the dog is unfamiliar to the speaker but presumed to be familiar to the listener, the speaker's talk might continue with, «Is it yours?» or «Is it your neighbor's?» However, if the dog is also presumed to be unfamiliar to the listener, the speaker might continue, «It was very friendly and tried to play with me and follow me in the house». Thus, the article the speaker initially selects (overuses the) establishes presuppositions, and the context that unfolds, which is often co constructed by the interlocutors, gives us further information about who knew what. If the initiating speaker had said (1) above without making the correct presuppositions, the interlocutor might have responded by saying, What dog? This would in turn signal to the first speaker that an erroneous presupposition had been made and the wrong article had been used.

Materials and methods

In formal linguistics, grammar is typically described and studied as context-free knowledge. This fits well with Chomsky's innateness hypothesis, which holds that all normal newborn humans are hard-wired for Universal Grammar and predisposed to learn whatever natural language(s) they are exposed to in the course of their cognitive development [1, 57]. This is not the only theory of how people learn first (or second) languages, however; another proposal is the language socialization hypothesis, which holds that the grammar one acquires and uses as

one develops cognitively and socially is highly constrained in terms of local social and cultural expectations and is shaped by local experiences over time rather than by an abstract universal and innate mechanism [2, 153].

This author tends to side with the language socialization hypothesis and holds that grammar in a first or second language is acquired through the learner's repeated and meaningful experience with contextualized discourse, in which grammar is a structural resource that may or may not get explicitly analyzed by the learner as she or he observes and/or engages in meaningful interaction. What has convinced me of this position is the fact that so few «rules» of English grammar can be applied and used without reference to context. A few context-free rules that we have been able to think of are as follows:

1 Verbs and verb phrases following prepositions must take the gerund form;

2 Reflexive pronoun objects must agree in person, number, and gender with their subjects;

3 Determiners must agree in number and noun type (count/mass) with their head nouns.

Other rules that some have proposed as context-free such as «subject-verb agreement» and «some-any suppletion» have been challenged by Lakoff, respectively, who argue that these two grammar rules are not context free but meaning dependent. Certainly, the majority of grammatical problems that English as a second language/English as foreign language (ESL/EFL) teachers have to deal with are not context free but rather clearly functionally motivated:

– Article usage (choice of definite, indefinite, or zero article)

– Choice of tense-aspect form

– Using past or present tense versus a modal auxiliary

– Choice of active versus passive voice

– Choice of a statement form or an interrogative form

– Choice of a syntactically affirmative form or a negative form

– Putting the indirect object after the verb or after the direct object and in a prepositional phrase (for ditransitive verbs that allow alternation)

– Putting the particle after the verb or after the direct object (for separable phrasal verbs)

– Using unmarked word order versus a marked construction such as «it-cleft» or «wh-cleft», and so forth using grammar entails making a series of decisions about when and why to use one form rather than another. Obviously, one needs to know the formal options (or be able to approximate them adequately) to make these decisions in an effective manner. Yet, if one's goal is communication, it seems even more important to be able to deploy forms effectively – even if inaccurate – than it is to use perfectly accurate forms inappropriately. Thus, the man who can ask, What you want? when a complete stranger walks into his house is more

effective pragmatically than the bookworm who can say I'd like to buy that horse perfectly in 10 different languages but who ends up buying a mule because he does not know the difference between a horse and a mule. In the final analysis, context-free knowledge is of less value than contextualized knowledge. And when we speak of teaching grammar in context, we mean teaching grammar through context-embedded discourse rather than through abstract, context-free sentences.

As a final bit of background, let us make clear what we mean by «grammar» and «discourse». Grammar is by far the easier term to define. It includes syntax (word order), morphology (grammatical inflections on words), and function words (structurally important words like articles, prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, etc.) [3, 45].

Discourse is harder to define. A formal definition of discourse might specify that it is a coherent unit of language consisting of more than one sentence; a functional definition might characterize discourse as language in use [4, 102]. However, neither definition is adequate on its own. Discourse in context consists of only one or two words as in stop or no smoking. Alternatively, a piece of discourse can be hundreds of thousands of words in length, as some novels are. A typical piece of discourse is somewhere between these two extremes. Furthermore, the notion of «sentence» is not always relevant, especially if we are analyzing spoken discourse, and the phrase «language in use» is so general that it is almost meaningless. Furthermore, the external function or purpose can only be determined by taking into account the context and the participants (i.e., all the relevant social and cultural factors).

Results and discussion of contextual analysis

Language pedagogy consists of far more than teaching grammar through discourse. However, for those teaching situations in which the teacher feels it would be desirable or necessary to focus on grammar (and to teach it through discourse), where can the teacher do the work of functional grammarians such as Givón, Halliday and Hasan, and Thompson – although very valuable – does not yet give teachers a complete functions at the discourse level. Thus, for many years we have been training the graduate students to answer their own questions and solve their own problems by doing contextual analysis. This is an approach in which the researcher uses at least 100 tokens of a target form or structure (complete with contextual information and context) to begin making useful generalizations about where the target form occurs (or does not occur), what it means, and why it is used (or not used) by a given speaker/writer in a given piece of discourse. Today large commercially available on-line corpora not only greatly facilitate the data collection process but also allow for greater generalization of findings. When doing a contextual analysis, we begin by looking at form and distribution and then move on to meaning and use by taking relevant contextual information and the entire context into consideration.

Research of linguistic features and grammar in actual spoken and written

communication has been carried out in such areas as spoken and written discourse analysis, spoken and written language corpora, and studies of naturally occurring data, as well as experimental studies of elicited data. In addition, many investigations have addressed instructional approaches and techniques for grammar teaching to determine what classroom pedagogy and techniques can best serve the needs of learners at various levels of proficiency [5, 27].

Discourse analysis examines contextual uses of language structures and investigates what speakers do to express meaning in various interactional settings. In addition to examinations of spoken discourse, studies of written discourse have also shed light on how meaning is conveyed in many types of written texts and genre. Analysis of written and spoken discourse seems to provide a practical avenue for grammar teaching and learning [6, 85]. Another benefit of using discourse in the classroom is that learners can start to notice how language contexts affect grammar and meaning and how speakers vary their linguistic structures depending on the sociolinguistic features of interaction.

Similarly, examinations of spoken and written language corpora seek to gain insight into linguistic regularities found in large-scope data sets. Corpora of spoken language allow researchers to analyze the features of English in narratives, service encounters, on the job situations, negotiations, and giving opinions in situations with family, colleagues, or debates. The corpora of written English include such genre as newspaper reports, editorials, and articles on religion and hobbies; official and government documents; the academic prose in chemistry, biology, sociology, and engineering; fiction; mysteries; science fiction; and biographies; as well as personal, business, and professional letters. By far the most comprehensive reference grammar of spoken and written English was developed by Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan to determine systematic patterns in language use, based on the findings of corpus analysis of conversations, fiction, newspapers, and academic prose. In addition to the descriptions of grammatical constructions traditionally found in reference grammars, Biber's study also deals with considerations of register, lexis, and discourse variations to show how English grammar functions in real spoken and written texts.

Experimental studies of naturally occurring and elicited language dealing with L2 grammar have been devoted to the use of language by different types of learners and in various environments, for example, what happens in L2 grammatical development when speakers it, how learners of different ages acquire L2, and what learner background factors affect L2 learning and acquisition. For example, investigations based on natural or elicited data have dealt with the order of learning and acquisition of specific grammatical structures, such as tenses, morphemes, clauses, and noun systems. The wealth of applied linguistics findings creates environment in which teachers and methodologists can endeavor to establish the effectiveness of their techniques and materials.

Although grammar teaching has been a thorny issue among teachers, teacher educators, methodologists, and other ESL/EFL professionals, it has continued to be one of the mainstays in English language training worldwide. All major publishers of ESL and EFL texts include grammar textbooks in their lists. Some particularly popular volumes have become best-sellers, despite their traditional approach to L2 grammar teaching. Furthermore, because the explicit teaching of grammar has been and remains at the core of the grammar-translation methodology adopted in many countries, students who arrive to obtain their language training in Great Britain, the United States, Australia, and other English-speaking countries often demand grammar instruction. For adults, the question is not so much whether to teach or not teach grammar, but rather, what are the optimal conditions for overt teaching of grammar [7, 349].

So, spoken and written discourse can be an effective tool for teaching the four language skills combined. Advantages of using discourse:

- 1 Learn grammatical rules in context.
- 2 Get familiar with essay organization.
- 3 Explore how punctuations are employed in a text.
- 4 Explore different writing styles.

Improve learners' oral communicative competence, e.g. mastering oral discourse management of prosody: rhythm, stress and intonation.

Explore naturally-occurring social interaction in L2.

Written Discourse

The teacher can choose any piece of informative written discourse that serves the main objective(s) of the lesson. In addition, through the same text, the teacher can highlight other aspects of written English like punctuations or capitalization depending on the age and the level of the students. For instance, a passage about a certain topic, famous sites in the world "Statue of Liberty", can be chosen to teach the passive voice in context as well as developing other language skills.

Reading

- Students practice reading the text.
- Students learn some information about the history of the "Statue of Liberty" and develop comprehension.
- Through reading the text, students learn the passive voice inductively and see how it is employed in context.
- Students learn new vocabulary.

Speaking

- As a warm-up, the teacher can start by asking students about the «Statue of Liberty», e.g. ask questions about its location, history, etc.
- As a post activity, students can discuss in pairs or as a class other famous sites with an emphasis on using the passive.

Listening

– Through engaging in discussions, learners have the opportunity to listen to each other speaking. While students are working in pairs, the teacher may ask each partner to write down notes, like misuse of the passive, as a form of peer review.

Writing

– Students may be asked to choose a famous sight, gather information, and write an essay/paragraph about it. It can be assigned as homework.

Spoken discourse

– The teacher can adopt any material of English spoken discourse, e.g. TV interview that serves the point of the lesson and suits the level of the learners. It is important for the teacher to provide a written copy of the listening material after practicing listening several times in order for the learners to write notes and go back for it later whenever needed.

Listening

– After introducing the topic, learners listen to/watch the TV interview several times.

– Learners get familiar with the English intonation, stress, pausing and other characteristics of the spoken language.

– Learners get the chance to listen to expressions, phrasal verbs, and grammatical structures used in real-life context.

Speaking

– After listening several times, the teacher can design a speaking activity, like working in pairs or groups of three to analyze, discuss, report, or debate what they have listened to. The teacher should monitor students' use of suprasegmentals, grammar and use of expressions.

Writing

– Learners can be assigned to write a paragraph or essay, like a reflection or their opinions, about a certain point in the listening section.

Reading

– As a peer review, students can exchange papers, read each others' writing and write comments, if necessary, for improvement [8,102–104].

Conclusion

– In conclusion, our work is based on thorough research, sound methodology, the findings of analyses of real language use and communication, and application of these findings to teaching and learning. They represent a wide range of approaches to L2 grammar teaching, seek to address practical instructional issues, and assist teachers in finding ways to benefit learners.

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Material received on 10.12.20.

С. А. Мейрамова

Студенттерге грамматиканы шет тілі ретінде контексте және дискурсивті тәсілмен оқыту

С. Сейфуллин атындағы Қазақ агротехникалық университеті,
Қазақстан Республикасы, Нұр-Сұлтан қ.
Материал поступил в редакцию 10.12.20.

С. А. Мейрамова

Обучение грамматики учащимся как иностранного в контексте и с помощью дискурсивного подхода

Казахский агротехнический университет имени С. Сейфуллина
Республика Казахстан, г. Нур-Султан.
Материал баспаға 10.12.20 түсті.

Бұл мақалада автор оқытушыларға әрі студенттерге грамматиканы шет тілі ретіндегі контексте және дискурсивті тәсілмен оқытуға талдау жасайды. Автор бұл тәсіл түсіну және қабылдау процесінің өте маңызды және қажетті құрамдас бөлігі болып табылады деп тұжырымдайды, өйткені сөйлемнің

контекстік мағынасы, әдетте, сөйлемнің сөзбе-сөз мағынасынан әлдеқайда көп нәрсені қамтиды. Осыған байланысты, бұл мәселені жан-жақты зерттеу мұғалімдерге контексте және дискурсивті тәсілдері арқылы грамматиканы оқыту әдістемесін жетілдіруге көмектеседі. Сонымен қатар, ғалымдар лингвисти-калық әлеуметтену гипотезасына бейім және бірінші немесе екінші тілдегі грамматика оқушының контексттелген дискурста қайталанған және мағыналы тәжірибесі нәтижесінде алынған деп сенеді, онда грамматика құрылымдық ресурс болып табылады, болуы мүмкін немесе болмауы да мүмкін студент өзінің бақылауы және / немесе өзара әрекеттесуге қатысу процесінде тікелей талданады. Осыған байланысты автор грамматиканы шет тілі ретінде оқыту туралы мұқият зерттеулер жүргізді және оқытудың практикалық мәселелерін шешуге бағытталған және оқытушыларға әрі студенттерге өте жақсы пайда әкелетін мүмкін жолдарын тез табуға көмектеседі.

Кілтті сөздер: грамматика, дискурс, тәсіл, контекстік білім, түсіну, оқыту.

В настоящей статье автор дает анализ преподавания грамматики обучающимся как иностранного в контексте и с помощью дискурсивного подхода. Автор утверждает, что данный подход является очень важной и необходимой составной частью процесса понимания и восприятия, так как контекстуальное значение предложения, как правило, включает в себя гораздо больше, чем буквальное значение предложения. В связи с этим, комплексное изучение этого вопроса поможет преподавателям совершенствовать методику обучению грамматике в контексте и с помощью дискурсивного подхода. Более того, ученые склоняются к гипотезе о языковой социализации и считают, что грамматика на первом или втором языке приобретается в результате многократного и содержательного опыта обучающегося в контекстуализированном дискурсе, в котором грамматика является структурным ресурсом, который может быть, а может и не быть прямо проанализирован обучающимся в процессе его наблюдения и/или участия в содержательном взаимодействии. В связи с этим, автором сделаны тщательные исследования по преподаванию грамматики как иностранного и направлены на решение практических вопросов преподавания и смогут помочь преподавателям находить возможные пути, которые принесут пользу обучающимся.

Ключевые слова: грамматика, дискурс, подход, контекстуальные знания, понимание, обучение.

Теруге 10.12.2020 ж. жіберілді. Басуға 15.12.2020 ж. қол қойылды.

Электронды баспа

2,22 Мб RAM

Шартты баспа табағы 22,7. Таралымы 300 дана. Бағасы келісім бойынша.

Компьютерде беттеген: А. Шукурбаева

Корректор: А. Р. Омарова

Тапсырыс № 3699

Сдано в набор 12.12.2020 г. Подписано в печать 15.12.2020 г.

Электронное издание

2,22 Мб RAM

Усл. печ. л. 22,7. Тираж 300 экз. Цена договорная.

Компьютерная верстка: А. Шукурбаева

Корректор: А. Р. Омарова

Заказ № 3699

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