

Integrating Grammar for Communicative Language Teaching

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Introduction

There has been a lot of progress in English language teaching since the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This progress has been reflected in the teaching of the four skills, which has moved from the presentation, practice and production (PPP) to pre-, while- and post-stages. However, teaching grammar has lagged behind the integration of pre, while and post stages. Although grammar instruction has recently been associated with contextual teaching (Clandfield, nd; Mora, 2003; Tennant, nd; Weaver 1996), we need to go beyond this movement to bring grammar instruction fully to life and to make it purposeful and communicative.

In the following section, I will note some problems associated with grammar teaching in general, then I will introduce a framework for implementing pre-, while- and post-stages to teach grammar.

- Direct grammar instruction is still very common.
- Contextual instructional techniques are not readily accessible to practitioners.
- In most cases grammar instruction is not integrated into the four skills but given in isolation.
- Mostly it is teachers that formulate the grammar rules. Grammar rules will be clearer and be remembered better when students formulate them themselves (inductive learning) than when teachers formulate them (deductive learning).
- Learners need repeated input of a grammar item. Just one grammar presentation is not enough.
- Learners should not be overwhelmed with linguistic terminology (Brown, 2001).
- Grammar should be taught in digestible segments bearing the cognitive process in mind.

Traditional grammar teaching, for instance, tends to cover the following points in the same lesson:

- the passive voice with all the tenses,
- all the uses of indirect speech (i.e. reporting statements, negative statements, question forms, imperatives, requests, time expressions, etc.)
- all the forms of a structure (i.e. statements, negative statements, questions, exceptions, etc).

Following a review of some common problems, the next step is to introduce a unique approach to teaching grammar. Grammar teaching, like teaching the four skills, should involve pre-, while- and post-stages in an attempt to provide integrated learning environments. In the pre-grammar stage, the teacher should bring grammar instruction to life, stimulate interest in the topic, and raise awareness by providing a reason for learning. The while-grammar stage should facilitate noticing of the new grammar point, and provide meaningful input through contextual examples, pictures, and texts. Finally, the post-grammar stage should provide an opportunity to put grammar to use, and relate grammar instruction to real life situations. The main distinction between the while- and post-stages is that the while-stage involves the clarification of the meaning, whereas the post-stage focuses on the productive aspects of the new structure.

Steps of an Integrated Grammar Lesson

Traditional grammar teaching starts with the teacher's statement of the grammatical point on the board. Integrated grammar teaching is a unique and an authentic approach because it implements the pre-, while- and post-stages.

The application of pre-, while- and post-stages into teaching grammar are shown below in two sample grammar lessons.

Sample Grammar Lesson 1: Used to

1. Pre-grammar

- a) The teacher discusses the topic "changes in people over the years"
- b) The teacher shows two pictures of a woman. One picture was taken 20 years ago and the other one is new. The old picture shows her playing the guitar while the new one displays her painting pictures. The teacher then asks them to compare the two pictures.

2. While-grammar

- a) This stage provides a context for input generation and an opportunity to notice the new grammatical structure. The teacher tells them they are going to learn a new structure (for the purpose of noticing) but does not mention the name of structure (for motivational purposes).
- b) The teacher makes a transition from the context created in 1b to the grammatical point by showing the same pictures and telling the picture differences with "used to" and "simple present tense" (i.e. "She used to play the guitar as a hobby, but now she doesn't, she paints pictures as a hobby now", etc).
- c) The teacher creates other contexts for the teaching of grammatical point through some other picture comparisons, discussions, stories, or reading/listening texts.
- d) The teacher asks some clarification check questions to ensure that the meaning is clear. Some examples:
 - Did she often play the guitar in the past?/Does she play the guitar now?
 - Did she often paint pictures in the past?/Does she paint pictures now?
 - Did she have long hair in the past?/Does she have long hair now?
- e) The teacher asks the students to formulate the rule on the board for the given sentence providing help if needed.

She used to play the guitar.

S + Used to + V 1 ...

(**Note:** The while-stage may involve production of the new structure through some questions about the pictures. In this case, however, the purpose is to confirm whether the meaning has been clarified.)

3) Post-grammar (adapted from Fatma Toköz, former student)

Brainstorming

The teacher asks students to think back to when they were a child and asks the following questions: "What are the differences and similarities between your life then and now? Think about where you lived, your likes/dislikes, your holidays and your family, and fill in the following lines with appropriate sentences".

Your life as a child...

Your present life...

Role-play

The teacher forms pairs of students and gives a role play to each student. The role playing students are supposed to be old friends meeting after a long time. They are supposed to communicate and note the differences in each using either their imagination or the role play cues.

Writing

The teacher asks students to write a story about the following topic for the school magazine.

Imagine that you have been asleep from 2007 till 2050. You have just woken up to be shocked about everything around you. Compare your old and new lives and write your story using "used to".

Sample Grammar Lesson 2: The present perfect passive voice

Pre-grammar Stage

First, the teacher has a discussion on burglaries. Following this discussion, the teacher shows a picture of a living room and says: "Today, a burglar has broken into this room. What do you think he has taken?" (The teacher tries to elicit responses such as he has taken the lap-top computer, he has stolen the jewellery, etc).

While-grammar Stage

The teacher shows a different picture of the same living room and turns attention to the missing items and says the following:

"The lap-top computer has been taken from the room.
The jewellery has been stolen.
The small TV has been taken as well.
The picture on the wall has been taken, too".

The teacher asks questions to elicit the passive voice structure. Following this, the teacher asks clarification check questions such as:

What is the difference between "the burglar has stolen the jewellery", and "the jewellery has been stolen"?; when do you think we need the second structure?, etc.

The teacher asks the students to formulate the rule on the board.

Alternatively, or additionally, the context can be created through a reading text written in the present perfect passive voice.

Post-grammar Stage

The teacher gives the following hand-out to be filled out and asks students to walk around and ask questions to the class members.

Find someone

Class members name

who has been blamed for something he/she hasn't done.

who has been disappointed by a close friend.

who has been told some good news today.

who has been told some bad news today.

who has been abandoned by his/her girlfriend/boyfriend.

who has been misunderstood today.

who has been forgiven by an old friend recently.

who has been given a present today.

Role-play

The teacher forms pairs of students and gives a role play to each student. One of the pairs holds the names of the cities and their weather reports, the other holds information about some football matches and the name of the cities where they are being held. They will exchange the information and find out which football matches have been cancelled.

The teacher assigns an incomplete writing task and asks them to complete it using some cue words and the present perfect passive tense as in the following:

Your wedding is very soon, but most of the arrangements have not been made yet. Write a complaint letter to the wedding specialist using these clues: wedding invitations, wedding dress, wedding party, wedding cake, wedding photographer, honeymoon, limousine cars.

Dear wedding specialist,

I visited your office today but you were out. I have seen that most of the wedding arrangements have not yet been made.

To begin with, ...

Conclusion

During grammar instruction, teachers should provide meaningful input through context and provide an opportunity to put grammar to use, and relate grammar instruction to real life situations. This is best achieved if grammar instruction is treated in the same way as the teaching of the four skills which involves smooth and organized transitions of pre-, while and post grammar stages.

References

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