

## Communicative Grammar Teaching Within a University Course of Foreign Language

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**Abstract:** The study deals with grammar teaching to university students through communication in situations of their future career. Recent techniques of communicative grammar teaching touch upon classroom activities involving students in meaningful participation in cognitive problem-solving, opinion sharing, language games, role play or student-led discussions and debates, question-answer interaction according to the specific speakers' discourse goals through replication of naturally-occurring social interaction. Being a facilitator in language acquisitions the teacher is to make the students "communicatively competent" in second/Foreign language in accordance with specific social behavior. Teaching methods (result-oriented or process-oriented, form-focused and form-defocused) help to replicate authentic communication in the classroom in accordance with specific social behavior.

**Key words:** Grammar teaching, meaningful communication, linguistic proficiency, socially appropriate behavior, Communication

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### INTRODUCTION

Teachers of Foreign language of Belgorod State National Research University postulate that grammar should be taught not as a set of rules, with attendant sets of vocabulary to be memorized. It is understood as a dynamic resource for creating meaning in the process of teaching/learning based on cognitive mechanisms, i.e., "the process of habit formation". Evidently language teachers arrange the educational process according to the following integrated principles: 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' to enable learners to deploy grammatical knowledge to communicate effectively. Acquiring morphology through communication learners are forced to attend to both the forms and their meanings and acquiring syntax they are engaged into activity attending to the word order and the meanings the words are associated with. Moreover, a communicative grammar teaching is based on the combination of analysis of text structure and linguistic features of text. Discourse analysis is considered to be a useful analytic tool for making informed changes in instructional practices. Besides, it involves looking at both language form and its function and includes the study of both spoken interaction and written texts. It identifies linguistic features that characterize different genres as well as social and cultural factors that aid in interpretation and understanding of different texts and types of conversation. A discourse analysis of written texts might

include a study of topic development and cohesion across the sentences while an analysis of spoken language might focus on these aspects plus turn-taking practices, opening and closing sequences of social encounters, or narrative structure.

**Literature review:** A number of researchers e.g., Bybee, (2006), Celce-Murcia (2002) and Pienemann (1984) have argued that if the goal of second/foreign language learning/teaching is the development of communicative competence, enabling learners to use language for communicative purposes grammar and communication must be integrated. Recent suggestions recommend teaching learners grammar in a manner of the "teachability hypothesis" developed by Pienemann (1984) which suggests passing learners through fixed developmental sequences used to express grammatically correct messages. Taking these considerations into account, grammar teaching is to be coincided with the learner's linguistic proficiency to focus on meaning while communicating.

According to the communicative approach in language teaching, it has become increasingly clear that grammar is a resource to be used in the comprehension and creation of oral and written discourse by those who are trained to function as an academic, a diplomat or a business executive. In order to possess mastery of a language, i.e., produce the language spontaneously in classroom activities, they must have at least some

knowledge about the construction of grammatical items of the language. This knowledge enables the learners to understand and make meaning in the communicative classroom and makes them proficient users of the target language.

In recent studies (Bybee, 2006; Du Bois, 1987; Ariel, 2008, 2009) grammar and discourse consider to complement each other. In this regard, the grammar/discourse relationship is that discourse and grammar definitely going together “like the horse and the carriage” (Ariel, 2009) are very much parts of one system of linguistic behavior. According to Bybee (2006) “usage feeds into the creation of grammar just as much as grammar determines the shape of usage” (Bybee, 2006).

University teachers should decide in which dimension the students are experiencing the greatest learning challenge at any given moment and respond with appropriate instruction.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In light of the foregoing discussion, we understand communicative teaching as a way of teaching a language through communication, depending on the needs of the learners.

The grammar point used in real speech “sticks in the learner’s mind, insight into pattern as an equal partner with communicative use” (Hawkins, 1984). This requires learners to become active thinkers in order to discover for themselves how the grammar of the language they are studying works. The teacher’s job is to create the conditions that will elicit the grammar rule from their students. This type of instruction often leads to implicit knowledge. The main objective of the teacher is to motivate students to use their knowledge of the world in order to accomplish tasks which is what is called dual processing. Although, language is the focal point of what they’re doing, relating it to things that they know creates a stronger bond between the new concepts and stored knowledge in the brain which links multiple concepts and makes it easier for students to remember and activate the new information later on in real social situation. For example, students of clinical psychology department do need to know how to talk about advantages and disadvantages of drug and non-drug mental disorders treating, what they can do with autistic children and etc.

Supporting the suggestions of Celce-Murcia (2002), we advocate the meaningful communication, i.e. to teach grammar with reference to meaning, social factors or discourse or a combination of these factors, considering form, meaning and function as three interacting dimensions of language.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Teaching grammar as meaning:** Though, methods of teaching have undergone a lot of rethinking the discovery approach appears to be an effective technique for teaching. It focuses on a particular point, when the students are provided with some information to illustrate a particular grammatical feature and in such a way, they are getting the opportunity to explore the examples, analyze them, make hypotheses and draw conclusions about a particular grammatical structure. This leads to a meaningful and active understanding how the rule works in an intuitive way and enables the learner to access it quickly and easily for purposes of communication.

The students should be provided with cognitive problem-solving, involving tasks aimed at creative activities of the learners. It is important for learners to have plenty of contextualized examples of the structure and to understand them. Visual materials can also contribute to understanding. In such circumstances, students are more actively involved in acquiring knowledge. The learners begin with listening to a statement/question that contains a certain phenomenon. They first process this for meaning. Then, they listen again, this time they focus their attention on the target grammatical feature (e.g., the teacher underlines it with the intonation or emphasis). At the next stage, they use the data to try to arrive at an explicit understanding of the rule (e.g., they grasp the use of the passive voice). Then follows an error-identification task where they can check if they have understood the rule clearly. Finally, the learners try to use the correct grammatical structure in their own sentences. Here are some examples of discovery technique used by us to illustrate the conscious-raising tasks:

- An example activity
- Level: intermediate
- Point: the passive voice

**Setting the context:** Education in our country is guaranteed by the Constitution. It is ensured by the broad development of secondary education, vocational and specialized schools, universities and academies.

- Are many schools, gymnasiums and lyceums opened in the region? (Elicit the response yes)
- What education is considered compulsory by law? (Elicit the response a 9 year education)
- When was the first teachers’ training college opened in our town? (Elicit a few ideas)
- When was it reorganized into the Pedagogical Institute? (Elicit a few dates)

- Why is not higher education considered compulsory by law? (Elicit a few ideas)
- What specializations are the students of our university trained for? (Elicit pedagogical and non-pedagogical specializations)
- How are the applicants enrolled to the University? (Elicit according to the results of their state secondary school exams)
- Who are practical classes and lectures conducted by? (Elicit by highly qualified lecturers)
- When is a scholarship guaranteed for a student? (Elicit a few ideas)

Now you can ask questions based on the story to try to elicit the structure:

- What secondary educational institutions are established in our region?
- What college is known to be the first in the area? When was it opened?
- What was it reorganized into?
- What professions are the students trained for?
- Is a scholarship guaranteed for every student?

You can suggest the students to say some words about the accommodation facilities at the university and students' life:

- If the university is well-equipped with computers
- If the working hours of the library are considered convenient
- If the campus is planned rationally
- If the lectures are conducted by prominent scientists
- If the timetable is often changed
- If the hostels are located far from the university, etc

**Level intermediate:** Grammar point: might+Perfect Infinitive. My friend Nick is a good student. He usually passes all his exams successfully but he hasn't passed physics this week. He says he has been preparing for it for 5 days but he has failed. Question: What might have happened?

- S1; he might have fallen ill
- S2; it might have happened by chance
- S3; Nick might have become sure he wouldn't fail

Question: Could you help him?

- S1; I might have revised all the material with him before the exam
- S2; we might have explained the most difficult tasks
- S3; he might have asked for our help

Question: Could the lecturer be more agreeable?

- S1; he might have asked him more additional questions
- S2; he might have taken into consideration his excellent marks in other subjects
- S3; the lecturer might have got tired and didn't want to be tolerant

Question: What would you have done if you had failed at the exam?

- S1; I might have asked the lecturer to give me some time for revision
- S2; I might have devoted all my time for physics
- S3; I might have felt upset

Ask questions based on the story to try to elicit the structure:

- Why hasn't Nick passed the exam?
- Might he have passed physics with an excellent mark?
- Might it have happened by chance?
- Might there have been serious reasons for his failure?
- How could his groupmates help him?
- Do you consider that the lecturer was too strict?
- Are there any ways to convince the lecturer that you know the subject?

The evidence seems to show beyond doubt that the discovery approach has a number of advantages:

- It is more motivated than deductive approach
- It supports developing communication abilities
- It develops the analytical skills of a learner
- It requires learners to be active thinkers
- It trains the skills of noticing
- It provides practice in monitoring
- It fosters curiosity and desire to work on the language

However, although the inductive approach is generally accepted to be more beneficial it demands serious preparatory work and more time for learners.

**Teaching as social function:** Considering the social function of language through the prism of teaching in real-life conditions it must be emphasized that it focuses on the development of students' communicative grammatical competence which is understood as the

ability to use and understand a structure in a variety of social situations spontaneously and appropriately. Students can be pushed to produce language that reflects their own ideas, experiences, opinions, etc. as these personal bonds also help to cement patterns and structures more efficiently than utterances that have no relevance to students' lives. In other words, we teach them how to say things that they need to know how to say, either because it's a part of their lives or because they're interested in it.

For example, studying Past Perfect the students are offered to remember the brightest impressions from their lives (e.g. an unforgettable journey, the greatest success, received injury and etc.). After it the teacher asks them to express their feelings using the phrase "I had never (or always) before" and can add "But afterwards I" thus using Past Perfect in comparison with Past Simple. Another task is aimed to practice the use of modal verbs.

Teacher: You have been offered a well-paid job by a rich employer. And you badly need money. But people have told you that his business is dishonest. So, give your comments, ideas or questions to suggest possible, advisable or necessary courses of action using modal verbs: should, ought to, may, might, could.

No doubt, getting such tasks, students become more active because they deal with their own social experience. Here are some more ideas of communicative activities.

**Conversation cards:** In this activity, the students are engaged into asking and answering each other questions, exchanging cards then and moving on to talk to a different student. In the guided version, all students use the cues written on the cards asking the same questions and answering them. In the communicative version, some students use cards cues only asking questions and expecting the answers of the rest students. Here are the examples of questions presented on the conversation cards to be used to practice the construction "have got". Tell about your family, answering the following questions.

Have you got a large family? Have you got a sister? Have you got a brother? Have you got any aunts or uncles? Have you got any pets at home?

**Tell about your flat or house:** Have you got a flat/a house? Have you got a large or small flat/house? Have you got a flat in a new block of flats or in an old house? Have you got a living room? Have you got a sofa and armchairs in your room? Have you got your own room?

**Tell what you do at home:** Have you got any good books at home? Have you got a piano (a violin, a guitar) at

home? Have you got any table games at home? Have you got any good music records? Here is another communicative activity to practice in Present Continuous.

**Discuss the following questions in pairs:**

- What are you doing now?
- Were you sleeping at midnight?
- Where will you be going at 8 am tomorrow?
- You are studying now, aren't you?
- Will you be having breakfast at 7 am tomorrow?
- Are your groupmates taking a rest now?
- Were you doing homework the whole evening yesterday?

Communicative activity to raise students' awareness of the future tense in the context of predictions: each student gets a card with a horoscope. Then they exchange their opinions speaking about every zodiac sign.

Aries March 21 to April 20; This year will be very successful for you! You will travel and meet a lot of new friends. Maybe you will even meet the love of your life!

Libra September 23 to October 22; This year won't have a very good start. Perhaps you will have problems with friends. Things will get better in summer but winter will be the best!

Taurus April 21 to May 20; This will be a tough year. You will have problems in the beginning but because you are such a hardworking student, things will work out in the end!

Scorpio October 23 to November 21; Hungry for adventure? This will be your year! The stars will help you in your troubles but try to listen to your brain, too.

Gemini May to June 21; This year will be complicated. You will lose some friends but your real friends will stand by you! Winter will be dangerous for your health.

Sagittarius November 22 to December 21; This year will bring happiness to your life. Problems that made you sad last year will end and you will feel much better and free!

Cancer June 22 to July 22; Parents, parents, parents! This year they will try to control your life more than ever. This will make you angry but try to listen to them. Perhaps you will benefit from their advice.

Capricorn December 22 to January 19; This year won't bring you much luck. There will be some small problems in school and the teachers won't be very patient with you, so be careful! Try to work harder if you can!

Leo July 23 to August 22; This year will bring love to your life. You will fall in love madly. Be careful! Summer will be critical. You will need money this year, so try to find some kind of job.

Aquarius January 20 to February 18; This will be a fun year! You'll meet interesting people, you'll visit interesting places and you'll have enough money. Love will also find you but you'll have to wait until the end of the year!

Virgo August to September 22; This year, the stars will help you at school. You will think fast and everything will seem easy. If you study, you will be the best student in the class!

Pisces February 19 to March 20; Chaos! This year, you will often wonder why all problems seem to find you. Don't worry and trust your instincts. You will always find the right way. This year will also bring some romance!

After students have read the horoscopes, make them discuss and answer the following questions in small groups:

- What are horoscopes? What do they do?
- What are some of the typical themes of horoscopes?
- What do you notice about the way that the horoscopes are written?

What's your zodiac sign? Do you believe in astrology (the study of the position of planets and stars and the belief that they have an effect on our lives)? Why or why not?

To make communicative activities result effectively they should be mentally stimulating, in other words used in real life context. Students have to be encouraged to actually think about what they're doing and what for not just let the information go in one ear and out the other. This is referred to a social function. In this regard, we propose to use "opinion sharing". It is one of the most enjoyable communicative activities. It involves students in comparing small groups' values, opinions and beliefs.

In the case of misunderstanding such activity helps to develop not only students' skills but also turn-taking, agreeing/disagreeing and negotiating meaning discussion abilities. Let's consider an example of forcing students to use subjunctive mood: ask and answer questions using the phrase "How would you treat your clients if you were a highly qualified clinician and have your own private clinic? What method would you choose? Would you use drug or non-drug methods of treating? Why?" It should be noted that this sample of activity is also regarded as "problem solving". The students are presented with a problem or a set of problems. Discussing the problem/s they identify issues and suggest solutions.

Adult learner theory says that activities that allow adults to bring their own life experiences to the learning process are the most successful. In this way, role play is

ideal. And it is not just important for low level learners to practice asking directions or buying a ticket. With a bit of tweaking, the same tasks can be used with more advanced levels. Some element of conflict can be easily introduced to make the task more challenging.

Here are some examples of the situations: Imagine that you are a clinician. Your client complains of constant migraine headache. Give your recommendations using the modals could (for suggestions) and should (for advice).

- Imagine that you are a psychologist. Your client has some kind of phobias (fear of flying/height/crowds/unknown and etc.). Consult him/her using the modals could (for suggestions) and should (for advice).
- Imagine that you are a speech-language pathologist. You've just diagnosed a child who has some speech disorders. What would you advise his parents in home language environment?

In such a way, a teacher fulfills students' cognitive needs of curiosity, acquiring knowledge, problem solving and drive for communication. This is also accomplished through peer learning and interaction as students are then able to not only debate and consider different aspects of the material together but also get and give explanations that make concepts much clearer. Peer learning also encourages oral communication which requires more mental energy and engagement and trains them to accomplish probably the most complicated and useful tasks of all speaking activities.

If all of these things are taken into account when planning classroom and homework activities, the end result is the activation of neural networks that are far more extensive than those activated by a few fill-in exercises. Essentially, teachers are hitting the problem from multiple angles and increasing the likelihood that students will not only retain but use the language that they're learning. So, there is the link between and socially appropriate behavior.

**Teaching as discourse:** Interestingly, discourse cannot but reflect : it contains only, or virtually only, grammatical language products complete spoken and written texts. At the same time, discourse makes a selective use of choosing just those grammatical forms which suit the specific speaker's discourse goals in turn, reflects discourse: " codes (best) what speakers do most in discourse" (Du Bois, 1987). It also makes a selective use of discourse, "choosing" some but not other discourse patterns for grammaticization (Thompson and Mulac, 1991). In other words, it is underlined that there's constant feedback between and discourse, each of them simultaneously takes the active role of the horse as well as the passive role of the carriage.

Taking into account that discourse is the product of the use of in particular natural contexts, teaching as discourse focuses on complete spoken and written texts as language products and cultural contexts in which the language operates. Arguing the intricate relations between discourse and it's surely worth mentioning that discursal procedures operate within the sentence, so as grammatical procedures operate across sentences and even speakers (Van Dijk, 1972). Sentences may behave as if they were a piece of discourse and discourse may obey grammatical principles. Evidently, discourse-specific principles directly dictate that speakers prefer some grammatical options over others. Being engaged in discourse to complete certain communicative goals speakers can do one thing for addressees choose their linguistic utterances in such a way that will facilitate the addressees in their interpretations. That's why, the constructions actually found in discourse do not reflect a random selection of conceptually appropriate and grammatically well-formed strings.

**Teaching the four language skills combined in spoken and written discourse:** In the process of communication the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) should be taught not in isolation but in conjunction as a complex of interrelated language processes pushing students from drills to guided conversation and then to free-communication in every lesson. Even though the classroom is clearly not the same as "real life," it could be argued that part of its function is to replicate it. If the main job of the teacher is to make the students "communicatively competent" in second/foreign language, then the teacher as a facilitator in language acquisitions should involve the learners in the learning process through problem solving, tasks, participation in group work, pair work, language games, role play and question-answer interaction. By taking the chance to perform meaningful tasks and activities in the classroom which expose learners to these skills in conjunction, they naturally will gain deeper understanding of how communication works in the foreign language as well as becoming more motivated.

Authentic written and spoken discourse-based teaching can be a perfect resource for teachers to teach the different language skills. For instance, through a newspaper study, a letter or an extract from a book, a rule can be taught. Students can learn the rule (how it is used in context) as well as learn new vocabulary and benefit from reading the study. Then using the same piece of discourse, students can practice speaking through retelling the information in the study to a partner/to the group with an emphasis on using the taught point

correctly. Also, students can be involved into writing an essay or a paragraph about a certain idea in the study. Moreover, a teacher can use a natural piece of spoken discourse like a real recorded conversation, a phone call, an interview, or an example of teacher's speech. Through, that students can learn oral discourse management of rhythm and intonation as well as have a chance to explore authentic social interaction that takes place between people in real life. Then, a teacher can design a role play or student-led discussions and debates in order for the students to practice speaking through what they have learned and assign a writing exercise to practice writing.

**Application of 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, e.g., the university students study the topic "Belgorod State National Research University" which can be chosen to teach the passive voice in context as well as developing other language skills.

While reading the text students learn some information about the history of "Belgorod State National Research University" and develop comprehension. Through, practicing in reading the text, students learn the passive voice inductively, see how it is employed in context and learn new vocabulary.

Speaking about Belgorod State National Research University students can start asking questions as a warm-up, e.g., the teacher: ask questions about the location of the University, its history, etc. As a post activity, students can discuss in pairs or as a group the university facilities for successful study with an emphasis on using the passive.

Listening skills of students can be developed through engaging in discussions. Thus 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.

To develop writing skills students may be asked to choose a famous sight, gather information and write an essay/paragraph about it. It can be assigned as homework.

**Application of spoken discourse:** The teacher can adopt any material of English spoken discourse such as for instance, TV interview that serves the point of the lesson and suits the level of the learners. The teacher should

provide learners with 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 activity comes after introducing the topic. Learners listen to/watch the TV interview several times, getting familiar with the English intonation, stress, pausing and other characteristics of the spoken language. Learners also get the chance to listen to expressions, phrasal verbs and grammatical structures used in real-life context.

Speaking activity can be designed by the teacher after listening several times. Such activity forces students 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 facts and use of expressions.

Writing activity 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 activity can be arranged as a peer review. Students can exchange papers, read each others' writing and write comments if necessary, for improvement.

Focusing on productive skills (i.e., speaking and, in particular, writing) formal accuracy is considered to be an important concern because rules of pedagogical are essentially rules of production. For the productive skills, register and medium are additional factors to consider.

Furthermore, communicative teaching can be successful if the teaching techniques help to replicate authentic communication in the classroom. The communicative classroom activities according to the learner's immediate goal can be as the following:

- Listen to the tape and react to the questions in the pauses provided/dramatize it
- Find the differences between the pictures that you and your partner has without looking at these pictures and only by asking questions
- Restore the logical order between parts of the written text, producing an "opinion gap" and boost communication
- Write a letter of complaint to the hotel about their service and demand a compensation for the spoiled holiday
- Hold an opinion poll in the group by asking everybody questions and report the results (every learner has a set of his/her own questions)
- Role-play a job interview in which you want the job as soon as possible while the manager is taking time and hoping to find a better candidate

Surely, there are certain advantages of using both types of discourse in communicative teaching: firstly, students learn grammatical rules in context; secondly, they get familiar with essay organization and explore different writing styles, noticing how punctuations are employed in a text; thirdly, exploring naturally-occurring social interaction in S/FL they master oral discourse management of prosody: rhythm, stress and intonation.

As it can be realized from the information above, "result-oriented" or "process-oriented" teaching methods occupy an intermediate position in communicative teaching. A result-oriented method advocates the idea of a final goal with the emphasis on its speediest achievement and the obligatory equal results achieved by all the learners. A process-oriented method focuses on the teaching/learning procedure with the individual pace of learning and the final results varying according to individual learner differences. Besides, form-focused methods focus teachers and learners on the forms of the target language. Form-defocused methods concentrate teacher's and learner's attention on speech patterns rather than on structures.

## CONCLUSION

Communicative approach to teaching, along with lexis and also phonology for spoken discourse gives learners the opportunity to create meaning through text and to negotiate socially motivated communication. Identifying the best ways of doing so in Foreign language classrooms it's important to maximize-focus activity without sacrificing meaning-focus communication. The importance of a reasonable degree of grammatical accuracy in academic or professional communication cannot be overstated. Both the findings of research studies and the authors' personal teaching experiences support the conclusion that most students do not benefit from study in isolation from meaningful communication in real-life situations if indeed our purpose in teaching is to help students improve their communicative competence. In the process of communicative teaching all the four skills are equally treated, involving many classroom activities like group work, pair work, language games, role play, question-answer sessions, task-based and problem solving situations. Thus a great variety of teaching techniques helps to replicate authentic communication in the classroom in accordance with specific social behavior.

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