

# The grammar we teach

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## ABSTRACT

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Second language teachers are great consumers of grammar. They are mainly interested in pedagogical grammar, but they are generally unaware of the work of theoretical linguists, such as Chomsky and Halliday. Whereas Chomsky himself has never suggested in any way that his work might be of benefit to L2 teaching, Halliday and his many disciples, have. It seems odd that language teachers should choose to ignore the great gurus of grammar. Even if their work is deemed too technical and theoretical for classroom application, it may still shed light on pedagogical grammar and provide a rationale for the way one goes about teaching grammar. In order to make informed decisions about what grammar to teach and how best to teach it, one should take stock of the various schools of grammar that seem to speak in very different voices. In the article, the writer outlines the kinds of grammar that come out of five of these schools, and assesses their usefulness to the L2 teacher.

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## Introduction

In second language teaching, there is an extensive literature on pedagogical grammar, which is defined as “the types of grammatical analysis and instruction designed for the needs of second language students” (Odlin, 1994, p. 1). One does not hear quite as much about the sources of pedagogical grammar, and in particular, the ‘linguistic grammars’ of English that teachers should know about in order to decide which kind of grammar is best suited to their pedagogic purpose and domain. The main schools of English grammar are discussed and their relative usefulness in the context of the ESL classroom is assessed. Five schools of grammar are considered: traditional prescriptive grammar, Structuralist applied grammar, modern descriptive grammar, Chomskyan generative grammar, and Hallidayan systemic functional grammar. The writer expresses his candid views on the value of each of these kinds of grammar for second language teaching purposes. The criteria of good pedagogical grammar include the following:

- truth: i.e., conforming to ( and not contradicting) real English usage
- clarity: i.e., explaining and exemplifying in plain English and not obfuscating by unfamiliar metalanguage
- simplicity: i.e., revealing the critical features of a rule
- comprehensibility: i.e., within the learner’s current competence
- process-oriented: i.e., the rule is capable of being uncovered by inductive means
- usefulness: i.e., having predictive value, as in, for instance, defining form-meaning relationships

### Traditional prescriptive grammar

Traditional grammar tends to be prescriptive. It lays down the norms of correct usage, the 'dos' and 'don'ts'. It is quite dogmatic, and makes clear distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' grammar. It is typically expressed in the following terms:

- Never end a sentence with a preposition.
- Never begin a sentence with 'And'.
- Do not split the infinitive (e.g., \*to really understand).
- Do not use 'shall' for 'will' or vice versa.
- Use 'must' for internal compulsion, and 'have to' for external compulsion.

As Odlin (1994, p. 1) notes, "Much of the time, though not always, decisions about what is good and bad are essentially arbitrary and do not often reflect any crucial principle of language or thought." Thus, traditional grammar is often inaccurate and subjective, and tends to ignore actual usage. It ignores the fact that a living language is constantly in flux, and it tries to preserve features and distinctions that have long since fallen by the way, such as the subjunctive (which hardly exists any more in modern English) and several modal verb fine distinctions (such as the usage contrasts that are supposed to exist between *can/may*, *must/have to*, *shall/will* but which no longer apply today). The problem is that modern descriptive grammars say that certain forms are acceptable, while usage manuals (and word processing grammar checkers) say the opposite. For instance, the COBUILD grammar says that splitting the infinitive is common even among educated users of English, whereas usage manuals still castigate it as a grievous error. The former is clearly descriptive while the latter is prescriptive.

Prescriptive grammar rules sometimes bear little relation to modern English usage. As Hung (2003, p. 44) notes, "the grammar of a language resides not in books but in the minds of its speakers".

### Structuralist applied grammar

Structuralist applied grammar derives from the American Structuralist tradition that goes back to Bloomfield (1933). The Structuralist grammarian simply collects samples of the target language and classifies them in much the same way as a biologist classifies butterflies. According to Cook and Newson (1996), a linguist's task in this tradition is "to bring order to the set of external facts that make up the language" with the resulting grammar being described "in terms of properties of such data through 'structures' or 'patterns'". Chomskyans dismiss this type of grammar as E-language (externalized language). In Chomsky's view, psychologically real grammar must be I-language (internalized language), i.e., it must capture and explain language knowledge in terms of the properties of the human mind (Cook, 1988, pp. 12-17).

The pioneering work on applying Structuralist grammar was carried out by Fries (1945) in the USA and by Hornby (1976) in the UK. Between them, they provide a fairly useful but far from comprehensive taxonomy of the structural patterns of contemporary English. Their 'patterns' provided the inspiration for a whole generation of classical structurally-based English grammar books such as Allen's (1974) *Living English Structure* and many structurally-graded English

courses such as Alexander's (1967) *New Concept English* series and the very popular *Kernel Lessons Intermediate* by O'Neill, Kingsbury, and Yeadon (1971).

Structuralist grammar views language as a taxonomy of set structures or patterns, which act as templates for the generation of any number of sentences on the same pattern. These patterns may be listed, as in Hornby (1976, pp. 13-14):

- [VP1] S + BE + subject complement/adjunct
- [VP2A] S + vi
- [VP2B] S + vi + (for) + adverbial adjunct etc.

Each pattern is then expanded into more delicate subsets of exponents. Thus, VP1 yields the following intransitive patterns:

- 1) subject + BE + noun / pronoun; e.g., *This is a book.*
- 2) subject + BE + adjective; e.g., *It was dark.*
- 3) subject + BE + prepositional group; e.g., *She is in good health.*
- 4) subject + BE + adverbial adjunct; e.g., *Your friend is here.*
- 5) There + BE + subject; e.g., *There was a large crowd.*
- 6) There + BE + subject + adverbial adjunct; e.g., *There are three windows in this room.*
- 7) It + BE + adjective / noun + to-infinitive; e.g., *It is so nice to sit here.*
- 8) How / What + adjective/noun + (it +BE) + to-infinitive; e.g., *How nice it is to sit here with you!*
- 9) It + BE + adjective/noun + gerund; e.g., *It is so nice sitting here with you.*
- 10) Subject + BE + clause; e.g., *The trouble is (that) all the shops are shut.*

Structuralist grammar has had a long lasting and harmful effect on the teaching of English. It has had a significant impact on both syllabus design and on teaching methodology. The problem with Structuralist grammar was that the linguist's taxonomy became the teacher's syllabus. In other words, the English syllabus focused almost exclusively on syntax. As Woods (1995, p. 37) notes that "the L2 grammar syllabus was and in many cases still is almost mathematical in its structural progression."

The structural syllabus consists of a long list of grammatical structures in ascending order of linguistic complexity, ranging from the most basic patterns (e.g., *This is my hand.*) to elaborate complex sentences (e.g., *I realize how hard it is for some people to learn a second language.*). The structural inventory is derived not from the learner's needs but from the grammarian's analysis. Staging and sequencing of structures are based on linguistic criteria:

- simplicity, i.e., simple structures before difficult
- regularity, i.e., regular forms before irregular ones
- frequency, i.e., frequency of occurrence in natural language, and
- contrastive affinity i.e., in the early stages one should focus on those language forms which present the fewest contrastive difficulties to the L2 learner

Research in second language acquisition (SLA) has questioned the validity of these criteria, and arguments in favour of a structural syllabus, which adopts an atomistic approach, are hard to sustain (McDonough, 1977). In some cases, the progression from one type of structure to the next had to be structurally

motivated. Thus, for instance, one was supposed to go from

(a) subject + is/are + complement

to

(b) subject + is /are + vb-ing

even though there is no semantic linkage between copular BE in (a) and auxiliary BE in (b).

The limitations of the structural syllabus are well known and need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that it focused on usage rather than on use, and made a major contribution to the phenomenon known as 'structure speech', a pejorative term sometimes used to describe the output of learners who are structurally competent but communicatively incompetent.

The audio-lingual method (ALM) was an approach to L2 teaching based on Structuralist linguistics and Behaviourist learning theory. The basic assumption was that a language is made up of a limited set of structural patterns, and that mastery of a given language is achieved by drilling the patterns to the point of over-learning. ALM initially comprised an inductive presentation of the 'key structure' followed by extensive practice. Oral practice was tightly controlled and consisted of a battery of drills of various types, which was complemented by written exercises, mainly of the gap-filling variety. In later versions of ALM, the Presentation -Practice- Production (PPP) instructional cycle emerged. The PPP formula has stood the test of time and still remains the instrument by which a structural syllabus is implemented. In spite of the dire warnings of Dakin (1973) on the damage done to the learner by 'meaningless drill', the Structuralist bandwagon still has its adherents, and many L2 learners are still being subjected to the mind-numbing experience of choral drilling in the classroom or in the language laboratory.

### **Modern descriptive grammar**

Nowadays, nobody knowingly teaches old-fashioned prescriptive grammar, and Structuralist grammar is not nearly as popular as it used to be, even though the PPP instructional cycle is still widely used. Prescriptive grammar has been replaced by modern descriptive grammar, which describes language as it is, not as it should be. It is objective, based on a massive corpus of real English, spoken and written, and it considers many structures that traditional grammar either ignored completely (e.g., determiners and verb complementation) or discussed only briefly (e.g., aspect and adverbial clauses). It exists in large works such as Jespersen's seven-volume *Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* (1922-1942) (Odlin, 1994, p. 3). Although a prescriptive grammarian in many ways, Jespersen (1922-1942) has elements that foreshadow a more modern approach. Modern descriptive grammar came rather later with the much-quoted *A Grammar of Contemporary English* by Quirk et al. (1972), *A comprehensive grammar of the English language* by Quirk et al. (1985), *The Oxford English grammar* by Greenbaum (1996), the *Longman grammar of spoken and written English* by Biber et al. (1999) and *The Cambridge grammar of the English language* by Huddleston and Pullum

(2002). Not all of these are corpus-based; the first generation of descriptive grammars may be said to be the work of 'armchair grammarians', while only the current generation is corpus-based.

Descriptive grammar, and especially the corpus variety, also exists in countless shorter volumes designed as reference grammars for advanced learners and teachers of English such as the *Collins COBUILD English grammar* (1990), Greenbaum and Quirk's (1990) *A student's grammar of the English language*, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman's (1999) *The grammar book* and Parrott's (2000) *Grammar for English language teachers*. It also appears as pedagogical grammars for learners of English such as Willis and Wright's (1995) *Collins COBUILD basic grammar*, Murphy's (1997) *Essential grammar in use*, Carter, Hughes and McCarthy's (2000) *Exploring grammar in context*, Swan and Walter's (1997) *How English works*, Azar's (1989) *Understanding and using English grammar* and Hewings' (2001) *Advanced grammar in use*.

Descriptive grammar, like other kinds of grammar, relies on structural analysis. It looks at syntax on many levels: morpheme, word, phrase, clause, sentence, and text. For example, at the sentence level, each simple sentence is analysed into its constituent 'sentence elements', i.e., subject, verb, object, etc. These high level units are then analysed into their phrasal components, i.e., noun phrase, verb phrase, etc. Phrases in turn are analysed into form classes .e.g., determiner, noun, etc. When it comes to pedagogical grammar, most of the grammar can be conveniently packaged under the headings NP (Noun Phrase) and VP (Verb Phrase).

Corpus grammar claims to describe real English in that the examples it gives are taken from real contexts of English use and are not made up as in traditional grammars. For instance, a traditional description of the future tense focuses exclusively on 'shall' and 'will', and the many subtle distinctions that are supposed to exist between them. However, an analysis of what people actually say shows that 'shall' and 'will' are seldom used in a purely predictive sense, but occur mainly as modal verbs, indicating speaker attitudes such as willingness, determination, promise and refusal. Instead of 'will' and 'shall', we find that other forms are used to express futurity.

### **Chomskyan generative grammar**

Chomsky (1965) claims that language is an innate ability which is unique to the human species. Furthermore, he claims that language is made in the mind, and hence grammar is the mirror of the mind. Odlin (1994, p. 4) notes that "scholars have long recognized that grammatical patterning reflects, however indirectly, a complex neurological system defined by the capabilities and limitations of the human brain." Chomsky has over the years tried to come up with a new kind of grammar, a 'mental grammar' that would have not only descriptive adequacy, but also explanatory adequacy. Similar views on the relationship between language and mind are expressed by Pinker (1994).

There is no need for applied linguists and teachers to immerse themselves in the different generations of Chomskyan theory that have appeared over the years,

from 1957 to the present. The early versions of transformational grammar have been abandoned in favour of *Universal Grammar*, also known as 'principles and parameters theory' and its recent revisions known as the *Minimalist Program* (Chomsky, 1995).

The architecture of the two current Chomskyan models is clearly spelt out by Cook and Newson (1996). They point out that "the sounds are the external face of language" while "the meanings are the internal face of language" (p. 42). The 'sounds' make up the Phonetic Form (PF) component, and 'the meanings' make up the Logical Form (LF) component. The old labels 'deep' and 'surface' structures have been dropped and we now have D-structure and S-structure. "D-structure is related to S-structure by movement: S-structure is interpreted by the PF and LF components in their respective ways to yield the phonetic and semantic representations" (Cook & Newson, 1996, p. 47).

Just as the world was accommodating to the new Universal Grammar outlined above, Chomsky (1995) decided to get rid of D- and S-structure, arguing that since language is a mapping between sound and meaning, the only absolutely necessary representations are the lexicon, the meaning component (LF) and the sound component (PF). A new concept called 'Spell-out' has been introduced. 'Spell-out' is an operation that takes all phonetic and semantic information from the lexicon and splits them into sound elements (PF) and all other information (LF).

Since the Minimalist Program is at the cutting edge of Chomskyan theory, we shall have to wait to see what impact, if any, it may have on the teaching of grammar. It may mean that we cannot teach grammar at all, since I-language is a generative procedure that works subconsciously.

Some years before, Chomsky made a crucial distinction between 'E-language' and 'I-language' (Cook, 1988). E-language is 'external' to the learner. It is the kind of grammar one finds in school grammar books. On the other hand, I-language is 'internal' to the learner. It is language that is stored in the mind. The distinction is marked in the way grammar is taught. The E-language approach sees grammar as a linear sequence of 'patterns' or 'structures' which are accumulated progressively over time. The I-language approach sees grammar as knowledge in the mind in the form of rules or principles which allow learners to generate countless novel utterances and to evaluate the grammaticality of the sentences others produce. This distinction is largely ignored in even the most recent grammar books for teaching purposes. A cursory glance at typical ESL grammar books will show that it is E-language that is taught in schools. One of the most widely used grammar books for elementary students of English is Murphy's (1997) *Essential Grammar in Use*. It contains 114 units of work ranging from am/is/are (Unit 1) to relative clauses (Unit 114). Each unit focuses on a specific grammar point. On the left-hand page, there are examples of the target structure, followed by explanation, and on the right-hand page, there are exercises, mostly of the gap-filling variety, or sentences to complete. There are also some attractive visuals to elicit the target structure. The examples ≠ explanation ≠ exercises sequence reflects the traditional instructional cycle, PPP (i.e., Presentation, Practice, and Production). These 'accumulated units' (Rutherford, 1987) are clearly E-language.



The validity of E-language in teaching the grammar of a second language has been questioned in recent years. Since grammar is made in the mind, it seems quite futile to attempt to teach it as if it were external to the learner. The main objection to the structurally graded syllabus concerns what Ellis (1993) refers to as the 'learnability' problem. Grammar is not acquired in a linear and atomistic fashion. Rather it grows and develops in fits and starts, and along a route that at one time claimed to be impervious to instruction. However, we now know that instruction (of the right kind) does help. Learners need to experience the process of 'grammaring'. They need to know how English grammar works. They have to discover how the various grammatical systems (such as tense, aspect, mood, modality, and voice) operate and interact, and the main task of teaching should be to show "how to create the right conditions for students to 'uncover' grammar" (Thornbury, 2001). Most importantly, students must explore the meaning-making function of grammar, and find out how various notions, relationships, and shifts of focus are 'grammared' in English. It is not enough for students to be able to perform mechanical operations such as transforming sentences from the active to the passive. They have to be sensitised to the process of passivisation and its functions in discourse. Likewise, it is not enough to drill students on the formation of relative clauses; they have to understand the process of relativisation and its role in the noun phrase. It is not enough to imagine that learning English grammar is a matter of mastering the tenses one by one, without developing a feeling for tense harmonisation, and noticing how tense and aspect overlap and enable us to express a wide range of concepts, both temporal and non-temporal. In a word, grammar teaching cannot be equated with the progressive mastery of discrete units of structure, but with the process of understanding and internalising rule systems, and then out-performing one's emerging 'internal' grammar, a process Thornbury (2001) calls 'grammaring' and Rutherford (1987) 'grammaticization'.

In an effort to help learners develop an understanding of 'how language works', many teachers have abandoned the conventional 'grammar bashing' approach in favour of *language awareness* (James & Garrett, 1993; Van Lier, 1995) so that instead of presenting grammatical rules to the students, we present them with linguistic data from which they can work out the rules inductively in their own way. In this way, we set them a linguistic task or problem to solve. Often referred to as 'guided discovery', this type of linguistic exploration takes many forms, all of which require noticing of features in the input (e.g., listing items, classifying items, making up a rule, etc.) and are intended to raise the learners' consciousness of how language works. It is a process-oriented approach as opposed to the conventional product-oriented approach.

The case for process-oriented grammar teaching (or Consciousness-Raising) has been argued by many writers, notably Batstone (1994), Fotos (1993), Rutherford (1987), and Schmidt (1990). In terms of classroom application, the process model appears in the work of several writers who use different terminologies, for instance, Bourke (1992) who makes the case for inductive linguistic problem-solving as a means of internalising L2 grammar, Wright (1994) who offers a comprehensive set of awareness-raising tasks, Ellis (1995) who proposes interpretation tasks for grammar teaching, and Thornbury (2001) who

elaborates the concept of 'uncovering grammar' in the form of grammaring, consciousness-raising, and grammar emergence tasks.

There are two ways in which Chomsky's views on grammar may affect the teaching of grammar. One possibility is that we should 'lose' formal grammar teaching altogether, as 'nativists' (such as Elley, 1997 and Prabhu, 1987) advocate, since learners will acquire it naturally in their own way and in their own time and according to their 'built-in syllabus.' The claim is that formal grammar teaching may hamper rather than help the process of grammar construction by the learner. Cook (1994, p. 42) notes that it is unlikely that any overall teaching methodology could be based on UG. Universal principles, such as structure-dependency, are built into the mind: "[They] are not learnt, so do not need to be taught" (ibid).

A second possibility would be to attempt to use Chomsky's formal grammar as pedagogical grammar. This approach, however, seems to make a complex subject (viz grammar) even more complex, because of the unfamiliar metalanguage and underlying assumptions. Chomsky did not intend his grammar to be used for teaching purposes, even though some applied linguists, notably Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) and Yule (1996) make extensive use of phrase structure (PS) rules and tree (T) diagrams, which is rather odd in that Chomsky's 'Aspects' model is now obsolete. PS-rules and T-rules are no longer part of the Chomskyan enterprise. Even in the heyday of transformational grammar, they were contestable and contested. In his *Minimalist Program*, Chomsky (1995; 2002, pp. 94-5) rejects the whole notion of rule systems and constructions such as VP and relative clause, in favour of more abstract 'Principles and Parameters'.

It may be best to see Chomsky as providing the mentalist rationale for grammar teaching just as Halliday may be seen as providing the social rationale.

### Hallidayan systemic functional grammar

Just as Chomsky approaches grammar from a mentalist perspective, Halliday (1994) approaches it from a social perspective. Chomsky is interested mainly in linguistic competence whereas Halliday is mainly interested in pragmatic competence, i.e., knowing how to use language appropriately in order to achieve certain communicative goals or intentions. Whereas Chomsky is a minimalist (or 'lumper'), Halliday is a 'maximalist' (or 'splitter').

The basic claim of Hallidayan systemic functional (SF) grammar is that every use (or function) of English determines the form of the language that is used for that particular purpose. Grammar is thus a tool for making meaning. For example, in expressing 'certainty', one may select from a range of possible exponents, e.g.,

Abu broke the window. (asserting)  
 I know that Abu broke the window. (confirming)  
 It was Abu who broke the window. (identifying)

In SF grammar, all meaning comes out of three 'metafunctions':

- 1) The *ideational* metafunction refers to the use of language to represent the



world and how we experience it, e.g., to talk about the weather or to say what is going on.

- 2) The *interpersonal* metafunction refers to language as an exchange between people, as in greetings, polite requests, giving instructions, etc.
- 3) The *textual* metafunction refers to the ways language 'holds together' as a text, i.e., how it forms a coherent message rather than just a collection of sentences.

The context in which the language occurs is also divided into three parts:

- 1) The *field* is basically what's being talked about and relates to the ideational metafunction;
- 2) The *tenor* has to do with the role relations between the people in the exchange and relates to the interpersonal metafunction; and
- 3) The *mode* has to do with the nature of the exchange - whether it is spoken or written, and the genre. It is related to the textual metafunction.

Unfortunately, there is much more to SF grammar than this simplistic summary suggests and when it comes to its application in language education, SF grammar is a very controversial issue.

In some ways SF grammar seems to be ideally suited to language teaching and learning. Functional grammar is for use. It is communicative grammar that learners can take out of the classroom and use in the ordinary situations of their daily lives. It is not an 'unapplied system' in the head. Moreover, it is semantic grammar, a grammar of meanings, in which grammar is viewed not as a set of rules, but as a communicative resource. Its purpose is to enable the user to 'make meaning', or to use the modern idiom, 'to grammar'. It applies to the analysis of genres (text types), fields (domains of experience), tenors (who is saying what to whom) and modes (oral and written). Thus, for instance, the narrative genre has a generic structure or set of phases. Within each phase of this discourse setting, the grammatical options are worked out, i.e., which narrative tenses to use, tense switching, discourse markers, noun phrase modification, verb complementation, etc. There is no clear separation between grammar and discourse; they melt into each other in the process of generating a text. If grammar can be deployed in this way and packaged within meaningful communicative tasks, it can play a vital role in the development of critical literacy. The school curriculum is a seamless garment and grammar permeates it all, especially in the ever increasing English medium schools where English is used across the curriculum. In this sense, then, functional grammar is natural grammar; it is how we all learned our first language.

Systemic functional grammar is a 'full rich description', which may be too full and too rich for teaching and learning. Many teachers find Hallidayan SF grammar complex and messy. Language is processed through a grid of system networks. At each point in the processing, certain options are made and one enters into ever more delicate system networks until eventually the original metafunctional meaning is transmuted into wording. Meaning is processed simultaneously on three levels—the three metafunctions, viz. ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The output from each stage becomes the input to the next stage. It is a veritable maze, very messy and complex, and it lacks a key ingredient of good pedagogical grammar, viz. simplicity.

As a result, Halliday's disciples have taken upon themselves the onerous task of explicating, propagating, and marketing SF grammar to the wide world (e.g., see articles in *Interchange* No.27, April, 1995). Unfortunately, what claims to be based on systemics and genre seems far removed from the kind of grammar proposed by Halliday himself. Australia has produced a vast genre-based literature, loosely linked to Halliday, which may be very scholarly, but seems to lack pedagogical relevance.

Another problem with SF grammar is its metalanguage which borders on the arcane. There are no verbs, only 'processes' and these are classified as material, behavioural, mental, verbal, existential, and relational. Subordination is labelled 'hypotaxis', and subordinate clauses are classified as elaboration, extension, enhancement, and projection. It is interesting to note that in New South Wales teachers are required to use functional grammar in the classroom but are banned from using its associated terminology. Is it a case of Hamlet without the Prince?

### **The grammar lottery**

It might be supposed that old-fashioned traditional grammar of the prescriptive kind has disappeared, but it still lingers on in the so-called 'usage manual' so beloved of secretaries and report writers. It also abounds in the dreaded 'grammar checkers' that come with word-processing packages. Fortunately, teachers do not use usage manuals and grammar checkers as their reference grammars.

Structuralist grammar was assumed to die a natural death with the demise of the 'structural syllabus'. However, a glance at ESL grammar workbooks will indicate that it is still alive and well. One still comes across structurally-driven lessons, such as the "There are" pattern, expressed by exponents like: "There are fishes in the sea. There are leaves on the tree. There are stars in the sky."

Generative linguistics has been applied a good deal in SLA research, but it does not seem to have compelling classroom applications. In his *Workbook in the Structure of English*, Rutherford (1998) draws on the generative model. He takes the view that "generative linguistics offers the most thoroughly worked out theoretical base for the study of grammar" (p. 2). However, how many students need to know the finer points of the Principles and Parameters model? The claim of Universal Grammar is that principles of language do not need to be learnt as they are already built into the mind and that no child needs to learn structure-dependency because he or she already knows it in some sense.

Halliday and his many disciples in Australia would claim that when it comes to educational linguistics, SF grammar has no equal. The problem with Halliday's descriptive categories is that they keep on popping up in an ad hoc manner all over the place. There seems to be no end to them and no way out of the maze. One comes away from SF grammar with a sense of bewilderment, hardly an appropriate attribute for pedagogical grammar.

That leaves modern descriptive grammar, and especially the corpus variety, in the driving seat of the pedagogical van. It has a host of advantages for language teaching compared to the other kinds of grammar that are available:

- It is non-judgemental. It describes but does not prescribe the grammatical features of modern English, their frequency, and discourse function.
- It is now corpus-based. For instance, the Cambridge International Corpus contains 100 million words, while the COBUILD corpus has 450 million words. This vast body of data tells us exactly what is in the language and what is not.
- It is about real English. All the examples are taken from real contexts of grammar in use. They are not made up by 'armchair' grammarians. The grammar therefore makes accurate statements about current English.
- Moreover, the grammar systems are explained and exemplified in plain English, the metalanguage is familiar, and the complete sets of items (e.g., phrasal verbs, or qualitative adjectives etc.) appear in display panels. It is thus very user-friendly.
- Its objective is to a) list and categorise the entire set of grammatical features across the various levels of language, from text to morpheme and b) to describe the grammatical patterns found in the major registers, viz. conversation, fiction, news, and academic. However, with the exception of the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (1999), modern descriptive grammars give more prominence to the written word rather than the spoken word.
- The grammar consists of statements rather than rules. Each statement is followed by a complete listing of the feature (for example, all the specific determiners). This display is followed by a detailed description of the usages surrounding the statement.
- Descriptive grammar is a grammar of classes. There is a complete listing of each class, for instance, all the 136 irregular verbs, all the determiners, all the allowable noun-prepositions, etc. Most of these lists have not been available before.
- Finally, and most importantly, descriptive grammar is comprehensible and therefore real to L2 learners, which is more than one can say for the theory-oriented grammars of Chomsky and Halliday. In teaching, it is the objective that creates the reality. Why do students learn grammar? It is certainly not for its own sake. It is not to understand the biological make-up of the human mind (as in the case of Chomskyan grammar) or the many functional roles of language in our lives (as in the case of Hallidayan grammar). Students simply want to perform better linguistically (especially in examinations). For them at least, the descriptivist's definition of grammar is adequate and appropriate: "Grammar can be briefly described as a set of rules for constructing and analysing sentences" (Leech, Deuchar, & Hoogenraad, 1982). The conventional wisdom is that students need a) knowledge 'what', i.e., linguistic knowledge of the rules and the constraints on them and b) knowledge 'how', i.e., the ability to 'grammar'.

The *Collins COBUILD English Grammar* (1990) is a good example of corpus-based grammar. It is a grammar of functions. The grammar is packaged under functional headings, such as 'concept building' and 'making up messages'. It is based on the important interplay between language forms and language functions.

Other grammar books which offer a clear exposition of contemporary English are Greenbaum and Quirk (1990), Parrott (2000), and Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000), to mention but a few of the descriptive grammars that have obvious pedagogical uses.

One application that is likely to be exploited quite a lot in the future is the use of corpora in language learning. Thanks to the Internet, L2 learners are now able to look up large corpora of electronic texts on-line. "By searching corpora, students can do their own research and discover the usages of contemporary English at their own pace" (Lee, 2003).

Many, but by no means all the advantages of descriptive grammar measure up to the criteria of good pedagogical grammar listed at the beginning of the paper. It is obviously true in the sense of being representative of real English. It is clear and economic in its statement. However, its scope may be too wide for some learners in that it seeks to provide a comprehensive coverage of all grammatical systems. It is for the most part comprehensible and therefore user-friendly. Learners may use it to check whether their own intuitions and articulation of grammatical rules are valid. However, like all the other types of grammar discussed thus far, it is reference grammar and not 'emergent' grammar that one can discover for and by oneself in task-based contexts.

Grammar for teaching purposes has to go beyond reference grammar and involve learners in 'grammaring', i.e., applying their grammar in various contexts of use. Pedagogical grammar is more than unapplied knowledge in the head; it is the ability to exploit one's grammatical resources in order to make meaning.

In the final analysis, it is the consumer who will determine which kind of grammar and which grammar books are selected. In certain contexts, the conventional PPP model will prevail, and with it, 'practice books' such as Murphy's (1997) *Essential Grammar in Use* will remain as the best and only option for many learners. Should the process-oriented model prevail, we are likely to see rather fewer pre-packaged grammar books, and instead, learners will discover or 'uncover' grammar themselves, using the grammar book or on-line corpora as a means of 'noticing the gap' between their emerging grammar and the full-blown variety. Either way, it seems likely that modern descriptive grammar will survive as a vital force in the L2 classroom, even though the nature of that grammar may itself change as our English grammar systems are explored and refined.

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