

ENGLISH GRAMMAR AS A SYSTEM OF MEANING: RETHINKING PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES IN UZBEKISTAN

Ibotova Xadicha

Boltayeva Anzirat

English teachers at Jondor 1st technicum
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abstract

While English grammar instruction in many schools remains tethered to rigid rules and isolated forms, such approaches often fail to bridge the gap toward authentic communication. This article contends that grammar is best taught as a dynamic system for making meaning, rather than a static collection of mechanical structures.

By integrating modern linguistic theories—specifically Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the form-meaning-use framework—the paper examines the specific pedagogical hurdles within the Uzbek educational landscape. Beyond identifying these challenges, the study offers research-driven strategies aimed at shifting the classroom focus toward contextualized learning. Ultimately, the goal is to demonstrate how teaching grammar in context not only builds communicative competence but also fosters greater learner autonomy and confidence. **Keywords:** English grammar, communicative competence, Uzbek learners, language pedagogy, form-meaning-use

INTRODUCTION

Grammar has traditionally occupied a central position in foreign language education. In many classrooms, particularly in post-Soviet systems, grammar instruction prioritizes explicit rule explanation, translation exercises, and written accuracy. While such approaches develop metalinguistic awareness, they often fail to produce communicatively competent speakers.

According to Hymes (1972), communicative competence extends beyond grammatical knowledge to include the ability to use language appropriately in context. Similarly, Canale and Swain (1980) identify grammatical competence as only one component of overall communicative competence. These theoretical perspectives suggest that grammar must be integrated into meaningful interaction rather than isolated drills.

This article explores grammar as a functional system and proposes pedagogical shifts suitable for Uzbekistan's educational environment.

Grammar as a Meaning-Making System

Modern linguistic research views grammar not as a list of prescriptions but as a system that encodes meaning. Larsen-Freeman (2003) proposes a three-dimensional model of grammar consisting of:

Form (structure)

Meaning (semantic content)

Use (pragmatic function)

Effective instruction should integrate all three dimensions.

For example, the distinction between simple present and present progressive reflects differences in aspect and speaker perspective rather than merely verb morphology.

When learners understand why a structure is used, retention and transfer improve.

Halliday (1994) further conceptualizes grammar within Systemic Functional Linguistics as a resource for meaning-making. From this perspective, grammar choices reflect social and communicative intentions.

Challenges in the Uzbek Educational Context

Several structural and pedagogical factors influence grammar acquisition among Uzbek learners:

1. Structural Differences

Uzbek follows a Subject–Object–Verb word order, while English uses Subject–Verb–Object order. Additionally, Uzbek lacks an article system, making “a” and “the” conceptually unfamiliar. These differences create predictable areas of difficulty that require contrastive explanation.

2. Tradition of Teacher-Centered Instruction

Grammar is often presented deductively, with students receiving rules before encountering meaningful input. While deductive instruction can be effective, overreliance on it may limit spontaneous language production.

3. Emphasis on Accuracy over Fluency

Excessive correction can inhibit risk-taking, which is essential for language development (Krashen, 1982). Learners may develop passive knowledge but avoid active communication.

Toward an Integrated Grammar Pedagogy

Research suggests several effective strategies:

Contextualized Presentation

Grammar should emerge from meaningful situations rather than isolated sentences. According to Ellis (2006), focus on form within communicative tasks enhances both fluency and accuracy.

Recycling and Input Flood

Repeated exposure to structures across contexts strengthens acquisition. Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis emphasizes that learners must consciously notice forms within meaningful input.

Balanced Feedback

Corrective feedback should support development without discouraging communication. Long (1991) highlights the importance of interaction and negotiation of meaning in language acquisition.

Implications for Educational Reform

For Uzbekistan, where English proficiency is increasingly connected to global mobility, higher education, and professional development, grammar instruction must evolve.

Reform should aim to:

Integrate communicative tasks with explicit instruction

Train teachers in functional grammar approaches

Develop materials that connect grammar to real-life contexts

Reduce overemphasis on translation-based exercises

Such changes align with international standards in language education and support learners' communicative competence.

Conclusion

Grammar is far from obsolete; it remains a cornerstone of foreign language proficiency. Yet, to be truly effective, it must be reimagined as a fluid vehicle for expression rather than a rigid list of constraints. For the Uzbek educational landscape, the path forward lies in bridging the gap between grammatical accuracy and situational relevance.

By prioritizing the interplay of form, meaning, and use, educators can move beyond the "drilling" phase and into the "doing" phase. This transition—from rote memorization to purposeful application—ensures that grammar is no longer a barrier to fluency, but the very tool that enables clear, sophisticated, and effective communication.

References

- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47.
- Ellis, R. (2006). Current issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 83–107.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Edward Arnold.

Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Larsen-Freeman, D. (2003). *Teaching language: From grammar to grammaring*. Boston: Heinle.

Long, M. H. (1991). Focus on form: A design feature in language teaching methodology. In K. de Bot et al. (Eds.), *Foreign language research in cross-cultural perspective* (pp. 39–52). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129–158.