

Module 5: GTL

Basic Module - English

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EXPLORE

As mentioned in the introductory video, the century long fascination with grammar teaching has led to the elaboration of a variety of ways in which it can be taught. Multiple approaches and techniques have originated from different theoretical backgrounds. However, before presenting the transformations that grammar teaching has undergone, let's start by focusing on a situation that might be familiar to language teachers.

Am I doing the right thing?

It is April when Olivia and Sarah, two teachers of English as a foreign language in middle school, meet after class. The end of the school year is getting closer and Sarah notices that Olivia is a bit concerned:

Sarah: Olivia, is everything okay? You look very stressed...

Olivia: Hi, Sarah. Well, actually, I'm a bit worried about my first-year students. We are revising before the final exams, but they seem so confused.

Sarah: What are you focusing on? Are they confused on all the syllabus?

Olivia: No, luckily, they enjoy working together and carrying out projects, they are a lovely class. Reading comprehension is fine and most of them don't act shy when they have to speak in front of their classmates. The real problem is with grammar. They keep using basic structures like the simple present even when they should use different ones like the present continuous.

Sarah: Yeah, well we know that grammar is never easy to teach and learn. Have you tried proposing more exercises focused on these structures?

Olivia: yes, I made them work on sentences and fill-in-the-gap activities following the order in which we studied each structure so that they could revise elements we learned in the order we learned them.

Sarah: That's what I do too. Have you also tried to make them use the structures orally?

Olivia: Of course. We did role-plays and they had to create sentences containing verbs at the present continuous, but most of them only used the simple present while communicating.

Sarah: Okay, I see why you are frustrated... when they struggle during communication tasks where they have to speak it means that they need to revise. I mean, that's the central

moment of the lesson that we work towards, the time when they really produce the language.

Olivia: You are right. Unfortunately, it's difficult to give them specific answers sometimes. I mean, a language is not a perfect science, sometimes you just have to 'feel' what's right and what's wrong...

Sarah: Can you make an example? Are you still talking about verb tenses?

Olivia: Yes, think of stative and action verbs, some of them are ambiguous and when my students ask me questions like 'Why does this verb work this way and the other verb doesn't?' sometimes it's hard to find a clear answer, probably because it doesn't exist.

Sarah: ...and this makes the students feel insecure because they would like to have simple and clear rules to avoid making mistakes.

Olivia: Exactly. They know I would never scold anyone for making mistakes, even if we all know grammar is not an opinion. They don't seem anxious in my presence, but maybe after all their fear of making mistakes is what makes them use simple structures even when they know more complex ones and they demonstrate it when they complete specific grammar exercises.

Sarah: I totally understand, Olivia. Listen, if I were you, I would prepare a revision plan and I would reassure them that they can do it. You know how the saying goes: 'practice makes perfect'!

A space for reflection

Now that you have read the exchange between Olivia and Sarah, read the following questions and try to reflect:

- Is the conversation between Sarah and Olivia familiar to you? Do you share your concerns with your colleagues? Do you normally act more like Olivia or like Sarah?
- Have you ever felt the same way as Olivia when teaching grammar to your students? Can you recall a specific episode?
- In your opinion, are Sarah's suggestions useful? Would you propose something else? Why? Why not?

This situation represents the starting point from which our journey begins. The next section will introduce the transformations that have characterised grammar teaching overtime and then it will concentrate on the current conceptions of grammar and the various didactic proposals which have tried to incorporate the different views of grammar teaching and learning.

1. Focus on form or focus on meaning: a secular dilemma

In the same way that the field of foreign and second language education has undergone significant transformations over the centuries and has been greatly influenced by historical dynamics, so has grammar and its teaching. In particular, grammar has played various roles within the different approaches to language education. On some occasions it constituted the core of language acquisition while in other proposals it was considered as an instrument that underlies other skills, with its functioning directly explained only when and if necessary. This section will present the way grammar teaching has evolved from antiquity to the 20th century focusing on its interconnections with socio-historical transformations and with other disciplines.

1.1 From antiquity to the 19th century

1.1.1 Antiquity and direct immersion

In antiquity, languages were learned in a rather contemporary manner, by immersion. For instance, in the 4th Century B.C., the description of Sanskrit proposed by Pāṇini considered individuals' direct experience by proposing rules based on ordinary language usage (Staal 1965: 109). Subsequently, other grammarians worked on language systematisation and contributed to the identification, among other elements, of eight word classes, of their formal and semantic features, and the technical metalanguage to label the dynamics that seemed to rule their functioning (Swiggers and Wouters 2020: 38). This desire to systematise language did not stop language teaching from centering on direct immersion. An example of this is the fact that the children of Patricians from an early age were put in contact with native speakers in order to learn Greek through direct immersion. In this way, they accessed formal education as bilingual speakers because they knew Latin, their mother tongue, and Greek (Mezzadri 2015: 16).

1.1.2 The Middle Ages: direct immersion and grammar instruction

Direct immersion also characterised language teaching during the Middle Ages although it wasn't the only tendency. At this time, the study of the students' mother tongue and the relative literature remained central in both elementary and secondary education. More specifically, if primary education focused on elements such as the alphabet and syllables,

it was during secondary education that pupils would use grammar textbooks to analyse linguistic elements. At this point, the study of grammar had a double objective: it provided learners with adequate language skills, and it supported them in the understanding of literary works (Luhtala 2020: 43-44). Even though Roman supremacy made Latin the language of international communication and favoured its direct teaching up to the Renaissance, the non-ecclesiastic world also called for the need to learn different languages such as French (Mezzadri 2015: 16). In the 12th and 13th centuries, French became attractive because of the chivalrous culture it was connected to and it was taught, once again, through direct contact with native speakers and little reference to theory, grammar rules or the pupils' mother tongue. The Middle Ages, therefore, present two different tendencies to language teaching, one where grammar is explicitly taught and explained, and another in which the language is learned by direct contact with native speakers or travelling to countries where the target language is spoken (Bischoff 1961: 210).

1.1.3 The Renaissance: 'grammaticising' modern languages

In disagreement with the centrality attributed to direct experience, inductive rule learning and spontaneous communication is the desire, typical of 17th century language teaching, to 'grammaticise' languages. The Renaissance, as a matter of fact, is a time in which grammar is simultaneously conceived as a tool for teaching languages and a way of describing them. Moreover, at this time, grammar textbooks do not contain all of the tools that students need to acquire a language, therefore, the role of the instructor is fundamental. An example of this is the fact that many grammar books simply explain grammar rules, but it is the contact with native speakers that enables the pupils to really understand how the target language works. In addition, grammar forms are expected to be translated by the instructor for the foreign students and students are required to read grammar rules over and over and to carry out related exercises to interiorize the studied items.

Specific of this time is also the spreading fear of the decentralization that characterised Latin grammar. Latin, more specifically, was seen as the 'victim' of local extensions of its use and the reaction was the publication, in 1660, by Port-Royal grammarians, of the *Grammaire generale et raisonnée* to try and introduce a general grammar including universal operations that each language presents in different manners, but which can be compared. This interlinguistic reflection on the specific applications of these general

principles was responsible of the didactic value that the Port-Royal grammar naturally acquired (Raby 2020: 104-107).

1.1.4 The 19th century: the grammar-translation method and direct approaches

The double tendency between the study of grammar and immersive language learning will last until the 20th century and will also characterise the 19th century with, on one side, the grammar-translation method, and on the other, direct approaches.

The grammar-translation method centred on the codification of foreign languages in morphological and syntactic rules that the pupils were required to memorise. Oral practice was particularly limited and central to the foreign language class was the presentation of constructions followed by practical exercises. To examine some of the features of this method, we can consider some characteristics of Seidenstücker's grammar textbook. As the denomination 'grammar-translation method' shows, translation was central to the study of grammar. The presentation of German relative clauses to students of French as a foreign language, for instance, happened with the verb already moved to its 'French position' (Siefert 2013: 57). Furthermore, the grammar textbook began by presenting grammar forms in German and then proposed long texts in French, on topics that the students were unfamiliar with, that had to be translated in German without many instructions on how to approach the text and its translation (2013: 63). It is evident that in the grammar-translation method there was no space for creative language use (Coffey 2020: 169).

The other tendency which characterised language teaching in the 20th Century were direct approaches. It is useful to mention that an alternative methodology to the grammar-translation method was established within the Reform Movement that exploded onto the public scene at the end of the 19th Century and that was characterised by a professional outrage at traditional language teaching methods in secondary language schools (Howatt 1982: 263). Reformers promoted the inclusion of non-native teachers and replaced the sentences to be translated – typical of the grammar-translation method – with comprehension questions, but the feature that we are most interested in is their conception of grammar teaching. In their view, the use of the foreign language did not need to be preceded by the presentation of grammar rules because these were expected to be induced by the pupils while spontaneously using the target language (Mani 2016: 8-10).

Berlitz's Direct Method stemmed from this natural tendency towards foreign language teaching, and it accorded primacy to oral communication over reading and writing distancing itself, as the reformers did, from the mere study of grammar rules (Stieglitz 1955: 300). Clearly, not even the Direct Method and natural approaches have been spared criticism – conducting lessons entirely in the target language was particularly difficult in lower-level classes, grammar was neglected in the attempt to avoid making it the centre of teaching, learners' direct experience was barely considered when teaching them vocabulary – however, these approaches undeniably emphasise learners' psychological dimension and promote the focus on meaning rather than form while teaching a language, a tendency which is typical of 20th century language education.

2. The 20th Century: shaping current approaches

The presentation, in the next section of this module, of the current trends in language and grammar teaching risks sounding a bit redundant and this would not be surprising because our short historical excursus demonstrates that many current issues in language teaching reflect questions which have often been asked throughout history. But before focusing on present trends, let's consider the role played by grammar as language teaching evolved in response to various historical transformations and issues.

2.1 Historical transformations and grammar teaching

Historical tendencies and social transformations strongly influenced the conception of language teaching. While the grammar-translation method fulfilled the needs of a society with a time-honoured and a scholarly view of language study, in America the 1920s saw the emergence of the Reading Method thanks to the primacy of the practical realities of the classroom in which the students were required to focus on text comprehension to interiorise grammar forms and linguistic meanings (Richards and Rodgers 2014: 20).

An example of the way that the conception of language teaching was interwoven with historical changes is offered by the United States. When the US was at peace, instruction in foreign languages was not considered of primary importance contrarily to what happened with economics and social science. The only motivation for learning a foreign language was appreciating the foreign language literature and culture. Things changed after Pearl Harbour, when the US entered World War Two. Now, learning foreign languages became instrumental for the military in order to communicate with native speakers and carry out radio propaganda (Vargas 2009: 230-231). Studying linguistic forms was not a necessity at this time, soldiers had limited time to learn the necessary elements to communicate and hearing and speaking were stressed at the start in order to form correct pronunciation habits. In the 1950s and 60s, the American interest in foreign language education continued in particular because of the waves of immigration of Spanish-speaking Cubans to Southern-Florida after Fidel Castro came to power. These waves led to the development of bilingual programs which paved the way for dual language programs aiming to develop both students' proficiency in their native language and in the second language (2009: 231). The need to avoid Americans from becoming isolated from scientific advances made in other countries fueled reforms dedicated to the study and analysis of modern languages. This renovated interest in language teaching and the different conceptions of grammar and its teaching, in

any case, were also influenced by the developments in the fields of psychology and linguistics.

2.2 The influence of linguistics and psychology: focus on structures

In the 1940s and 50s, language education was influenced by the structural school of linguistics. Central to this school of thought was the idea that when studying a language, only the overtly observable data can be examined because meaning was regarded as ‘explanatory fiction’. Structuralists believed that language could be divided into small units that could be scientifically described and contrasted. One of the exponents of structuralism, Fries, applied the principles of structural linguistics to language teaching and promoted an approach that considered grammar differently from the Direct Method. More specifically, the methodology which became known as the Audiolingual Method, believed that grammar should be the starting point of any language lesson. Next to the study of sentence patterns and grammatical structures, systematic attention was devoted to pronunciation and oral drilling to conclude with pattern drills and repetition exercises (Richards and Rodgers 2014: 59-60).

The Audiolingual Method, it must be said, was not simply influenced by trends in linguistics, also behaviorist psychology played its part. In particular, behaviorists claimed to have unravelled the secrets of human learning and tried to apply their principles to language teaching. This resulted in the extension to language education of their idea that each human behaviour is elicited by a stimulus that, in turn, triggers a response which can be marked as ‘appropriate’ – and reinforced – or ‘inappropriate’ – and suppressed. Looking at this stimulus-response chain from the angle of language education, the sequence was believed to be as follows:

- the instructor teaches students verbal behaviors (stimulus)
- the students react to the linguistic stimulus (response)
- the educator approves (reinforcement) or disapproves (suppression) their reaction, and the students feel self-satisfaction (reinforcement) or dissatisfaction (suppression)

Where does grammar fall into all this? In the same way as speech was primary and had to come before written practice and work on sentences, so grammar had to come before vocabulary learning because structures, as said, were considered central to this approach. Structural patterns had to be practiced in a variety of contexts before students received explicit grammar instruction, therefore, grammar can be said to be taught in an inductive way and then practiced through drills.

Criticism to the Audiolingual method concerned the underlying theoretical framework but it also came from the students who affirmed they were unable to transfer the skills acquired in class to actual communication. It is, then, interesting to conclude our excursus by examining one more proposal from the field of linguistics.

2.3 Chomskyan linguistics: the separation between grammar and meaning

It was at the end of the 1950s that the American linguist introduced the concept of transformational grammar explaining that fundamental language properties derive from innate aspects of the mind and from the way in which people process experience through language. Central to his theory is the conception that syntax is independent of meaning because Chomsky defined grammar simply as a way of sequencing linguistic elements. In even more simple words, humans do not learn language because of external stimuli, they ‘create’ language using an innate knowledge of abstract rules. The Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that every learner is believed to possess from birth automatically acquires language from input. This principle was translated into the language teaching practice of providing students with authentic inputs and promoting group work (Cook 2007: 120-128).

Naturally, at a time in which learners had already expressed their need to be able to use the learned elements in authentic communication, Chomsky’s theory and its lack of consideration for the social functions of language was not free of criticism. Two proposals in response to his theory that can be interesting to mention before we analyse current approaches are Jerome Bruner’s Language Acquisition Support System (LASS) - an extension of Chomsky’s LAD acknowledging the importance, in language acquisition, of the communicative environment – and Hymes’s communicative competence – a construct contradicting Chomsky on two aspects by claiming that there are variations in individual speakers’ underlying knowledge and that knowledge of formal structures is not the only one that counts because patterns of use must also be considered. At this point, communicative

functions, therefore, result primary over the mastery of linguistic structures (Bruner 1974: 284; Cazden 2011: 365).

Look back... is everything clear?

As you may have noticed, presenting the evolution of the conceptions of grammar in language teaching makes it necessary to also talk about history, social transformations, and different fields of study. Try to reflect using the following guiding questions to make sure you get the general message of what you have just read:

1. Why, do you think, we decided to show you how the conception of grammar and its role in language teaching evolved?
2. What are the main differences between approaches focusing on form and those focusing on meaning? Do the second type of approaches leave out the study of grammar?
3. Can you recognise some of your daily teaching practices in the approaches we have presented? Which ones? Are you satisfied with your practices or has the presented information made you reflect?

3. A current plurality of grammars

The quick historical excursus on the transformations of the conception of grammar and its role in language teaching has shown us how there has never really been agreement on the right way in which grammar should be considered and, more specifically, taught. What we should really reflect upon, however, is whether there is only one way of looking at grammar and its teaching. Couldn't we just accept that there is a variety of ways of conceiving grammar and that all of them, if adequately incorporated in teaching, could benefit acquisition?

In the light of this reflection, let's now focus on the current plurality of 'grammars' that can be found in the field of educational linguistics, and beyond, then, let's look at some didactic proposals to incorporate grammar in language teaching in a flexible and accessible manner.

Conception of grammar teaching	Deriving features
Grammar for the development of communicative competence	Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) focuses on the promotion of real communication and authentic exchanges in the classroom. Grammar is taught inductively with limited explicit instruction and practice activities focus either on mechanical language features or on meaning-related aspects of language production (Richards 2006: 13-14).
The explicit-implicit grammar teaching dichotomy	Humanistic approaches incorporate Krashen's distinction between acquisition and learning. The first enables knowledge to reach long term memory whereas the second stimulates the monitoring of spontaneously acquired concepts but does not last for a long time. The result of this is the dichotomy between implicit and explicit grammar teaching. While Implicit grammar teaching aims to induce the acquisition of grammar rules through communicative language use and emphasises the unconscious and automatic nature of language study, explicit grammar teaching promotes learners' awareness of the learning process and the explicit study of grammar rules typical of classical approaches to language teaching. Some scholars believe that these two views of grammar teaching can complement each other even if they admit that the dominant grammar promotes students' attention to language forms and inhibits communicative skills (Ling 2015: 559).

Grammar taught through metalanguage	Even if unconscious language acquisition is the one that actually lasts, some scholars have individuated a positive correlation among metalinguistic knowledge, metalinguistic awareness, and second language proficiency. This does not mean that grammar should only be taught using metalanguage, but that making learners aware of the functioning of language can facilitate language interiorisation if it is adequately presented and supported by meaning-oriented tasks (Hu 2010: 66).
Grammar taught considering the underlying conceptualisations	The importance of the conceptualisations underlying grammar is central to Cognitive Grammar, a model born within Cognitive Linguistics, a discipline which has been developing since the 1970s. The encounter between Cognitive Grammar and language education is favoured by Applied Cognitive Linguistics. The latter shares principles with CLT – the social and communicative potential of language is more important than the mastery of structures – and favours an embodied view of language – grammatical structures have a meaning and are strongly connected to our direct experience with the world and the way we conceptualise said experience. When teaching a language, the consequence is that general rules are not important anymore and do not facilitate fluent communication because regularities need to be researched in smaller structural patterns that are abstracted from daily usage and that are flexible and dynamic (Püts 2007: 1141-1142).

This presentation of the conceptions of grammar teaching is not exhaustive, but it conveys the idea that grammar and its teaching can be regarded in a plurality of ways. Before moving on to the different approaches to grammar teaching, try to complete the following activity to test your understanding of the different ‘grammars’ you’ve read about.

Reflection task

Match the sentences pronounced by the teachers with the conception(s) of grammar teaching they are adopting:

“Nina, what you said is correct, but are you sure you used the correct pronoun? You have used a direct pronoun but doesn’t this verb need a preposition?... Try to recall what we said...”

“Kevin wrote an interesting sentence in his text: ‘The green grass around the blue flowers makes my garden look very fresh’. The grammar is correct, but I would have written ‘The blue flowers in the green grass’. He should reflect on the way he visualises this image, maybe I should make the whole class reflect on this...”

“So, today we have seen how to talk about our hobbies, and we have studied the simple present, now, work in pairs and discover what is the favourite hobby of your peer, be ready to share your discovery with the class. Believe me, you have all the elements you need!”

3.1 A non-linear and dynamic approach to grammar starting from the syllabus

As mentioned, this module aims at showing that grammar teaching is varied and that there is a plurality of ways in which grammar can be taught. After presenting the evolution of the conception of grammar and the plurality of conceptions regarding its teaching, let’s start by proposing a way of planning grammar teaching to favour a student-centered education in the light of a dynamic conception of grammar.

The proposal of a ‘horizontal syllabus’ to plan the presentation of structures is described by Larsen-Freeman in her book *Teaching Language. From grammar to grammaring*. The author conjugates the need typical of humanistic approaches to put students at the centre of learning with an innovative view of grammar as strongly connected to authentic communication and usage. Starting from the assumption that planning the presentation of grammar structures using a classical vertical syllabus divides the target language into pieces but disregards the non-linear natural process of language acquisition, Larsen-Freeman advises teachers to let the students’ natural learning process guide the construction of a horizontal syllabus. Teachers must, therefore, look at learners’ performance and be alert to recognise ‘teachable moments’ in which they can guide

learners to notice the emergence of a specific form in the language they use. Naturally, the textbook teachers adopt will offer a defined syllabus, but transforming it into a checklist to be presented following the students' learning process could be an effective adaptation strategy. Finally, an interesting feature of a horizontal syllabus is the possibility to space out practice avoiding teaching a structure per class, but rather presenting constructions, favouring its practice and the related reflection, over several class sessions depending on the natural rhythm of each group of learners (Larsen-Freeman 2003: 145-148).

Think back to the conversation between Olivia and Sarah. Olivia insisted on the fact that it made no sense that her students had mastered the simple present but struggled to use the present continuous. Her comment makes it clear that she is looking at the grammar syllabus as a vertical, fixed, and defined list which, however, is not necessarily in line with her students' acquisition process. Perhaps she has missed a 'teachable moment' and probably the students might have needed more time to interiorise the elements she had presented to them. Planning horizontally might make her look at the situation in a different light.

3.2 Current CLT and the features of teaching grammar for and through communication

Larsen-Freeman, aware of the widespread knowledge of CLT, distances her proposal of a horizontal planning from the recursive study of structures within the same lesson or across learning units that is specific of the Communicative Approach. This, however, does not intend to condemn this planning fashion. Remember that we don't want to identify the best way to teach a language and its grammar, we want to present the features of a plurality of methods, each of which can be stimulating in its own way. Teaching grammar within current CLT includes activities that both stimulate the inductive and deductive learning of grammar thus incorporating both conceptions of implicit and explicit grammar. The tasks typical of CLT aim at not teaching grammar in isolation but, rather, try to make it rise out of communicative tasks by creating the need for the use of specific items of grammar. Students read a text and only subsequently reflect on the grammatical elements it contains

in the same way that they first communicate and then reflect on the grammar items contained in their performance (Richards 2006: 23).

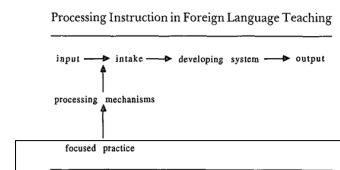
When Olivia was telling Sarah that during role-play activities students had to communicate using the present continuous but couldn't do so, it seems that the task she proposed to them was failing at making the target structure naturally rise out of communication. Perhaps, it is the task that needs reorganisation and not only the students that need systematic grammar revision.

3.3 Processing instruction: first input, then output

When presenting the various conceptions of grammar teaching explicit grammar teaching has been said to be functional if used in harmony with other elements which are fundamental for effective language acquisition. Processing Instruction starts with the intention of redefining explicit grammar instruction before describing how it can favour the natural language acquisition process. Traditionally, explicit instruction centres on the manipulation of learners' output with the teacher explaining a grammatical concept before encouraging the students to produce the structure or form in question.

Differently, the proposal inherent in Processing Instruction reconsiders explicit teaching and connects it to input processing. Keep in mind that the language acquisition process starts from the conversion of linguistic input into intake, then another set of processes enables the intake that students have actually interiorised to restructure the learners' linguistic system and, finally, a third set of processes favours linguistic output. Within Processing Instruction, explicit teaching does not act at the time of output but is concerned with the transformation of input into intake. Input, therefore, must contain referential meaning and must be adequately prepared by the teacher who should also warn students of the possible limitations in their elaboration of the grammar form and of the strategies to overcome these obstacles (Lee and Benati 2007: 6).

VanPatten and Cadierno 1993: 46



It goes without saying that adequately focusing on language input provides students with knowledge that is also available for production (VanPatten and Cadierno 1993: 44-45, 54).

Although Processing Instruction has the intention to facilitate grammar acquisition, Sarah and Olivia seem not to be familiar with it because Sarah agrees with Olivia that it is when students produce language that a teacher can really intervene on their acquisition process. The central moment of the lesson, however, is not the final one according to Processing Instruction, and being aware of this might both equip the teacher with a methodology that facilitates acquisition and help him/her to identify critical elements that could be particularly difficult for the students while also making them aware of said elements.

3.4 The focus on the ‘why’ of grammar: conceptual learning for grammar teaching

One of the most innovative perspectives on grammar and language at large is that of Cognitive Linguistics. The space and time available here force us to briefly hint at the central principles and the didactic benefits of this perspective (to know more about Cognitive Linguistics, refer to Geeraerts 2006).

As mentioned before, the ‘branch’ of Cognitive Linguistics that focuses on grammar is called Cognitive Grammar (CG), however, before presenting the five principles of CG, it is important to mention that the entire field of Cognitive Linguistics conceives language in an innovative way. First of all, grammar is believed to be shaped by usage and it needs to be studied not as a set of structures that exist in the abstract, but as groups of words that appear together in actual utterances within real conversations. Language structure and language use are, here, believed to be on the same level. Secondly, speakers are believed to use language on the basis of the knowledge of the world that they acquire through cognitive abilities – perception, attention, memory, abstraction, categorisation (Geeraerts 2006: 4-7). Thirdly, since language is believed to exist to communicate meaning, then every linguistic element is meaningful, including grammar constructions as they structure and symbolise conceptual content in a similar way as lexical elements do. A consequence of this is that since languages differ in their grammatical structure, the conceptualisations and

imagery used by speakers of each language must be different (Langacker 1994: 12). Finally, the fact that the same situation can be linguistically described in a variety of ways is the demonstration that linguistic meaning depends on the speaker's perspective onto the world and is therefore embodied (Geeraerts 2006: 4).

Now that the main tenets of Cognitive Linguistics have been presented, let's look at Langacker's proposal of a theory of language: Cognitive Grammar. The reason for our interest in this proposal is that it is the part of Cognitive Linguistics that has been applied to language education. The five main assumptions of Cognitive Grammar are (Radden and Dirven 2007: xi-xii, 25, 28, 42):

1. The grammar of a language is a part of human cognition, and it interacts with other cognitive faculties. Speakers will say 'a bird in the sky' and not 'the sky around the bird' because they visually organise what they see, using the terms of Gestalt psychology, into a salient figure – the bird - and a non-salient ground – the sky.
2. Different grammar elements enable for the presentation of different degrees of generalization of phenomena. For example, verb tense can express general notions of time while lexical material – hours, years – express more specific notions.
3. Grammar structures, like lexical items, always have a meaning. Nouns convey the notion of 'things' while verbs the notion of 'processes. For example, the 'to' of a verb at the infinitive – I'd like to hear from you – is meaningful as it communicates that the speakers' wishes are directed towards a goal.
4. Grammar incorporates all of native speakers' knowledge of lexical categories and grammatical structures.
5. Grammar is usage-based because it provides speakers with different structural options they can choose from to describe one specific scene – e.g. active or passive voice.

This being said, integrating CG perspectives into language teaching can benefit learners because it can provide them with more detailed explanations on the functioning of grammar rules, specify the connection between grammar and pragmatic factors, overcome interlinguistic arbitrariness by unravelling the conceptualisations motivating the use of different structures in different languages, and facilitate the visual representation of

grammar structures to support a multimodal approach to teaching (Bielak and Pawlak 2011: 377-379).

It is now evident that, thinking back to Sarah and Olivia's conversation, Olivia's claim that a clear answer to apparently vague grammar rules doesn't exist is wrong. Perhaps Cognitive Grammar could show us why some verbs are stative, others dynamic and yet others fit in both categories. The explanation may not be immediate, but it's wrong to say it doesn't exist.

3.5 Promoting metareflection on grammar to favour autonomy and well-being

So far, different views of grammar have been proposed, therefore, it is clear that grammar is not a static and fixed concept. To conclude this section of our module, let's go back to Larsen-Freeman's 'grammaring' and consider two elements which she deems central to teaching students how to learn grammar: reflecting on what grammar actually is and working on student-teacher relationship.

It is commonly known that in order to become autonomous, students need to be provided with strategies or, on this occasion, tools of inquiry. In order to better approach grammar learning, students should be trained to analyse what they see, to experiment with no fear and to gather linguistic data from the observation of texts or, in second language contexts, authentic exchanges. All of this is what can 'convince' students that grammar is not a set of defined and rigid structures but a context-based and adaptable code.

Not only could such innovative approach to grammar facilitate acquisition and foster experimentations, it can also facilitate being mindful of students' affect. Learners' emotional dimension has been deemed central by approaches which have permeated the field of language education for the past decades, and it seems particularly relevant when we have to deal with grammar. Activities to work on improving the relationship between students and the teacher might, indeed, have a positive effect on the many learners who have a grammar-phobia, an unpleasant trait easily inherited by classical teaching

approaches focused on corrective feedback with little consideration of the mechanisms actually at work during language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman 2003: 153-155).

These reflections and the need to provide students with analysis tools and with a new perspective on the nature of grammar seems to contrast with Olivia's assumption that 'grammar is not an opinion'. Of course, the solution is not inventing new structures and pretending that there is not a 'correct way' of putting ideas into words. Perhaps, however, Olivia could try to make her students reflect on the fact that there may be many 'correct ways' of saying things and invite them to analyse when their preferred structures can be functional and when something a bit more elaborate could facilitate communication.

Concluding reflection

Grammar and its teaching can be conceived in many different ways with none of them being the right one. Try to reflect on what you have learned using the following guiding questions:

1. Think back to your reflections when comparing your grammar teaching with the trends that have permeated history. Do you think you will change something about your practice now that you've read of new perspectives?
2. Were you familiar with some of the approaches/methodologies presented here?
3. Do you disagree with some of the approaches/methodologies presented here? Why?
4. Is there anything you read about that struck you? Did it do so negatively or positively? Why?

WORKSHEETS: GTL – Basic Module

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Worksheet 1: Am I doing the right thing?

It is April when Olivia and Sarah, two teachers of English as a foreign language in middle school, meet after class. The end of the school year is getting closer and Sarah notices that Olivia is a bit concerned:

Sarah: Olivia, is everything okay? You look very stressed...

Olivia: Hi, Sarah. Well, actually, I'm a bit worried about my first-year students. We are revising before the final exams, but they seem so confused.

Sarah: What are you focusing on? Are they confused on all the syllabus?

Olivia: No, luckily, they enjoy working together and carrying out projects, they are a lovely class. Reading comprehension is fine and most of them don't act shy when they have to speak in front of their classmates. The real problem is with grammar. They keep using basic structures like the simple present even when they should use different ones like the present continuous.

Sarah: Yeah, well we know that grammar is never easy to teach and learn. Have you tried proposing more exercises focused on these structures?

Olivia: yes, I made them work on sentences and fill-in-the-gap activities following the order in which we studied each structure so that they could revise elements we learned in the order we learned them.

Sarah: That's what I do too. Have you also tried to make them use the structures orally?

Olivia: Of course. We did role-plays and they had to create sentences containing verbs at the present continuous, but most of them only used the simple present while communicating.

Sarah: Okay, I see why you are frustrated... when they struggle during communication tasks where they have to speak it means that they need to revise. I mean, that's the central moment of the lesson that we work towards, the time when they really produce the language.

Olivia: You are right. Unfortunately, it's difficult to give them specific answers sometimes. I mean, a language is not a perfect science, sometimes you just have to 'feel' what's right and what's wrong...

Sarah: Can you make an example? Are you still talking about verb tenses?

Olivia: Yes, think of stative and action verbs, some of them are ambiguous and when my students ask me questions like ‘Why does this verb work this way and the other verb doesn’t?’ sometimes it’s hard to find a clear answer, probably because it doesn’t exist.

Sarah: ...and this makes the students feel insecure because they would like to have simple and clear rules to avoid making mistakes.

Olivia: Exactly. They know I would never scold anyone for making mistakes, even if we all know grammar is not an opinion. They don’t seem anxious in my presence, but maybe after all their fear of making mistakes is what makes them use simple structures even when they know more complex ones and they demonstrate it when they complete specific grammar exercises.

Sarah: I totally understand, Olivia. Listen, if I were you, I would prepare a revision plan and I would reassure them that they can do it. You know how the saying goes: ‘practice makes perfect’!

Worksheet 2: Conception of grammar teaching

Conception of grammar teaching	Deriving features
Grammar for the development of communicative competence	Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) focuses on the promotion of real communication and authentic exchanges in the classroom. Grammar is taught inductively with limited explicit instruction and practice activities focus either on mechanical language features or on meaning-related aspects of language production (Richards 2006: 13-14 ¹).
The explicit-implicit grammar teaching dichotomy	Humanistic approaches incorporate Krashen's distinction between acquisition and learning. The first enables knowledge to reach long term memory whereas the second stimulates the monitoring of spontaneously acquired concepts but does not last for a long time. The result of this is the dichotomy between implicit and explicit grammar teaching. While Implicit grammar teaching aims to induce the acquisition of grammar rules through communicative language use and emphasises the unconscious and automatic nature of language study, explicit grammar teaching promotes learners' awareness of the learning process and the explicit study of grammar rules typical of classical approaches to language teaching. Some scholars believe that these two views of grammar teaching can complement each other even if they admit that the dominant grammar promotes students' attention to language forms and inhibits communicative skills (Ling 2015: 559 ²).
Grammar taught through metalinguage	Even if unconscious language acquisition is the one that actually lasts, some scholars have individuated a positive correlation among metalinguistic knowledge, metalinguistic awareness, and second

¹ RICHARDS J. C., 2006, Communicative language teaching today, New York, Cambridge University Press.

² LING Z., 2015, "Explicit grammar and implicit grammar teaching for English major students in university", in Sino-US English Teaching 12, 8, pp.556-560. DOI: [10.17265/1539-8072/2015.08.002](https://doi.org/10.17265/1539-8072/2015.08.002)

	language proficiency. This does not mean that grammar should only be taught using metalanguage, but that making learners aware of the functioning of language can facilitate language interiorisation if it is adequately presented and supported by meaning-oriented tasks (Hu 2010: 66 ³).
Grammar taught considering the underlying conceptualisations	The importance of the conceptualisations underlying grammar is central to Cognitive Grammar, a model born within Cognitive Linguistics, a discipline which has been developing since the 1970s. The encounter between Cognitive Grammar and language education is favoured by Applied Cognitive Linguistics. The latter shares principles with CLT – the social and communicative potential of language is more important than the mastery of structures – and favours an embodied view of language – grammatical structures have a meaning and are strongly connected to our direct experience with the world and the way we conceptualise said experience. When teaching a language, the consequence is that general rules are not important anymore and do not facilitate fluent communication because regularities need to be researched in smaller structural patterns that are abstracted from daily usage and that are flexible and dynamic (Püts 2007: 1141-1142 ⁴).

³ HU G., 2010, “Revisiting the role of metalanguage in L2 teaching and learning”, in English Australia Journal 26, 1, pp. 61-70. <https://hdl.handle.net/10497/16146>

⁴ PÜTZ M., 2007, “Cognitive linguistics and applied linguistics”, in Geeraerts D., Cuyckens H. (eds.), The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics, New York, Oxford University Press.