

Module 5: GTL

Extended Module - English

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EXPAND

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED:

1. What does it mean to teach grammar using a non-linear and flexible syllabus?
2. How can grammar practice be fostered in a communicative way?
3. How can grammar be taught considering students' language processing?
4. How can grammar be taught making students aware of the conceptualisations that underlie structures?
5. How can teachers promote metareflection on grammar and its learning to favour student autonomy and well-being?

1. STEP: What does it mean to teach grammar using a non-linear and flexible syllabus?

RECALL AND REFLECT:

In the EXPLORE section of this module, we have proposed that the grammar syllabus of a language can be structured not vertically but horizontally as a checklist in which presented elements can be marked off without forcing students to learn elements in the order indicated by the textbook in use and that might not be in line with the spontaneous language acquisition process of learners.

In the light of humanistic approaches, this proposal favours a student-centred approach that takes into consideration students' needs and makes learning more stimulating as learners quickly realise that it is their learning process that sets the direction and contents of teaching thus making them the real protagonists of the learning path.

This proposal, naturally, conflicts with the structure of most textbooks which, however, must not be considered as an obstacle limiting the adoption of a horizontal planning. Indeed, the materials contained in the textbook might become precious teaching material to be proposed, and adequately adapted, when the teacher deems useful. Larsen-Freeman's invitation to be alert to 'teachable moments' also needs to be kept in mind because the time when students are ready to acquire a specific structure is the indicator that should guide this innovative structure-presentation sequence.

Finally, by dedicating more time to the presentation of grammar elements, it is also possible to simultaneously work on different structures and patterns that naturally coexist in the linguistic context.

OBSERVE:

Now, keeping in mind the elements we have just recalled, let's look at a section of a text trying to imagine an alternative way of presenting structures on the basis of students' natural learning process.

Think back to the dialogue we have read at the beginning of this module and let's picture ourselves as observers in Olivia's classroom.

She has just presented her students with the following text, and the target structure she wants to teach her students are prepositions of place (for clarity purposes, we have highlighted them in the text):

My name is Lucas, and I live in a small town. Every morning, I walk to the bakery **near** my house. I buy fresh bread and sometimes a sweet pastry. After that, I go to the park to enjoy my breakfast. I like to watch the birds and the people **in** the park. In the afternoon, I work **at** a bookstore. I love books, and I like helping customers find new stories to read. In the evening, I cook dinner and watch TV with my family. I feel happy and relaxed **at** home.

Let's also look at the vertical syllabus Olivia has been following since the start of the year. For space constraints, we have only included some of the structures that are presented in the first year of middle school:

- Personal pronouns: I, you, she, he, we
- Verb be (affirmative, interrogative and negative form) - Possessive adjectives: my, your There is / There are (affirmative, interrogative and negative form)
- **Prepositions (place): in, on, under, near, next to, behind, between, in front of, opposite**
- Present simple (affirmative, interrogative and negative form, all persons)
- Spelling rules for the 3rd person singular
- Short answers with do
- like / love / enjoy / hate + *-ing*; don't mind + *-ing*
- Modifiers describing degrees of liking: very much, really, not ... at all
- Object pronouns: me, you, him, her, them

Now, what would happen if one of Olivia's students asked her the following question: 'Why does the text say **like to watch** and then **like helping**? They are different. Is it a mistake? Is the correct way **like to help**?'. In this text, these structures are not very far from one another and it is not unusual that a curious and interested pupil might notice that there is a slight difference between them. What we can notice is that, according to the vertical syllabus, Olivia would have to teach other three structures before getting to 'like / love / enjoy / hate + -ing'.

However, if she adopts a horizontal syllabus, she can identify this moment as one of the 'teachable moments' you have read about and dedicate time to the presentation of this structure as well as its possible uses.

Extending the presentation of a structure, its context of use, and the elements that compose it would also facilitate Olivia's job as she will have to consider different grammar elements while presenting this structure. 'I like watching' incorporates a verb at the simple present that slightly changes if we have a third person singular because it adds an -s at the end, therefore, Olivia should quickly mention the spelling rules of this tense - two topics later in the vertical syllabus -, at least with the verb *to like*. Then, she might need to make more examples, and expressions such as 'I like playing' or 'She likes driving' might come up thus forcing her to explain that when adding *-ing* after letter *y*, this letter does not disappear and when adding *-ing* to a verb that ends with letter *e*, this letter disappears.

As you can see, not only does presenting all these features require more than just one lesson to be adequately focused on and practiced, it also demands a flexible syllabus that looks more like a checklist than like a vertical and fixed line of structures.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN:

Olivia's situation is likely to have also happened to you. How many times do students ask questions that traditional language teaching approaches would answer with 'Not today, we will learn this further on.'?

In order to try and set your mind on a more flexible approach to the planning of grammar teaching, try to look at the textbook you use when teaching and choose one of the grammar structures that the book presents in the vertical syllabus - carry out this task considering the language you actually teach.

Now, look at the written or oral language input that your book proposes to work on this structure and try to find grammar elements that the vertical syllabus asks you to teach later on.

In the following box, specify the chosen structure and the second structure you have found in the text and that you may have to teach in advance, then answer the guiding questions:

1. Do you think you would have a hard time anticipating the presentation of a structure? Have you ever had to do it?
2. Does the structure you have to present in advance include many elements that your students don't know? Can you imagine how many lessons you would need for the elongated presentation of this structure?

2. STEP: How can grammar practice be fostered in a communicative way?

RECALL AND REFLECT:

In the EXPLORE section, we have mentioned how Communicative Language Teaching both encourages the explicit presentation of grammar structures and information-gap activities aimed at favouring the practice of the target structure. As we have said, information-gap activities take a step forward towards authentic communication because they do not simply consist of role-plays and made-up scenarios, they actually put the student in a position where, in order to complete the activity, he/she has to use the specific construction the lesson has focused on. This is what we mean when we say that information-gap activities try to make the structure rise out of communicative tasks creating the need for the use of specific grammar items.

In the dialogue you read at the beginning of the module, Olivia complained that her students did not try to incorporate the present continuous in their productions as they carried out communicative task. Undoubtedly, the level of competence of the students might have played a role in their tendency to use the simpler structure, but perhaps, part of the responsibility should be attributed to the structuring of the task in a way that did not foster the natural and unconscious use of the desired grammar item.

Even if our focus will mainly be on the final practice task, we must remember that, within the frame of the Communicative Approach, Olivia had explicitly presented the present continuous after the class had worked on a text which contained this structure.

Olivia had probably presented a text focusing on people's hobbies or daily activities, then, after working on global text comprehension and making sure that the vocabulary was clear to everyone, Olivia probably selected some sentences containing the present continuous and explicitly made her students focus on the meaning of the construction – talking about things that are happening as I speak – and the structuring elements – subject + verb *to be* at the simple present + verb at the *-ing* form. Then, she probably proposed some mechanical activities to make sure the students had the opportunity to practice the structure, but, eventually, she presented a role-play activity that didn't necessarily require the use of the target structure to be completed and this is why the students felt free to use language elements such as the simple present because they came easier to them.

OBSERVE:

Now, let's try to look closely at what Olivia could have done to adequately encourage her students to use the present continuous.

Observe the following information-gap activity that aims at fostering the use of verbs at the present continuous.

One of them is lying!

To complete this task, the class needs to be divided in five groups. If the class is too small, the activity can be adapted for a smaller number of groups.

Scenario: In the past three weeks five thieves who started stealing books from different bookstores, but no one knows what these five people look like.

Task instructions: Each group has a handout with the profile of one of the thieves reporting some of his/her characteristics or habits. Under the profile, there are four pictures – the pictures are different on each handout and each picture shows one person as he/she does something. Each group has to read the profile and then indicate which of the four pictures portrays the thief. To justify their conclusion, the students have to explain why the four people they have excluded do not correspond to the profile of the thief and they should expose their observations by describing what each person is doing in the photo.

Objective: find the thief and convince the other students that each group's conclusion is correct by openly presenting the line of thought based on the evidence – the photos.

By means of an example, here is one of the five handouts:

Handout 1 - Profile of the thief

Name: unknown

Physical appearance (height, weight, hair colour, eye colour...): unknown

Habits: is a vegetarian

Typical behaviour: only likes classical music; only uses public transports to move

Particular trait: is scared of water

Photos of the four suspects

The thief is suspect nr. ____

Why are the other people innocent? What are they doing in the photos? Explain it to your classmates!

COMMENT:

This information-gap activity naturally favours learners' use of the target structure because when they justify their conclusion that, in this case, the thief is depicted in picture nr. 3, they will have to explain what the people are doing in the photos that the thief would never do. This type of request naturally pushes them to the present continuous.

Naturally, no class is the same and this activity can be adapted. First of all, the instructor is free to model the students' answers by providing an example of how they should present their reasoning showing them that a good way of presenting their line of thoughts would look like 'The person in picture nr. 1 is not the thief because she is swimming, but the thief is scared of water.' Naturally, the amount of teacher modelling depends on the degree of communicative autonomy the students have reached and on how clearly they seem to have acquired the target structure.

Moreover, this activity, in order to be motivating and not simply effective, can be transformed into a competition making sure not to cause anxiety and stress among the students. This task could be made competitive by telling the students that the first team which guesses who the thief is wins and each group could choose a name for their team to personalise the task.

This is just a proposal and various versions of it can be created, what matters is that when carrying out this activity, the focus is indeed the correct use of the target structure, but grammar practice is inserted in a motivating and entertaining frame which can promote a pleasant learning experience and in which it is the tool that is necessary to convince the rest of the class that your conclusion is valid.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN:

Now that you have seen an example of how grammar can be taught and practiced in a communicative way, think of a grammar item that your students usually struggle to use when they communicate in the target language and try to propose an information-gap activity that can make the target structure naturally rise out of communication.

Shortly present your proposal specifying:

Language taught:

Grammar item:

Instructions of the task:

How is this task pleasing / motivating / careful to students' well-being?

3. STEP: How can grammar be taught considering students' language processing?

RECALL AND REFLECT:

In the EXPLORE section, you have read about Processing Instruction and about the way in which this proposal tries to harmonise explicit grammar teaching and input processing. While explicit grammar teaching centres on the open presentation of the functioning of grammar structures, input processing indicates the first of the three sets of processes that are at play in the students' brain between the phase when they encounter a language input and that when they produce language.

What differentiates Processing Instruction from the other approaches to grammar teaching are two main features:

- The moment when explicit teaching acts is not when students produce language – either in written form or orally – but the time when the learners encounter the linguistic input containing the grammar item that the lesson wishes to focus on
- Linguistic input cannot be equated to explanations about the target language mechanisms, the input must contain referential meaning and students must be warned of the way in which their processing of language could become an obstacle to the elaboration of the grammar construction.

Central to this proposal is the claim that a linguistic context that is too rich in information does not give the students the opportunity to adequately elaborate the target grammar form, therefore the teacher must intervene on the presented input and not on the correction of the output.

Before moving on to a practical example of how Processing Instruction can be applied to the case study you saw at the beginning of this module, we would like to specify that just like we have talked of structured input, we could also speak of structured output (cfr. Lee and VanPatten 2003: 173-175). We will briefly mention the features that structured output should have, but you will notice that also the activity proposed in the 2. STEP can easily function as structured output because, in a genuine manner, it puts the students in the situation where they must use a specific grammar item to complete the task. This shows us

once again that the proposals for grammar teaching that we are looking at are not in contrast but can coexist in different moments of the lesson or be adapted on the basis of the construction which is being studied.

OBSERVE:

Now, let's go back to Olivia's situation and to the primary role she seems to attribute to the time when students produce language. We don't have many details about the way she has presented the structures to her students, but it looks like she does not attribute much importance to the moment in which the students first see the structure and interiorise it as central.

The target structure her students were supposed to learn was the English verb tense present continuous. Now, let's look at what she could have done to apply Processing Instruction and be mindful of her students' language acquisition process to facilitate the interiorisation and re-use of the structure.

Processing Instruction

PHASE 1: the teacher makes the students aware of the possible obstacles to the elaboration of the target structure

Since learners should become responsible and autonomous in their learning process, it makes sense that the instructor raises their consciousness of the way in which their brain elaborates a language input and of the limitations it could impose to them.

Olivia could show the students an example of how their mind processes the linguistic elements which come 'easier', maybe with a structure they have already studied. For example, she could write on the board

Everyday Alice and Mary go to school together.

Everyday Alice goes to school by bike.

and then she could guide the students to notice that the words that the elements that really caught their attention are content words like ‘everyday’, ‘Alice/Mary’, ‘school’. These words are, indeed, useful to understand what is happening, but the issue is that they, in a way, absorb all of the processing resources that the students have available and leave no space to the elaboration of the grammar form – the difference in the use of the simple present with the third person singular and plural.

PHASE 2: the teacher presents the structured input to the students

The aim of this phase is that of making students notice the connection between form and meaning of the target structure by reflecting on language and not by producing it.

Since the target structure to be learned in the present continuous, Olivia could now propose to her students an activity such as the following.

TASK: match each situation with the correct interpretation:

SENTENCE	INTERPRETATION
Molly: Can you answer the phone? John: I am cooking! (2)	1. Molly and John can't answer the phone in this moment.
Molly: You never tidy up the house! John: But I cook delicious food! (3)	2. John can't answer the phone in this moment.
Molly: I want to answer my phone. John: But we are cooking! (1)	3. John normally cooks for Molly.

With an activity like this, the students must necessarily focus on the verb tense and on its meaning in order to find the right interpretation of the sentence. The short exchanges don't

present expressions or adverbs related to time because they would catch students' attention and get in the way of the processing of the verb tense.

While correcting the task together, Olivia could make the students reflect on which logic they used to complete the activity and could propose more examples, even orally, to expose the students to more input.

Here, the students are doing something with the input, but they are not producing language as this is not the moment.

PHASE 3: the teacher proposes structured output activities focused on form and meaning

After proposing the structured input activities and presenting the situation in which the new construction should be used – in this case she could mention how the present continuous expresses actions which are happening while the person is speaking or at the same time as a second action – Olivia can propose a structured output activity before asking the learners to insert the studied structure in their productions (Lee 2014: 2).

Output activities should be as gradual as input ones. This means that, initially, the students should only have to focus on the meaning of the construction and, only afterwards, on the production of the structure.

For example, Olivia could propose a set of sentences in which the verb is missing. The students should not identify which verb to insert, this activity focuses on the meaning of the grammar construction and not on verb semantics. They should simply identify whether the verb needs to be conjugated at the simple present or at the present continuous, and then fill in the gap with the verb at the chosen tense.

Some of the sentences that Olivia can propose could look like this:

Conjugate the given verb at the simple present or at the present continuous and specify why:

1. Martha is studying (study) at the moment because she has a test in two days.
2. Martha studies (study) every day because she loves learning.
3. Martha and Anna are studying (study) Spanish this summer because they want to visit Madrid.

Here, the students already know which verb they should insert but they need to look at the contextual elements of the sentence to understand what the best verb tense is to complete the sentences.

This activity strongly focuses on making the students identify the right construction starting from its meaning, but to fill in the gaps, they also have to conjugate the verb at the chosen tense reflecting on the structural elements – suffixes, *-ing* form, auxiliary verb.

Another output activity which could be proposed could be the activity presented in the 2. STEP which would make the students produce language orally and not in written form and would insert their language output within a richer frame, that of the search for a criminal.

As said, multiple output activities can encourage the production of the desired structure. The students could be asked to interview a friend, construct a dialogue / write a script, answer an e-mail, what matters is that the instructor carefully considers the architecture of the activity in order to give the students space to freely produce language while also making the insertion of the desired construction necessary to complete the task.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN:

In this STEP, we have focused on the importance of supporting students when they process linguistic input so that their attention can adequately be turned to the desired grammar item.

In order to encourage you to include this practice within your daily teaching practice, choose a construction from the textbook you are using and try to answer the following questions – you can also consider the same construction that you have selected for the activity in the 2. STEP:

1. Look at the way the structure is initially presented. Is the linguistic context too rich? Why yes? Why not?
2. Can you think of a way in which you could adapt the linguistic input to facilitate students' input processing?
3. How do you think your students would react to such an activity? Would they be curious to explore the grammar structure this way? Would they be nervous at the idea of approaching structures starting from their meaning?

4. Do you think there are some constructions or types of constructions that Processing Instruction wouldn't be ideal for?

4. STEP: How can grammar be taught making students aware of the conceptualisations that underlie structures?

RECALL AND REFLECT:

In the EXPLORE section, we said that Cognitive Linguistics proposes a way of looking at language that is more dynamic and usage based. Briefly, language doesn't exist in the abstract, but it originates from communicative contexts, it depends on the way that speakers perceive the world, and every element of language is meaningful, including grammar structures.

You have also read of Cognitive Grammar, a theory of language proposed by Langacker in the 1980s and which applies the innovative views of Cognitive Linguistics to grammar. Cognitive Grammar will be the focus of this STEP because it has been considered the ideal model to try and connect Cognitive Linguistics to language education.

Before focusing on the practical application of all the principles we have listed when introducing Cognitive Linguistics, it is useful to concretely describe what a Cognitive grammar-based approach to language teaching really entails.

Langacker himself, in 2001, insisted on the pedagogical relevance of his theory and specified that applying it to language teaching would mean:

1. Attributing limited importance to fully general rules because only a small part of conventional patterns is actually constituted by general regular constructions. This is why mastering general rules does not give students the ability to speak fluently during communication. Fluency, on the contrary, can only be achieved learning conventional fixed expressions and the 'normal' way of phrasing ideas in specific circumstances. The logic behind this is that if everything we say was made of the combination of general grammatical rules, our processing capabilities wouldn't bear rapid and fluent speech because it would overwhelm us.
2. Since Cognitive Grammar is a usage-based model, therefore it observes language as it appears in usage, communicative, social, and cultural contexts have a central role in language teaching. Naturally, this is not new as many other current teaching approaches emphasise the importance of authentic communicative context, but with Cognitive Grammar real communication becomes even more pervasive. This

means that communicative contexts don't simply have to be considered during language teaching or practice, but that the nature of language, and grammar, is strongly connected with authentic use, therefore, the way we look at language structures, and consequently present them to learners, must be modified.

Finally, Taylor (1993) emphasises how Cognitive Grammar-based language teaching attempts to provide students with answers regarding the different functioning of different languages. Central to this didactic application is the possibility to raise students' awareness of the mechanisms underlying language in opposition to the intuitive communicative learning that often makes learners anxious and gives them the impression that they have no control over the language they are using and the way they are using it.

To verify the usefulness of all these theoretical assumptions, scholars have tried to create didactic materials and build units to teach some grammar elements and they have tested their materials. In this STEP, we will only look at a simplification of Bielak and Pawlak's 2011 proposal to teach English tense and aspect to get the gist of how Cognitive Grammar can be inserted in learning units. To read the full study and to look more in depth at differences between traditional grammar and Cognitive Grammar-based teaching you can click [here](#). More perspectives and studies on Cognitive Grammar-based language teaching can be found in De Knop and De Rycker (2008).

OBSERVE:

After all of these theoretical premises, let's dive into practice and let's start, once again, from our case study. Olivia made an affirmation that might be very common to most teachers when she said that some stative and dynamic verbs work ambiguously and that her students would like to overcome this ambiguity for fear of making mistakes but that she doesn't know how to adequately help them because sometimes a clear answer just doesn't exist. Well, maybe inserting Cognitive Grammar views in her lessons could be helpful.

TRADITIONAL STATIVE VS. DYNAMIC VERBS PRESENTATION

Probably, when teaching stative and dynamic verbs to her students, Olivia presented them traditionally by saying that stative verbs cannot be used with the *-ing* form while dynamic verbs can because they indicate activities that are in progress at the moment of speaking.

Moving on, she probably presented the categorization of stative and dynamic verbs in sub-groups also to justify the fact that some verbs, like ‘think’ sometimes can be stative and other times dynamic. Look at this example:

I think it is all right.

~~*I am thinking it is all right.*~~

Traditionally, the explanation behind this limitation is that I cannot use the *-ing* form because I am talking about a passive mental state.

Whereas with

I think about it every day.

I am thinking about it now.

I can now use the *-ing* form because in this sentence, ‘thinking’ represents a mental activity and not a passive state.

This is just one example, but it is enough to show us that this explanation, although traditionally correct, is problematic because:

1. Students, in particular if they have a low level of English, might struggle to use the examples as evidence of the theoretical explanation, which is itself a bit complicated to decode
2. Differentiating a passive mental state from a mental activity is not always immediate and, generally, native speakers or very proficient ones would not rely on such a very

often subjective distinction to understand whether they can use the *-ing* form or not, so how could a middle school learner?

Let's now take a look at another way of approaching this topic.

COGNITIVE GRAMMAR-BASED STATIVE VS DYNAMIC VERBS PRESENTATION

Let's try to take a look at how Olivia could present static and dynamic verbs when working on the present continuous using a Cognitive Grammar-based perspective.

Olivia could ask her students to Imagine that they are in front of a door and can look through the keyhole to see what happens on the other side of the door. Naturally, the keyhole will only give them the possibility to see part of the scene, because it is a limited space. To make sure the concept is clear, she could show them a picture of a keyhole and share possible scenarios from which they can make up stories.

Look at this image:

Now imagine that you are hiding behind this door at 2am and through the keyhole you see two people running. Naturally, you only see them when they pass in front of the keyhole because your field of vision is limited. What are they doing? You have five minutes to imagine what happened to them, use your fantasy!

It is very likely that, if the students are given these instructions, and because they have been working on the present continuous, their stories will include many verbs at this tense.

After the students have shared their made-up scenarios, Olivia could use the students' proposals to present the following reflection:

Now, let's leave our keyhole for a moment.

Some of you said that these two people are running from a monster, others said they are escaping because they are thieves, others that they are playing hide and seek.

You know what else we can say from many of your stories? That they trust each other.

Careful, we can only say they trust each other, not that they are trusting each other.

Now that she has introduced the ‘limiting’ construction, she can use the elements she has given the students to introduce the cognitive perspective.

Let’s go to another door. Looking through the keyhole, this time, you can see Jerry.

Olivia can use guiding questions to make the students get to the sentence she wants to represent:

What is he doing? / Who is he thinking about? / Is it a positive or a negative thought? / Can we say that he trusts his girlfriend?

So, let’s write:

Jerry trusts his girlfriend.

But, remember:

~~*Jerry is trusting his girlfriend.*~~

We can’t say the second sentence because, the truth, is that what happens behind this door is very boring.

Jerry is always doing the same thing, both when he is behind the door and when he passes in front of the keyhole. This action does not progress, it is always the same, right? The verb ‘to trust’ in this case, describes an action that does not change, so we

are satisfied with what we see through the keyhole. This is why we call ‘to trust’ a *stative verb*.

How do we describe actions that happen for a long time and that do not change? With the simple present!

After this, Olivia can invite the students to propose other stative verbs, other ‘boring’ scenes (know a language, see well, hear a noise) or she can propose more examples, if the students don’t feel ready to propose options.

Then, she can proceed by presenting a dynamic verb:

Probably Jerry heard us say that he is boring, so he started doing something interesting.

Let’s look at what he’s doing. What do we see through the keyhole?

Olivia can use guiding questions to make the students get to the sentence she wants to represent:

What is he doing? / Is it interesting? / Has he started? No? How long ago did he start? / Has he finished? What is missing?

So, let’s write:

Jerry is building a castle.

But, remember:

~~*Jerry builds a castle.*~~

We cannot say the second sentence because we would ruin all the story!

If we only look through the keyhole, can we see the whole story? No, we are missing out on so much. We can't see Jerry as he sets down the first bricks, we can't see as the castle takes shape but, most of all, we can't see the finished castle!

If we really want to describe what we see through the keyhole, we must use the present continuous because the keyhole of the simple present leaves out the starting point and the endpoint of the action. Verbs like 'to build' allows us to describe a process, an action that lasts for some time and that creates a change while is happens. At the beginning, the castle doesn't exist, at the end, it does! We call verbs like 'to build' dynamic verbs.

After this, Olivia can ask the students to describe processes or prolonged actions or she can make examples mentioning some of the interests of her students (reading, writing, playing, etc.)

COMMENT:

Such a presentation of stative and dynamic verbs gives the students a narrative frame in which they can insert the learned rule and can show them that language aims to describe reality and is not just a set of words that must be put together in the correct way.

Furthermore, this presentation can be adapted to different types of classes and it leaves space to students' participation in the guided discovery of grammar.

The multimodal presentation of grammar items, finally, can stimulate learners' interest and it can facilitate their approach to a way of explaining language that is rather far from traditional practices.

The instructor must always keep in mind that the theoretical explanations presented by Cognitive Grammar can become very abstract since they often explain the conceptualisations hidden behind very complicated constructions and students should always be provided accessible and pedagogy-friendly material that doesn't risk reverting to metalinguage-based grammar teaching.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN:

After looking at a possible application of Cognitive Grammar to language teaching, you are invited to express your feelings and impressions about this approach to grammar teaching. Here are some guiding questions that can direct your reflection.

- Now that you have seen a practical application, has your initial opinion on Cognitive Grammar changed? Why yes? Why Not?
- Do you like this approach? Do you think you would enjoy applying it? Why yes? Why not?
- How do you think your students will react to it?
- Is there a specific structure for which you would like to use this type of teaching?

5. STEP: How can teachers promote metareflection on grammar and its learning to favour student autonomy and well-being?

RECALL AND REFLECT:

In the final part of the EXPLORE section we have spoken about the fact that students should be provided with tools of inquiry to better frame the notion of grammar but also to become more autonomous and confident learners.

The approaches we have mentioned in the previous STEPS are present major differences but are also similar to the extent where they promote a type of grammar teaching experience that puts students' needs, perception, and biological functioning at the centre.

Grammar can and should be taught also emphasising its flexible nature. Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching show that behind structures there are meanings necessary for communication. Processing Instruction, similarly, insists on the importance of the communicative contexts in which structures are inserted and the same does a perspective stemming from Cognitive Linguistics which, as said, looks at language as usage based.

The example of a Cognitive Grammar-based approach such as the one we have seen in the 4. STEP, despite the primacy it attributes to the context of use of language and the underlying conceptualisations, clearly shows that during the in-class presentation of constructions there is no room to conduct a metareflection on the non-static nature of grammar.

Imagine a language class in which the teacher presents a structure in context or starting from a narrative framework or unraveling the conceptualisation of language it actualises while continuously specifying that, based on the context, the grammar item could have a different meaning or be replaced by a more or less similar construction. It would be a rather chaotic explanation.

This STEP, therefore, focuses on the proposal of a grammar teaching experience able to provide students with tools of inquiry, foster students' feelings of self-efficacy, and encourage a metareflection on what grammar actually is.

OBSERVE:

Thinking back one last time to our initial case study, we can recall that Olivia said that grammar is not an opinion. It is beyond doubt that we can't make up rules and pretend that the others will understand us, but grammar can't be considered fixed and dogmatic, as long as it is inserted in authentic usage and communicative contexts, grammar will have to adapt to different scenarios, therefore no instructor should forget to teach his/her students to detect grammar flexibility and determine how far they can go with their experimentations, at least with the structures they have worked on.

Let's look at a possible activity that Olivia could propose to her students at the beginning of class to stimulate a metareflection on grammar while working on student-teacher and student-student relationship. This activity can also be proposed in other moments of the lesson, with due adaptations.

CORRECT THE TEACHER

This activity has a double aim:

1. The students are shown that some elements might look like mistakes but their meaning can be negotiated in a flexible way
2. The teacher is asking the students to correct her mistakes and, even if the class probably knows they were made intentionally, the activity can easily become humorous and favour a friendly and relaxed classroom environment

Olivia could start the lesson by writing a text on the board introducing it as follows:

I would like to share with you an overview of the topic we have been studying for the past few lessons. I wrote this paragraph yesterday evening when I was very tired, if I made some mistake, make sure to correct me!

*This week, we are working on a verb tense called present continuous. We are considering many aspects of this construction, for example, a person **is using** the present continuous to describe actions that **happening** while this person is speaking. In our lessons, we reflect on the actions that we can describe with the present continuous. For example, if I **am look** at*

my friend who **is tasting** an ice cream, I can describe this scene saying, ‘My friend is eating an ice cream.’ Finally, in class we **are also talking** about the stories that our sentences can tell because we are learning that language only exists in communication, and it is important to consider the message that we express with language.

In red, we have analysed the elements that the students should point out, but they are not necessarily mistakes, and this is what the students should understand.

To mention some: saying ‘A person **is using** the *present continuous* to describe actions...’ is incorrect because since I am speaking of a habitual action, I should use the simple present, therefore this mistake depends on the timing of the mentioned action. Same goes for ‘We **are also talking** about the stories...’

Another example could be ‘...describe actions that **happening** while this person is speaking.’ In this case, the mistake is a form-related one because this sentence misses the auxiliary verb *to be* and it should, therefore, be corrected to ‘...describe actions that **are happening** while this person is speaking.’

Another form-related mistake is ‘am look’ which misses the *-ing* form while expressions such as ‘is tasting’ can be analysed differently.

If students point out that ‘My friend **is tasting** an ice cream.’ is a mistake, they are right because normally sense verbs are stative verbs. However, Olivia could encourage a reflection on the flexibility of grammar by saying that once she read a story that contained this sentence

*The servant **is tasting** the Queen’s food to make sure it is safe.*

The class could then reflect together on the fact that even sense verbs, when they refer to voluntary actions, behave like dynamic verbs.

In this way, students see that most meaning-based constructions are not normally right or wrong, it strongly depends on the context.

Olivia could also make the students think that, maybe, within the paragraph, the mistake wasn't the *present continuous* but the article 'an' as follows:

If 'taste' can actually be a dynamic verb when the action is voluntary, then, can I not say, 'My friend is tasting my ice cream?' instead of 'My friend is tasting an ice cream?' After all, maybe my friend has simply taken my ice cream because he wanted to see if he liked the flavour, he is not doing this action unintentionally!

Working on this aspect of grammar, and innovating the whole grammar teaching architecture, would be incomplete without providing students with a reflection tool.

Look at this reflection table, the students could work together to complete it and it could be proposed while working on different structures throughout the learning path.

TABLE OF OBSERVATION: the structure of today is present continuous

Is this grammar structure flexible? How?	Make an example of how it is flexible (you can use an example you made in class or you can invent your own): (possible answer) <u>'My friend eats an ice cream.'</u> is correct <u>'My friend is eating an ice cream.'</u> is also correct <u>If I want to use the verb 'to taste' I must be careful to the meaning because</u>
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	<u>'My friend tastes an ice cream.'</u> is correct <u>'My friend is tasting an ice cream.'</u> is not correct but I can change some other elements of the sentence so <u>'My friend is tasting my ice cream.'</u> is correct
The moments in class when the teacher talked of this grammar structures were different. Can you remember some?	Think of the times when we spoke of the <i>-ing</i> form, of the present continuous, of making plans: (possible answer) <u>We talked of the <i>-ing</i> form when we studied the expressions to say what we like or dislike</u> <u>We talked of the present continuous when we described what our friends were doing while we looked at them and the team that guessed first won candies</u> <u>We talked of the present continuous when Mary asked why she had heard the sentence 'I am going to the USA' in a song and the teacher said it was used to make plans</u>
Do you think this structure is easy to learn and use? Or is it difficult to some extent? Can you think of some strategies you found useful while working on this structure? And	Write your opinion on this structure and the opinions of at least two of your classmates.

what about your friends? Ask them.	
Talk to your classmates and think of at least three emotions that you felt when the teacher reacted to your questions / doubts / observations on the structure you are studying.	(possible answer) • <u>When I had a doubt and the teacher clarified it for me I felt relieved</u> • <u>When Alice thought she had found a mistake but then it was simply a different way of using this structure I felt confused</u> • <u>When the teacher showed us how stative and dynamic verbs functioned using images my friends and I felt curious but also scared because we had never studied grammar with pictures</u>

COMMENT:

Filling in this table can make the students notice that the construction is flexible in the way it is structured and used, in relation to the moments in which it can be presented, in connection to the degree of difficulty, and in the emotions that arise while working on it. Furthermore, the last two sections also encourage a metareflection on the emotions involved in grammar learning and on the strategies learners can put in place.

In the spirit of this activity, more lines can be added to the table if the teacher deems it relevant.

Furthermore, the students can be asked to complete this table using the language they prefer, in particular if they might not have enough elements to express themselves in the target language. However, with adequate tools and teacher-scaffolding, completing this table in the target language could also be an effective activity.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN:

As we have seen, these two activities can be proposed at different times of the lesson and are both aimed at working on classroom well-being while also promoting a new and less rigid conception of grammar and its teaching.

On the model you have just seen, carry out one of the following tasks:

TASK 1: choose a grammar structure or item in the language you teach and try to write a text that your students have to correct. Mention how you would conduct the correction and emphasise how the mistakes are different in nature.

TASK 2: choose a grammar structure or item in the language you teach and try to fill in the table we have proposed – or create a new one – with the possible answers you expect from your students imagining you have fostered a flexible and dynamic approach to grammar teaching and a horizontal planning.

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY: Exploring grammar teaching and learning

In this section of the module you have seen five proposals to approach grammar teaching which are mainly in agreement among them, although conjugating all of them might be a bit complicated and could overwhelm the students.

Each STEP focused on a proposal that always considers students' acquisition process and their well-being as central to any learning experience. What changed were the theoretical assumptions behind each proposal and the fact that, probably, some methodologies or strategies might better apply at different levels of teaching or to some structures rather than others while other principles or tasks – see the 1. STEP and 5. STEP – could become a constant element of grammar teaching.

In order to encourage you to experiment with grammar teaching, the final activity that we ask you to carry out here focuses on the creation of a learning unit in which you have to teach a target structure of your choice.

For the sake of coherence, you are not required to include all the strategies and approaches presented in all five STEPS. For instance, we agree that Processing Instruction and a Cognitive Grammar-based teaching, would be difficult to use in the same class session without sounding redundant, if not confusing.

CREATE YOUR LEARNING UNIT ON GRAMMAR

(It is sufficient for you to specify the phases of your lesson and briefly describe what you would do in them. You don't necessarily have to provide detailed materials, but you are welcome to if you want!)

SPECIFY THE GRAMMAR ITEM YOU WANT TO TEACH: _____

INDICATE THE STRATEGIES/METHODOLOGIES/APPROACHES YOU WILL INCLUDE AND SPECIFY HOW THEY WILL EMERGE FROM YOUR UNIT:

- Horizontal planning (1. STEP)
- Communicative grammar production (2. STEP)
- Processing Instruction (3. STEP)
- Cognitive Grammar-based teaching (4. STEP)
- Metareflection on the flexibility of grammar and promotion of student autonomy (5. STEP)

SPECIFY WHY YOU LEFT OUT THE STRATEGIES/METHODOLOGIES/APPROACHES YOU DID NOT INCLUDE:

DESCRIPTION OF YOUR LEARNING UNIT

Type in here...