Grammar in the Communicative Classroom: Friend or Foe?

Mónica Mulholland, Ph.D.
AGENDA

• 5 min warm-up
• Intro
• What is language? How does that affect language teaching?
• Larsen-Freeman’s Pedagogy
• The Inert Knowledge Problem
• Grammaring or Functional Grammar
• Examples: face-to-face & digital
5 min. Warm-up: Reflection activity 1

Introduce yourself to your neighbor/s and discuss this statement: “In the late 1980’s, language teachers were confident that any attention to language form would cause students to feel stressed or anxious without really helping them become more proficient in the second language.” (Lightbown 2000). Do you share this opinion?
Informal Survey on Grammar

In your opinion, what is the optimal method to learn Spanish Grammar?

Answered: 22  Skipped: 2

- By professor’s lecture and...
- By studying beforehand a...
- By learning in groups with ...

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Informal Survey on Grammar

Do you consider it is important to learn the grammar of a language in order to use that language as a college student and/or after graduation?

Answered: 23   Skipped: 1

- Yes
- No
- Do not have an opinion

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<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<td>Yes</td>
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100.00% of the respondents answered 'Yes'.
What is language?

1. Language is a means of cultural transmission.

2. Language is what people use to talk about the things that are important to them, for example, occurrences in their everyday lives.

3. Language is a set of sound (or, in the case of sign language, sign) and sentence patterns that express meaning.

4. Language is a set of rules through which humans can create and understand novel utterances, ones that they have never before articulated or encountered.

5. Language is a means of interaction between and among people.

6. Language is the means for doing something - accomplishing some purpose, for example, agreeing on a plan of action for handling a conflict.

7. Language is a vehicle for communicating meaning and messages.

8. Language is an instrument of power (those who know a language are empowered in a way that those who do not are not).

9. Language is a medium through which one can learn other things.

10. Language is holistic and is therefore best understood as it is manifest in discourse or whole texts.

Larsen-Freeman (2003) p. 1
What is language?

Our answers to this question will inform our beliefs about language teaching and learning and what we do in the classroom as we teach the language.

Becker (1983), “Our ‘picture’ of language is the single most important factor in determining the way we choose to teach one.”
What is language?

[Diagram of an iceberg with layers: Communication style, Beliefs, Attitudes, Values, Perceptions, Cultural and social norms, with LANGUAGE highlighted]
Relevance to language teaching: Despite some overlap among the ten definitions, each presents a view of language that may be realized in a language classroom in quite distinct ways. For instance, depending upon your view of language, you may choose different elements or aspects of language to emphasize.
Relevance to Language teaching

1. *Cultural transmission*: focus on literature, history, current events
2. *Everyday life*: family, daily routines, situations
3. *Sound and sentence patterns*: sentence patterns: statements, questions, negation, intonation
4. *Rules*
Relevance to Language teaching

5. **Means of interaction**: interpersonal communication, social context: *Spoken vs. Written Grammar?*

6. **Means of doing something**: functions such as agreeing, expressing preference

7. **Means for communicating**: emphasis on lexical items
Relevance to Language teaching

9. *Medium*: content such as geography, along with language-learning strategies (reading comprehension, for example)

10. *Holistic*: reading and writing different texts
Larsen-Freeman’s Pedagogy

The question is whether it makes more sense to teach others to use a language by preparing them to do so –systematically helping students develop control of the forms of the language, building their competence in a bottom-up manner –or have students learn in a top-down manner –learning to use another language by using it.

Presentation-Practice-Production
Practice-Production-Presentation
Larsen-Freeman’s Pedagogy

She concludes that, ideally, these two methods should be integrated for best results, but, in reality, in most language classrooms, these (function and form) remain segregated.
What are the problems of a segregated approach?

• Few students sustain their enthusiasm for learning when the lesson focuses on the parts of language.

• However, even if they are not thrilled, some students welcome a lesson focused on form (familiarity, a sense of accomplishment, a sense of security –something almost tangible to hold on to)
The Inert Knowledge Problem

Students can recall the grammar rules when they are asked to do so but will not use them spontaneously in communication, even when they are relevant. This contributes to a great deal of attrition from language study. Students become discouraged when they cannot do anything useful with what they are learning.
Reflection activity 2: What associations do you make with the words *grammar* and *communication*?
When I think of grammar, I think of...

• Rules
• Parts of speech; verb paradigms
• Structures, forms
• Word order in sentences
• Memorizing
• Red ink
• Drills
• Boredom
When I think of communication, I think of...

- Dynamic understanding
- The four skills
- Meaning
- Accomplishing some purpose
- Interacting
- Establishing relationships
- Small group activities
- Fun
All the qualities of “communication” described above, should be equally applicable to the study of grammar. Presenting “grammar” in such a context, (as communication) is the only way in which we can help our students overcome the dual problems of their lack of engagement in learning the forms and their inability to call upon their knowledge of forms when they must put their knowledge to use (Larsen-Freeman p. 9).
To think of grammar as a skill rather than an area of knowledge; this emphasizes the importance of students’ developing an ability to do something, not simply storing knowledge about the language. Larsen-Freeman coined the term *grammaring* (1992) to highlight the dynamism of grammar.
When we view grammar as a skill, we are much more inclined to create learning situations that overcome the inert knowledge problem. We will not ask our students to merely memorize rules and then wonder why they do not apply them in communication. **Skill development takes practice, and learning grammar takes practice.**
Also called Functional Grammar by Oliveira and Schleppegrell

The goal is to move from thinking of grammar as rules to viewing it as a resource for meaning-making. The focus in the learner-centered classroom should be meaning, but to make meaning, the forms need to be recognized, learned, and practiced (Oliveira and Schleppegrell, 2015. p. 13)
How?

By rethinking Lesson Objectives: What are the students going to do today? Instead of what am I going to cover today?

Applying Bloom’s Taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking
### Bloom’s Taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking

**Benjamin Bloom, 1956**

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**BLOOM’S TAXONOMY**

- **Evaluation**
  - Assessing theories; comparison of ideas; evaluating outcomes; solving; judging; recommending; rating
- **Synthesis**
  - Using old concepts to create new ideas; design and invention; composing; imagining; inferring; modifying; predicting; combining
- **Analysis**
  - Identifying and analyzing patterns; organization of ideas; recognizing trends
- **Application**
  - Understanding; translating; summarizing; demonstrating; discussing
- **Comprehension**
  - Recall of information; discovery; observation; listing; locating; naming
- **Knowledge**
  - Recall; defining; describing; enumerating; finding; identifying; labeling; listing; matching; naming; reading; reproducing; select; sequence; state; view; write
Example: 1. Grammar Scavenger Hunt

Students will _skim_ newspaper articles, _select_ instances of usage of various verb tenses (active and passive voice), relative pronouns, and modal verbs, _create_ a poster, and _explain_ their choices by means of a mini-presentation.
Example 2: Ads

Students will select a product or a service they want to advertise, they will design a poster which contains at least three expressions with the passive “se”, they will illustrate the ad, and report to the rest of the class.
Advertise a product or a service. Include the passive marker “se”
Example 3: La naturaleza y el medio ambiente.

Materials: Video: Ojalá que llueva

Task: Recognize familiar words in a song and write them down, and identify terms related to the topic of Nature and the environment.
Ojalá que llueva, Juan Luis Guerra (Continued)

- (at the end of the song) students come up to the board and list their words without repeating those already up.
- Students compare their individual lists with the one on the board.
- Students define or illustrate with examples (in Spanish) some of the words on the board. This can be done in pairs or small groups.
- In pairs, students use at least four of the words in an imaginary speech by a politician. What needs to be done to improve the situation in Santo Domingo? Es necesario que..., No cabe duda de que..., etc. (they will evaluate their decisions and select the best)
- In pairs, students design and create a poster that will form part of that politician’s campaign to win the presidential election. This will be created on
PADLET WALL:
http://padlet.com/mdmulholl/ykrpww081ayd

Nick Sykes y Karen Cantwell
Necesitan aumentar su producción de café para ganar más dinero. La población está en la pobreza.

Emily y Ashley
Santo Domingo necesita más negocios para aumentar trabajos.

Cali y Chinmayee
La canción es sobre los derechos civiles y la pobreza en el caribe. La causa de la pobreza puede ser la mayoría de las empresas de café que no ayudan a la población.

Alyson C. y Alex
Necesitan que disminuya la tasa desempleo.

Jennifer and Elizabeth:
Experto que no haya guerra y ellos tengan los fondos para comprar comida.

Anthony y Catherine
Crear un mundo perfecto, necesitamos disminuir guerra y aumentar paz y felicidad. En un mundo perfecto, no existe la pobreza.

Karín y Nick
Todas las personas tienen la felicidad, la paz y la propiedad. La mayoría de la población puede leer y escribir. No hay pobreza o pandillas y no hay mucha contaminación. Todas las personas tendrán los derechos civiles respetados.

Beverly y Grant
En el mundo perfecto hay felicidad por todos. La fuente de energía es limpia y las guarderías infantiles son de buena calidad. Todos tienen derechos civiles. Los personas no tienen analfabetismo. Todos naciones se respetan y hay la paz por todos. No necesita orfanatos.
Example 4: Authentic Writing Assignments

Step 1 (First draft in class): Students will **demonstrate** understanding of the topics presented/practiced in class by writing a timed composition (no textbooks or dictionaries allowed)

Step 2 (at home): Students will **examine** the teacher’s comments on it, and **create** a blog post with their second (and final draft)

Step 3 (at home): Students will **select** a classmate’s post, and **elaborate** a reply.
Español intermedio (Span. 210) describe una fiesta inolvidable

Monica Mulholland  ·  September 20, 2015  ·  Spanish-language practice, Culture, College  ·  14 Comments  ·  Edit

Luego de estudiar el vocabulario relacionado con las fiestas y los verbos en preterito (pasado simple), los estudiantes describen una fiesta que les haya gustado mucho. Las descripciones estarán dentro de los comentarios a este post. ¡Que las disfruten!

Prof. Mulholland

Mike
September 21, 2015 at 4:42 pm  Edit

La fiesta de graduación

Hace tres semanas, mi novia tuvo una fiesta para su graduación de la Universidad de Nueva Jersey. Ella vive en la ciudad de Rockaway en la norte parte de Nueva Jersey. Yo conduje mi coche por cinco horas para la fiesta. La fiesta fue en una playa cerca de su casa y hacia mucho calor. Ella invitó a toda la gente de su familia. También algunas amigas vinieron. Comimos comida italiana y un sandwich que era más alto de un niño. Mi novia compró muchos refrescos y agua para beber. Todos los invitados dieron muchos regalos para mi novia. Mi novia, quien se llama Lauren, estuvo muy feliz.

Después de comer, fuimos a la playa y jugamos voleibol y cornhole. Los primos de Lauren que son niños, ganaron al voleibol. A las cinco de la noche, todos sus tios y primos y amigos salieron a sus casas.

Después de la fiesta, Lauren y yo tomamos una botella de vino blanco cerca del agua. La fiesta fue especial porque no vi a mi novia mucho en el verano pasado y también porque fue una fiesta importante para Lauren.

Reply
Los estudiantes de español 250 [pre-avanzado] se comunicaron con la Profesora Sandra Goronas y con el Profesor Gonzalo Rosetti de Buenos Aires y con la Profesora Carla Raguseo de Santa Fe. En este enlace (Proyecto) tendrán acceso a las imágenes y el sonido. Los chicos y las chicas hablan de por qué están estudiando español, nos cuentan un poco de su vida y les hacen preguntas a nuestros invitados de Argentina.

Gracias a todos los que participaron en este proyecto que demuestra el valor de extender la clase más allá de las paredes del aula y de las fronteras territoriales. ¡Una gran experiencia educativa para todos!
Conclusion

• How to teach grammar? By integrating these three dimensions: form, meaning and use.

• When? As part of the whole that is language. Our classroom should reflect that whole, that continuum. Focusing on grammar does not mean providing endless worksheets to complete, or interrupting the students in their attempt to communicate. It means promoting awareness and, hopefully, infusing interest and why not delight in learning the language?

• We cannot do any of this if we do not expand our students’ engagement.
References


