Learning to Grammar
Integrating Grammar into Communicative Approaches to SLA
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What is Grammar?
The skeleton of language:
• Supports communication
• Holds everything together
• Enables language to be active and vibrant
• Carries social meaning

What Does it Mean to “Grammar”? According to Diane Larson-Freeman: To grammar means learning to use the grammatical system of a language as a communication skill.

Why Learn to Grammar?
• To be understood – coherent and cohesive
• To have your message respected
• To be polite

Different Scenarios for SLA
1. Language School
2. Linguists
3. Working with a Tutor

These first three scenarios share the same common problem: Inert Knowledge.

4. Comprehension-Driven Self-Directed Learning
Common Problem: Insufficient noticing of grammatical and/or lack of effective feedback and correction

5. Speech-driven Self-Directed Learning
Common Problem: Over-reliance on memorization and habit-formation

Common problem: Integration of knowledge studied in school with communicative activities in SDL

In Each scenario some learners do well and achieve a fair to high proficiency in speech and some learners do not. In all cases, a major deficiency in the ability to use the grammatical system well impedes communication.
How is Grammaring Learned? (or Acquired)

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<th>Approach</th>
<th>Relies on</th>
<th>What can go wrong?</th>
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<td>Immersion</td>
<td>Adults learning like children</td>
<td>Comprehensible input and interaction isn’t always enough</td>
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<td>Immersion with controlled input</td>
<td>Learner ability to acquire grammar from input without explanations</td>
<td>Works better for some learners than others Learners may process messages but not notice the forms</td>
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<td>Audiolingual Approach</td>
<td>Habit formation and memorization</td>
<td>People tune out What they practice is not what they want to say With LAMP –what they want to say may not be at their level – they memorize it Often can’t parse what they say or hear</td>
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<td>Grammar Translation</td>
<td>Ability to turn declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge</td>
<td>Not many people are really successful at becoming fluent by doing this</td>
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<td>Communicative Approaches</td>
<td>Ability to learn from trial and error and to notice difference between what they say and what other people say</td>
<td>People concentrate on exchange of messages, not on the grammatical forms. They process lexical meaning and may not notice forms that carry grammatical meaning</td>
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My Beliefs about SLA
1. Adults are not big children and don’t learn exactly the same way as children do.
2. Comprehensible Input may not be enough for people to acquire grammatical competence without feedback and some correction.
3. Accuracy, fluency and complexity are all important to develop to be able to communicate well and if you neglect them too long it is harder to develop them.
4. Adults’ SLA can be made more rapid, effective, efficient and enjoyable by appropriate “intervention” from teachers, coaches, nurturers, tutors or helpers.

Three Components of Grammar and Keys to Learning them (Diane Larsen-Freeman)
1. Form – the key to learning it is frequency.
2. Meaning – the key to learning it is association.
3. Use – the key to learning it is context.

How do we Learn “to Grammar”?
- Engage in meaningful activities – using the grammatical forms we want to learn.
- Look at the pattern or the rule ahead of time to focus on what we want to learn.
- Set up activities that require us to use certain forms, but where we actually express something meaningful.
- When doing the activities, we concentrate on meaning, as well as form.

Today’s Learners Are...
- Socially connected.
- Tech-savvy and expect to use their tech tools to communicate and learn.
- Content-producers and publishers of blogs and online posts.
Why do these Learners Find Grammar Boring or Irrelevant?

- They don’t connect grammar with communication.
- The activities they are given to do are boring.
- They aren’t expressing their own emotions and ideas, with the grammatical forms they are trying to learn.

How Can Learning Grammar Be Fun?

- Have learners work together on joint projects and get local people involved in helping them with their projects.
- Encourage them to produce and publish content by sharing it with others – “publishing” their projects in some shared space.
- Turn “drills” into puzzles, games or quizzes.
- Keep the projects at the learners’ level.

In a Language School or Language Acquisition Center

- Have learners engage in some activities where they have to notice the form of the language to distinguish meaning.
- Control input so that the form-meaning link is focused.
- Give some learners the chance to discover rules.
- Give class assignments that are puzzles in which they need to figure out the answer from the form.
- Give homework assignments to do out in the community where they need to use the forms.

In Self-Directed Programs

- Get learners to keep a portfolio with samples of their speech and writing.
- Include activities where they actively ask for feedback on these performances.
- As learners progress, include some assignments that require more complex structures.
- Teach learner strategies to turn communication into learning.
- Give some assignments where they have to share their writing or speaking with other learners.

In More Speech-Driven Self-Directed Programs

- Make sure learners know how to elicit natural-sounding texts.
- Help them identify basic sentence patterns within the texts, and make sure they have ideas for how to practice those structures in meaningful ways.
- Have them start with simple Q-A sets instead of whole memorized paragraphs.
- Give suggestions for incorporating listening activities with what they want to learn to say. For example: if learning to ask directions, start with TPR activities to help them understand directions first.

From Early Stages

- Suggest learners make scrapbooks or digital scrapbooks. Post pictures of places they have visited. Label entries or get someone to label it for them or write a caption. They might add a map and record themselves giving directions. Suggest that if they can write more they add comments on what they did at that place.
• Take pictures of foods they order when they eat out and learn to recognize the names of the dishes. Get someone to label the pictures for them, if they can’t yet write the language.

If You Have a Number of Learners of the Same Language

1. Assign joint projects with other learners, where they have to speak or write. For example:
   • Cookbook based on Series activities
   • Guide book of interesting places with pictures, cultural notes, directions
   • Collection of family histories, or illustrated personal biographies
2. Draw some attention to the kinds of grammatical structures that show up in these projects.
3. Encourage learners to get input from local friends on how to make their project more accurate.

In Summary

1. Think of grammar as a communicative skill and use communicative activities to help learners acquire it, but don’t assume it will happen automatically without activities that make the form salient.
2. Keep the advantages of meaning-based activities, but also include some overt focus on form and how it relates to meaning.
3. Don’t wait until errors are fossilized to give feedback and promote awareness of accuracy.
4. Get learners involved in thinking up joint activities where they can be creative and produce and share content.
5. Use reading and writing and the production of videos or oral recordings to help learners develop the appropriate concern for accuracy.
6. Get local people to give feedback and correction so learners can be proud of what they produce.