

# Teaching grammar

Instructor: Nguyen Ngoc Vu Ph.D.

# Outline

- General issues
- Showing structure meaning
- Practicing structures

# Teaching Grammar Effectively

The best way to teach grammar is .....  
Some responses from teachers

- *Students need to understand the situation.*
- *Communicative way - first practice, then rule*
- *Deductive and inductive*
- *Test teach test*
- *Errors help them **notice the gap**.*
- *Creating situations for practice*
- *Understanding meaning from context*
- *Teachers need to present the rules.*
- *Asking concept questions*
- *Students need to **notice** the patterns and identify if right or wrong.*



# Arguments against Grammar Instruction

- The study of grammar promotes knowledge about language not how to use the language (Krashen, 1983, p. 10).
- We acquire our first language without any explicit knowledge of grammar (Krashen, 1983, p. 10).
- The natural order (Krashen, 1983, pp. 12-36) in which languages are learned precludes the influence of instruction.
- If communicative competence is the goal, then classroom time is better spent engaging in language use (Krashen, 1983, p. 37).

# Arguments for Grammar Instruction

- Without explicit instruction learners' interlanguage often fossilizes.
- Grammar instruction may act as an advanced organizer helping learners to notice features of language when they are ready.
- Learning finite rules can help to simplify an otherwise daunting and complex task by organizing it into neat categories.
- Older students' expectation about language learning often includes grammar instruction.
- Learning grammar structures allows for more creative applications of language.

(Lightbown & Spada, 1990, pp. 429-448)

# Why is grammar important to teach?

- Develop a metalanguage and ability to reflect on and analyze how you write
- Develop the ability to identify and fix errors in writing
- Conventions tell the reader how to interpret text
- “It sounds right” can only get you so far and does not work for everyone
- Serves a “gatekeeping” function in many contexts

# Grammar presentation methods

- Deductive methods
- Inductive methods

# Deductive methods



# Steps for deductive methods

The **deductive method** relies on **reasoning, analysing and comparing**

- Presentation (by example)
- Explanation (native language, terms)
- Production



The **deductive method** is criticized because:

- Grammar is taught in an **isolated** way;
- Little attention is paid to **meaning**;
- The practice is often **mechanical**.

# MERITS

- It could be very successful with **selected and motivated students**.
- It could **save time** when students are confronted with a grammar rule which is complex but which has to be learned.
- It may help to increase student' confidence in those examinations which are written with **accuracy** as the main criterion of success.

# Inductive methods

# Inductive Method

- In the inductive method, the teacher induces the learners to realise grammar rules **without any form of explicit explanation.**
- It is believed that the rules will become evident if the students are given enough appropriate examples.

# Steps for inductive method

- Presentation (by examples)
- Induction
- Production

# Sources of inductive instruction:

- Realia / Actions
- Worksheets (can often be structured to inductively lead students to a grammar rule)
- Authentic texts (after listening to a dialogue or reading a text, students can answer questions to highlight certain grammatical structures– these may then be used to derive rules)
- Dialogues
- Recorded Conversations

**Showing meaning of a  
new structure**



# Showing meaning visually

- Use things students can see: objects, classroom, yourself, students themselves, pictures
- How do you present these structures:
  - ‘Too ... ADJ ... to...’
  - Comparison: ADJ + er
  - As + ADJ + as
  - Can + verb



# Showing meaning through a situation

- Think of a situation outside the class in which the structure can be naturally used.
- How do you present these structures:
  - I wish ...
  - There's no point in ....-ing
  - See sb doing st

# Showing form and meaning

- Give a clear model & ask Ss to repeat 2 or 3 times

T: Listen. It's too heavy to lift. It's too heavy to lift.

Ss: It's too heavy to lift.

- Write the structure clearly on the board

**It's TOO heavy TO lift.**

# Contrasting structures

- Important when there is a contrast bet. 2 structures
- 2 ways of doing this
  - Giving examples
  - Giving simple explanations
- How do you present these structures:
  - There is .... vs. There are ...
  - A little .... vs. A few ....

# Stages of presenting a structure

1. Draw the pictures & give the example
2. Give a model & ask Ss to repeat
3. Ask individual Ss to repeat the sentence
4. Write the sentence on the board
5. Explain how the structure is formed
6. Ask the class to copy the sentence
7. Give other situations & examples

# Practicing structures

# Techniques of practice

- Controlled practice
  - Mechanical practice
  - Meaningful practice
- Free practice



# Mechanical practice

**Mechanical practice** involves activities that are aimed at *form accuracy*.

Commonly used drills

- Repetition
- Substitution
- Transformation
- Single word prompts
- Picture prompts
- Free substitution

Substitute the underlined part with the proper forms of the given words:

*green lawn*

*clean house*

*pretty garden*

*nice flowers*

Mrs Green has the *largest house* in town.

Change the following sentences into the past tense.  
Use the adverbs given in the brackets.

- *Now he lives in London. (last year, Paris)*
- *We have English and maths today. (yesterday, music and P. E.)*
- *He usually gets up at seven. (this morning, eight)*

# Questions for discussion

- What is the purpose of mechanical practice?
- What are the advantages and disadvantage of mechanical practice?

# Meaningful practice

- In meaningful practice the focus is on the **production, comprehension or exchange of meaning**, though the students “keep an eye on” the way newly learned structures are used in the process.  
e.g. After the presentation and mechanical practice of adjective comparatives and superlatives:

Pair work: Look at the table below. Rank the items on the left column according to the criteria listed on the top.

	<b>Cheap</b>	<b>Healthy</b>	<b>Tasty</b>	<b>Fattening</b>	<b>Important</b>
Beer					
Water					
Fruit					
Cigarettes					
Alcohol					
Milk					



The students may come up with:

- *I think beer is cheaper than fruit.*
- *No, no, I think fruit is cheaper than beer.*

# Three ways of making practice more meaningful

- Getting Ss to say real things about themselves

Ex: Say true sentences about yourself:

I often go to the cinema but I rarely go to the zoo.

- Giving situations that imply the structure; Leave Ss to decide what to say
- Letting Ss add something of their own

Ex: T: What do you want to do when you grow up?

S: I want to be a doctor.

T: Why?

S: Because ...



# Questions for discussion

- What are the advantages of meaningful practice?
- Does it have any possible disadvantages?

# Teaching practice

---

- Do some ELT2 exam questions.  
Practice teaching if possible.

# Teaching practice

---

- ① You have just presented the simple past tense to a group of grade 7 students.
- ② Design a mechanical practice activity and a meaningful practice activity.
- ③ Write out the steps and give a mini demonstration in your practice group.

# Free practice

- Free practice gives Ss the chance to use the structure to express their own ideas or to talk about their own experiences.
- 2 kinds of useful topics for free oral practice
  - Get Ss to talk about real life
  - Ask Ss to imagine a situation which is not real

# Some suggestions about teaching grammar

1. Teach only those rules that are **simple and typical**.
2. Teach **useful and important** grammar points.
3. Teach grammar in **context**.
4. Use **visible instruments** such as charts, tables, diagrams, maps, drawings, and realia (pl. of realis) to aid understanding;
5. Avoid difficult grammatical terminologies as much as possible.
6. Allow enough **opportunities** for practice.
7. Live with the students' mistakes and errors.