Grammar Module 2 (GM2)

Resource 2a: Trainer’s notes to accompany PowerPoint

The Why and How of grammar teaching

Trainer’s notes to accompany PowerPoint presentation

Slide 2

It will be important to discuss what we are hoping to achieve as language teachers, particularly in relation to grammar, before moving on to consider ways to achieve it. Slide 2 poses some questions which are likely to lead to the conclusion that not all activities have the same goals, and certainly not at different levels, but there will be some common factors.

Slide 3

What is communicative language teaching?

Invite definitions of communicative language teaching.

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| Activity:Which of these statements do you think characterise communicative language teaching?Are there any that you disagree with? Could you rank order the ones you agree with?  |

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| 1. **Students learn a language best when using it to do things rather than learning rules**
2. **Grammar is no longer important in language teaching**
3. **Writing the language is not important**
4. **Students learn a language through communicating in it**
5. **Errors should not be corrected as long as the message is communicated**
6. **Students should only read authentic texts**
7. **Speaking is the most important aspect of language teaching**
8. **Classroom activities should be meaningful and involve real communication**
9. **Accuracy and fluency are equally important in communicative language teaching**
10. **All communication in the classroom should be in the target language**
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What do we mean by ‘authentic’? – Invite definitions

Is real authenticity achievable?

Can language use be ‘authentic’ with such limited knowledge?

Does this have implications for target language use?

How ‘authentic’ can we make the pre-communicative tasks?

Is there a place for language ‘drills’?

Activity

Invite students to work in groups and discuss the lesson/activity they reflected on in preparation for the course.

Has what they have heard so far changed the way they view that activity?

Invite feedback from groups if they wish to give it.

Slide 4

Do we put a different emphasis on grammar when teaching different skills? Do we teach ‘grammar for listening’ or ‘grammar for reading’? or do we only talk about grammar in the context of writing or speaking?

Are we more tolerant of error in speaking then in writing? If so, why?

Slides 5–7

These slides explore the causes of error and our attitudes to them. It is a vast topic which cannot be fully explored within this module, but it is worth drawing out a few significant points. It is particularly important to focus on the point of the exercise (slide 7) as this will often dictate the approach taken by the teacher.

Slide 8

Before moving on to some examples of grammar in context, it would be useful to agree some general conclusions. Trainers may decide to change these conclusions or to omit this slide.

Slide 9

Grammar in context

Is it possible to teach grammar in a context which will interest the students, given the gap between cognitive maturity and linguistic competence?

Can we make these tasks authentic or do we have to motivate the students to ‘buy into’ the artificial nature of some tasks as a means to an end?

How do we do that? Invite suggestions from staff. These may include:

* Providing models to copy
* Scaffolding and gradually withdrawing support
* Providing supplementary support for those students who need it
* Providing more open-ended tasks but within a controlled framework for more able students.

Slides 10–18

Even if we cannot aim for complete authenticity, we can certainly teach grammar in context and come closer to ‘meanings that matter’.

A few examples:

**Desert Island Discs slide** – practice of imperfect tense is an enjoyable context. Students use this slide (or similar) as an example and adapt their own song, book, film, etc. Sentence frame with model verbs can be supplied for support if needed.

**Fantasy dinner party slide** – can be adapted to practise conditional tense and discuss what would happen, or could be used to practise descriptions. Students plan their own ideal party (holiday/outing/ barbecue etc) guests and say why they would invite them. Could be a group activity.

**German New Year’s resolutions** – practice of future tense

**Verde que te quiero verde** – substitute a different colour or other adjective to practise agreement of adjectives in a creative context.

**Other poems** – use as models and substitute different verbs.

**Song to adapt** – highlight all uses of subjunctive. Adapt song to a different context

**Song / rap writing** – students write their own song/rap and produce a video to accompany it. Song can be based around a particular grammar point. Examples can be found on the Routes into Languages SW Youtube site.

Think about what sort of pre-communicative work (scaffolding, grammar exercises or whatever we wish to call it) would have to be done in preparation for these activities.

**Invite staff to work in groups** and devise an activity for grammar in context which would suit the cognitive maturity and interest of a defined group of students. They should decide:

* The grammar point to be taught
* How they would teach this using pre-communicative activities
* What the final ‘product’ would be
* How they would support weaker students whilst allowing scope for more able students
* What the success criteria for the activity would be

Suggested further reading

**Written from an EFL perspective, a little dated, but interesting:**

Nunan, D. (1998) *Teaching Grammar in Context*: 203.72.145.166/ELT/files/52-2-1.pdf

**An old stalwart – but still with something to say!:**

Littlewood, D. (1983) *Communicative Language Teaching: an Introduction* (Cambridge University Press).