

Accordingly, it's advisable for teachers to integrate grammar structures into short and meaningful conversational texts. Of course, grammar points may not all be equally suitable for being contextualized.

Many teachers may find it difficult and tiresome to prepare appropriate texts for every small point, and on the other hand, many beginning students may not be able to process the foreign language beyond short constituents, i.e., words, phrases and sentences. As Swan(2002: 148) puts it, "It is important to choose grammar points relevant to students' needs and level rather than blindly going through the syllabus from left to right". In the contextualization of grammar points, apart from these two criteria, the teacher should consider how suitable the point is for being contextualized.

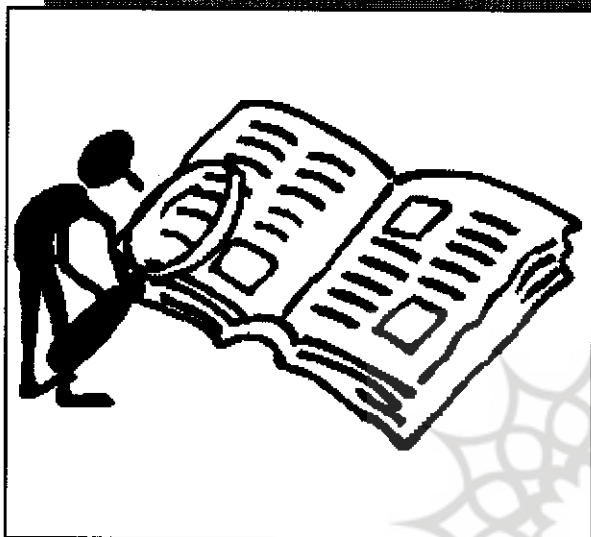
The suggested technique doesn't reject the deductive teaching practiced in the class, but rather, its objective is to reconcile the conventional grammar teaching with functional and communicative considerations. Taking a context-based approach to teaching grammar gives the learner a more natural, realistic and dynamic impression of grammar, making her/him develop proper appreciation of the form-function relations. They are exposed to fairly ample linguistic input and can not only learn the rule in question in an almost psychologically real way but also 'notice' many other form(especially communicative forms), and this noticing, in turn, can be a prerequisite for further learning(Thornbury 1999).

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# Gram



the text so that the learner could have more exposure to the rule. Also, the tense was mostly used in a way that its different meanings were understood by the learner so as to prevent her/him from this supposition that there is only one to one correspondence between form and function. Some texts were the exact extracts from different books; some others were adapted to conform to the subjects' level and needs, and some were teacher-made. The texts were either presented in the form of hand-outs or written on the blackboard. The students were given opportunities to practice the texts to learn the tenses in discourses similar to those of the everyday life dialogues. After the treatment, a post test was given to both groups. The test comprised 20 items on English tenses: 15 items were of the multiple-choice type, and the last 5 items were in the form of short texts which the

subjects were to write the correct form of the verbs in brackets. The mean and Standard control group were respectively 12.38 and 2.26, and for the experimental group were 13.8 and 2.87. To compare the means of the two groups, the t-test was employed. The t-observed was 2.028. At the 0.05 probability level ( $p \leq 0.05$ ), and the degree of freedom of 58, t-critical is 2.000, so t-observed was greater than t-critical, and this result indicated that the difference between the groups was statistically significant.

Also to show how much the experimental group was attentive to the context and communicative features, some short conversational passages were given to both groups. In each exercise, the subject was expected to fill a blank with an appropriate form that best expresses the relevant communicative function. The exercises were like the following one:  
Mrs. Wilson:.....to have some more chicken?

Mrs. Brown: O No, thanks I've had it two times.

- a) Do you like      b) Would you like
- c) Will you like    d) would you want

The number of the correct answers by the experimental group was far more than those of the control one. The majority of the subjects in the experimental group had '*noticed*' the conversational clues. This shows that the contextualization of the rules contributes not only to the better learning of the rules but also to the improvement of the learners' communicative competence.

## Conclusion

On the one hand, the adult EFL learners cognitively and affectively benefit from the grammatical explanation and deductive thinking (Ausubel 1964), and on the other hand, in order to develop their communicative competence, they need to relate their grammatical competence to their social needs.

This technique makes the learner work with language at the suprasentential level and get familiar with the aspects of discourse (cohesion and coherence). A single structure can be meaningfully repeated in the text, and this repetition could contribute to its retention. In the discourse, the learner can recognize various meanings of a single form and also sees how a single meaning can be expressed through different forms. In the text below, the present progressive tense conveys two meanings: the first expresses an action happening now, and the second and third express future:

Jack: Are you doing anything right now?

John: No. Nothing in particular. Why? What's up?

Jack: We're going to the movies in half an hour.  
Are you coming with us?

John: Er, let me see...

Apart from the structure to learn, (s)/he can notice how a grammatical structure can be related to the forms of different communicative functions. For example, in the first text, '*excuse me*' initiates a conversation, '*would you please*' is used to make a polite request, and '*you can...*' expresses a suggestion.

The teacher had better use texts that match the students' needs and provide opportunities for them to practice the texts, trying to present the rules as well as the communicative acts in a '*spiral*' fashion so that the students constantly encounter them. This will expedite the transfer of the items from the short term memory to long term one.

Although the teacher cannot replicate the authentic communicative situations seen outside the class, (s)/he can at least simulate some conversational situations, aiding the learner to process linguistic items in a more or less similar way to the naturalistic processing.

## An Experiment

To see how effective the above-mentioned technique is, an experiment was conducted in an ELT institution. 60 high school students were assigned into two groups: an experimental group (30 students) and a control group (30 students). A pretest was administered, and the F test was applied to see if the groups are comparable. The observed F was 1.22, which was less than the critical F, 1.81. This showed that the difference between the groups wasn't significant and they were liable to be compared. In order to increase the internal validity of the experiment, it was attempted to control as many relevant variables as possible. All the subjects were adult Iranian EFL students who had registered for the English course of the third grade of high school. Both groups received formal instruction for 12 sessions. (2 sessions per week), and both groups were taught by the same teacher. The grammatical points selected for the treatment were the English tenses. (The reason for choosing tenses is that the category of tense is of multiple types, and this multiplicity allows for better discrimination among the subjects, thus providing meaningful information). Both groups were taught most of the English tenses along with their own coursebooks; however, the techniques of the presentation of the tenses were different: the control group was taught traditionally, i.e., the principles of the grammar-translation method was drawn on. The structure (formula) of the tense to be taught was introduced deductively, and its use(s) was explained in the learners' native language, i.e., Persian. Then a few exemplary sentences (detached from any context) were used to demonstrate the application of the rule. As for the experimental group, each tense was explained in English (or in Persian if they felt confused); then it was placed in texts containing some communicative acts. Attempt was made to use a single tense more than once in



'categories of verbal behavior' (Richards et. al. 1992). These functions are referred to as '*communicative acts*', e.g., greetings, farewells, requests, admissions, apologies, complaints, offers, compliments, etc.(see Brown 1987, p. 204). Of course, the adult learner is aware of these functions; the aim is to show her/him how they are realized in the foreign language(Rutherford 1987). Long's '*focus on form*' approach assumes that grammar instruction is best provided during communicative activity.(Sheen 2003:225), and "*a communicative activity*", according to Brown(2000: 250), "*is a series of communicative acts or speech acts which are used systematically to accomplish particular purposes*", so it seems reasonable to integrate the grammar structure to be taught into conversational texts. In the process of the contextualization,

however, the teacher should take care that the linguistic context conforms to the learners' level of achievement. The texts should be worked out in a way that they can serve as '*comprehensible input*'. Krashen (1985) believes that classes are effective when they are primary source of comprehensible input. Consider, for example, the following text for the presentation of the '*present progressive*' tense:

Tourist: Excuse me sir, I'm visiting London, sightseeing, you know, and now I'm looking for Trafalgar square. Would you please show me the way to the square?

Man: I'm going to the square. You can come along with me.

Tourist: OK. Thank you.

structures. As Rivers (1981: 47) puts it, "Students may progress like a well-trained parrot-able to repeat whole sentences perfectly, but uncertain of the meaning of what they are saying and unable to use memorized materials in contexts other than those in which they have learnt them".

The two mentioned types of grammar instruction, though pedagogically prevalent, tend to limit the knowledge of grammar to the level of syntax without reference to structure to structure beyond sentence, thus reducing meaning to semantic propositions (Cook 1991).

### The Functional Approach

The functional approach to language is mainly concerned with the use of language in context and is intimately related to the communicative approach (Berns 1984). It considers the individual as a social being and investigates the way (s)/he acquires and uses language in order to communicate with others in her/his social environment. According to the functional linguistics, the primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse. (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 161).

Halliday, the most prominent proponent of the functional grammar, states that grammar is concerned with the description of language in use because it is the only way which all the components of meaning are brought into focus (1970). Two fundamental concepts involved in the functional grammar are '*function*', and '*context*'. There have been numerous definitions and classifications of the term '*function*'. Halliday (1989:15) equates the word function with the word 'use', i.e., the way people use their language to achieve a large number of different aims and purposes. He offers an abstract and general classification of functions (macrofunctions): '*ideational*', '*interpersonal*' and '*textual*'. The

ideational function serves language to express '*content*'. i.e., communicating experience and logical relations. The interpersonal function serves to establish and maintain social relations, and the textual function is concerned with the creation of text, expressing the structure of information and the relation of each part of the discourse to the whole and to the setting (1973:99, see also Halliday 1978, 1989). Grammar, in his view, is a component of language which makes us produce a text which is ideationally and interpersonally relevant to the situation of communication, so he doesn't regard grammar as simply the combination of words into phrases and phrases into sentences, but rather as a system that the individual draws on so that (s)/he can make her/his meaning in the most '*appropriate*' way in the context. Halliday, in his '*systemic grammar*', refers to '*meaning potential*' which embodies a range of possibilities and options in behavior that are available to the individual. These options are organized into sets of systems. Thus, language is a series of systems and '*choices*' among these systems, and choices are made in accordance with the context. A single form can take on an unlimited range of meanings, and a single function can be expressed through different forms. It's the contextual factors that make possible the right choice among various forms and meanings. Grammar acts as an intermediary among meaning, context and choice, so language cannot be analyzed without reference to meaning, which is in turn, determined by the context.

### Pedagogical Implications

The insight we can take from the functional approach is the incorporation of '*function*' and '*context*' into teaching grammar. It is proposed that the grammatical structure to teach be contextualized with regard to language functions. In the classroom situation, functions are often described as the

of this paper is to propose a functionally oriented technique of teaching structures so as to help the learner relate 'usage' to 'use', making him develop a better and more psychologically real attitude toward grammar. It is suggested that grammatical structures be contextualized based on 'communicative acts'. To evaluate such a technique, two groups (control and experimental) were compared. The experimental group was taught within a functional framework, while the control group received a traditional instruction. The results were in favor of the experimental group indicating that teaching grammar in the stretches of discourse would lead to a more efficient learning than when it is taught in vacuum.

**Key Words:** grammar, form function, functional approach, context, communicative acts

### Introduction

Due to various reasons such as the EFL learners' cognitive and affective development, the number of the learners, time limit, avoiding the painstaking job of preparing communicative tasks, etc., many teachers are inclined to adopt a sentence-based and analytic way in teaching grammar rules, as a result, the learner often treats grammar as an abstract and isolated system that should be analyzed rather than used for communication, and for this reason, even after a long period of formal instruction, (s)/he fails to express her/his meaning through grammar. In fact, s/he is more concerned with "usage", and "use" is of little significance. According to Widdowson, (1990:81), "Grammar is not just a collection of sentence patterns signifying nonsense, something for the learner's brain to puzzle over". He also says, "for the learner to learn only the intricacies of the grammar without knowing how to use it is rather like learning about the mechanisms of a clock without knowing how to tell the time. What is crucial for the learner to know is how language structures are allied to language use for the achievement of meaning." (ibid: 95). To promote such an alliance, it is suggested to apply functional considerations in teaching grammar so as to show the student how linguistic items are linked to their communicative values in text and discourse.

### Sentence-based Grammar Instruction

The techniques of grammar-translation method, practiced in many language classrooms, are rooted in the formal and analytic teaching of classical languages which justifies language learning as an intellectual discipline in which the mind is trained by the logical analysis of the language and much memorization of rules... (Rivers 1981:28). Sentence is the basic unit of introducing grammar rules (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 6). It's taught deductively and in the learner's native language; the aim is to draw her/his attention directly to the rule. 'Parsing i.e. the form and inflection of words, is a well-established technique (Celce-Murcia 1991: 6). The learner gets some knowledge of rules, forms and exceptions which contributes to her/his knowledge 'about' language rather than language itself.

Another widely applied technique of grammar teaching which has derived from the principles of the behavioristic structuralism is 'drill' or 'pattern practice', in which language is often manipulated without regard to meaning in context (Celce - Murcia 1991: 6). This technique which is based on guided repetition gives rise to a static learning. The learner becomes a passive recipient of rules trying to memorize the formal properties of abstract



# Grammar

## Grammar Instruction through the 'Functional' Contextualization of Structures (a supplementary technique)

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### چکیده

روش سنتی آموزش دستور زبان خارجی که بر توضیح قیاسی ساختار دستوری جدای از بافت مبتنی است و هم اکنون نیز در بسیاری از مراکز آموزشی به کار می رود، اغلب باعث شده است که زبان آموزان، زبان خارجی را نه به عنوان وسیله ای برای ایجاد ارتباط، بلکه به عنوان چیزی برای تجزیه و تحلیل بنگرند (مانند درس ریاضی).

هدف مقاله حاضر رد این روش نیست چرا که استفاده از چنین روشی، در بسیاری از موارد اجتناب ناپذیر است. مقصود بررسی، میزان تأثیر یک تکنیک آموزشی است که از اصول اساسی دیدگاه کاربردی (functional approach) در تدریس ساختارهای دستوری در کلاس زبان بهره می گیرد. در این تکنیک، ساختار دستوری در بافتی کوتاه و محاوره ای قرار می گیرد که در آن، مواردی از نقش های ارتباطی زبان (communicative functions) گنجانده شده اند. سؤال این است که آیا یادگیری و تمرین دستور زبان با استفاده از چنین بافت هایی می تواند به زبان آموز نگرشی واقعی تر و صحیح تر به دستور زبان دهد و آنان را در «به کارگیری» دستور برای بیان منظور یاری کند. انجام یک آزمایش و مقایسه دو گروه کنترل و آزمایشی نشان داد که این تکنیک می تواند به طرز معنی داری بهتر از تکنیک های جمله محور عمل کند و در تقویت توانش ارتباطی زبان آموز (communicative competence) مؤثر باشد.

کلیدواژه ها: دستور زبان، شکل، نقش، نگرش نقشی (کاربردی)، بافت، نقش های ارتباطی زبان

### Abstract

Sentence-based, context-free and form-focused way of teaching grammatical structures has often made the language learner view grammar as an object for analysis rather than a means of communication, thus proving to be of little contribution to her/his proper use of language in the social situation. The purpose