Pedagogical grammar, which we may define as a grammar developed for learners of a foreign language, draws on two separate but interrelated areas of theory: firstly, descriptive models of grammar, which can be incorporated into pedagogical reference grammars and teaching materials and formulated in ways which make the description accessible to the learner, and secondly, theories of second-language acquisition, which will provide the basis for classroom methodology.

Considerable discussion (see Dirven 1990, Chalker 1994) has been given to the differences between pedagogical and linguistic grammar, variously termed ‘theoretical’ or ‘scientific’, in particular concerning the extent to which a pedagogical description should have a theoretical basis and what this basis should be. Despite the large number of reference grammars on the market and the important role which grammar rules play in many classrooms, there appears to be relatively little coherent theory underlying rule formulation. This is somewhat surprising since as Dirven (1990) points out ‘learners can be and are misled into all kinds of wrong generalisations by the inaccurate rule formulations in their textbooks’. Some grammarians have attempted to give a theoretical basis to their rules: for example, Leech, Svartvik (1975) draw on the linguistic model of *functional/systemic grammar; Swan (1994) outlines his ‘design criteria’ for rule formulation; Newby (1989) derives his rules from his own ‘notional grammar’ model (1989a). Yet on the whole the area of rule formulation is one that is relatively unexplored (see Westney 1994).

Of the two theoretical areas that comprise pedagogical grammar – description and methodology – it is the latter that has been the main focus of attention and which has, at recurrent periods in the history of language teaching, represented a highly contentious topic. The main bones of contention concern:

- the aims of grammar teaching (knowing about grammar or using grammar; manipulating sentences or free production)
- the categorisation of grammar (form, meaning, use) into units which will form a syllabus or teaching objectives
- the extent to which grammar should be dealt with separately from other aspects of language
- the use of rules, in particular in how far a cognitive focus on grammar rules assists acquisition
- the type of grammatical exercises and activities which will lead to automatization.

In modern grammar teaching the influences of the following approaches are most strongly discernible or influential.

Traditional grammar. Grammar is defined primarily as a set of forms and structures, which comprise the main focus of the textbook syllabus. Whilst grammatical meaning plays an important role, it is dealt with in an unsystematic way. The sentence is the main unit of analysis and emphasis is placed on the student's ability to form correct sentences. The usual classroom methodology is based on presentation, explanation, practice. Learning is seen largely as a conscious process and grammar rules are used deductively; that is to say, they are explained by

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teacher or textbook prior to the practice stage. The most common forms of exercise type are gapped sentences, pattern drills and sentences for transformation, reflecting a form-based, rather uncontextualized view of grammar. Grammatical competence is measured according to the student’s ability to manipulate sentences, rather than being performance-oriented.

Communicative grammar. Language is seen not only as a formal system but primarily as the process of communicating messages between human beings in actual contexts, grammar being a means of expressing certain types of meanings through grammatical forms. Attempts to recategorise grammatical meaning in terms of *functions and *notions were only partly successful since they did not go very far in addressing the need for pedagogical grammar to give an accurate any systematic specification of meaning. Since, however, the focus of aims had shifted from formal correctness towards communicative effectiveness, the ‘grammar vacuum’ tended to go unnoticed or was patched up in textbooks by a structural-functional organisation or, in the case of the ‘extremist fringe’ of communicative teaching, grammar was dispensed with altogether. As far as grammatical rules were concerned, a distinction was made between ‘knowing about’ grammar and ‘knowing how’ to use it, referred to as declarative vs procedural knowledge (see Johnson 1994), which led to shift of focus from analysis to use. Rules tended to be dealt with inductively, that is to say the understanding emerges from use, rather than the other way round. Various important features of communicative methodology can also be applied to grammar; in particular, a ‘learning-by-doing’ approach based on small-group oral activities (*information gap and similar communicative games), which is reflected in a number of grammar practice books (for example Ur 1989). Whilst the communicative approach brought many benefits in the areas of methodology, its failure to integrate grammar in a coherent way led to the widespread but quite false ‘grammar vs communication’ dichotomy.

Acquisition-based approaches to grammar. In the 1980s various factors led some methodologists to take a quite different view of grammar. At the core of this movement was an increasing interest in the psychological processes underlying first-language acquisition and the belief that many of these processes could apply to second languages if suitable learning environments and conditions were provided. The best-known proponent of this view was Stephen *Krashen (1981 etc), who distinguished between learning – with a conscious focus on grammar (explicit rules, terminology etc) and automatic, unconscious acquisition. It was only through the latter that students could achieve communicative competence. The proposed method entailed providing learners with what he termed comprehensible input and allowing the intake process to function automatically, following an innate acquisition order for which the learner’s brain was already ‘wired up’ and which could not be influenced by structuring the input. Despite – or perhaps because of - their rather simplistic nature, these views enjoyed considerable appeal in some quarters and were part of a more general ‘anti-grammar’ movement. This was especially the case in Britain, which unlike most other European countries, had seen the abandonment in schools of formal grammar teaching.

Language awareness approaches to grammar. In recent years, particularly under the influence of educational psychologists, renewed interest has been shown in the special role of the learner in formal educational in general and of the specific nature of various cognitive processes linked to learning a language in particular. Central to this view, which is part of a wider learner autonomy credo, is the notion of language awareness – that learners should be guided towards focusing on aspects of language and be encouraged to use various cognitive strategies to explore for themselves how language works. Teachers should not ‘impose’ their own grammatical knowledge on learners but should be facilitators of the learning process. Thus, grammar rules explained by the teacher give way to consciousness-raising or discovery techniques and tasks

It would probably be true to say that modern classrooms reflect a variety of approaches. Whilst there is almost uniform rejection of traditional grammar among methodologists, the security its structured practices offer to teacher and learner is obviously appealing. A traditional core, with bits of communicative methodology and awareness-raising activities superimposed, is a not uncommon classroom scenario.

Bibliography


Further reading