



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens

ELT Methods and Practices

Unit 3.1:

Dealing with Grammar in a Communicative Context

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Issues to be discussed in this unit

- What is grammar?
- Types of grammar.
- Grammar in the communicative approach.
- Teaching grammar: Main principles (form, meaning and use, the importance of context, giving effective explanations).
- Approaches to teaching grammar.
- Choosing grammar activities.



What is grammar?

Grammar is the system of a language. People sometimes describe grammar as the "rules" of a language; but in fact no language has rules. If we use the word "rules", we suggest that somebody created the rules first and then spoke the language, like a new game. But languages did not start like that. Languages started by people making sounds which evolved into words, phrases and sentences. No commonly-spoken language is fixed. All languages change over time. What we call "grammar" is simply a reflection of a language at a particular time.



Different views of grammar (1/2)

1. Grammar involves the rules of combining words into sentences and the rules for forming words.
2. The grammar of a language consists of the devices that signal structural meanings... that can be described in physical terms.
3. Grammar includes the study of phonology, syntax and semantics.
4. Grammar is concerned with how words are combined to form utterances which function meaningfully in different contexts.
5. Grammar involves the rules of how language operates in text, genre and discourse.



Different views of grammar (2/2)

- Different theories of language entail different ways of studying language and different views of grammar. In essence theories of language are theories of grammar.
- “Language is not fixed, but is rather a dynamic system. Language evolves and changes... [it] grows and organises itself from the bottom up in an organic way, as do other complex systems.” (Larsen-Freeman, 2006)



Dated views of language and language learning

“To learn a new language one must establish orally the patterns of the language as subconscious habits”. (Lado & Fries, 1943, 1970)

“There is no boundary between lexis and grammar: lexis and grammar are interdependent.” (Stubbs, 1996).



Grammar books/grammars (1/3)

Just as there are many different views of language and thus different views of what grammar is, there are many types of grammar books. Each type of grammar book represents the linguist's description of the language.

- **Descriptive grammar:** provides a precise account of actual usage (how people use language in everyday communication).
- **Prescriptive grammar:** attempts to establish rules for the correct use of language.



Prescriptive or descriptive? (1/2)

Typical mistakes:

- The weather's **warmer as** last week.
- I've been waiting **longer that** you.

Comparatives are followed by than:

- The weather's **warmer than** last week.
- I've been waiting **longer than** you.

Which is correct: older **than I** or older **than me**?

- In informal English, we often use object pronouns (**me, him, her, us, them**) after than. In a more formal style, subject pronouns (**I, he, etc.**) are considered more “correct”. e.g. She's older than me (informal). / She is older than I (am) (formal).
- When the pronoun is used with a verb, only subject pronouns are possible, of course. e.g. Lucy found more mushrooms than I did. (Not:*than me did.).



Prescriptive or descriptive? (2/2)

The grammar of newspaper headlines.

Newspaper headlines often follow rather different grammatical rules from other kinds of writing.

1. Headlines are not always complete sentences. e.g. “MORE EARTHQUAKE DEATHS”.
2. Headlines often contain strings of three, four or more nouns. e.g. “FURNITURE FACTORY PAY CUT RIOT”.
 - In expressions like this, all the nouns except the last one act as adjectives. The easiest way to understand headlines of this kind is to read them backwards.
 - ‘FURNITURE FACTORY PAY CUT RIOT’ refers to a RIOT about a CUT in PAY for the workers in a FACTORY that makes FURNITURE.
3. Articles and the verb to be are often left out. e.g. “SHAKESPEARE PLAY IMMORAL, SAYS HEADMASTER”.
4. Newspaper headlines have a special tense-system. It is unusual to find complex forms like is coming or has produced; generally the simple present form.



Grammar books/grammars (2/3)

The study of grammar involves the study of individual languages and uses linguistic data as a means of developing insights into the nature of language. It is dependent on different theories of language and therefore we have different grammars (functional grammar, structural grammar, transformational generative grammar etc.)



Grammar books/grammars (3/3)

- **Pedagogical grammar:** Designed specifically for teaching a foreign language or developing awareness of the mother tongue. It is inherently prescriptive.
- **Theoretical grammar:** goes beyond the study of individual languages and uses linguistic data as a means of developing insights into the nature of language and develops categories for linguistic analysis. It presents a theory of language (functional grammar, universal grammar, transformational generative grammar etc.).



To teach or not teach grammar
explicitly...

Arguments against

- The study of grammar promotes knowledge about language not how to use the language.
- We acquire our first language without any explicit knowledge of grammar.
- The natural order 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, 1981).



Arguments in favour (1/2)

- 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.



Arguments in favour (2/2)

- Older students' expectations about language learning often include grammar instruction.
- Learning grammar structures allows for more creative applications of language. (Lightbown & Spada, 1990, pp. 429-448).



Grammar Viewed through the Communicative Approach to Language Teaching and Learning

Grammar in the communicative approach (1/5)

- Communication is the be-all and end-all of language learning and grammar is the by-product of this endeavour.
- Grammar is **cumulative**. It should not be presented in a linear additive fashion but should be regularly revised and reintroduced (cyclical/spiral approach).



Grammar in the communicative approach (2/5)

- The grammatical component of a syllabus is characterised by **selectivity**. Grammatical items are not included because they have always been taught but because they can be justified in relation to the type of course, its length, objectives and student population.



Grammar in the communicative approach (3/5)

- Grammar instruction and activities should be integrated within a **communicative framework**.
- Language should be presented and learnt **within a context**.
- The relationship between **forms and their uses** should be made clear to learners.



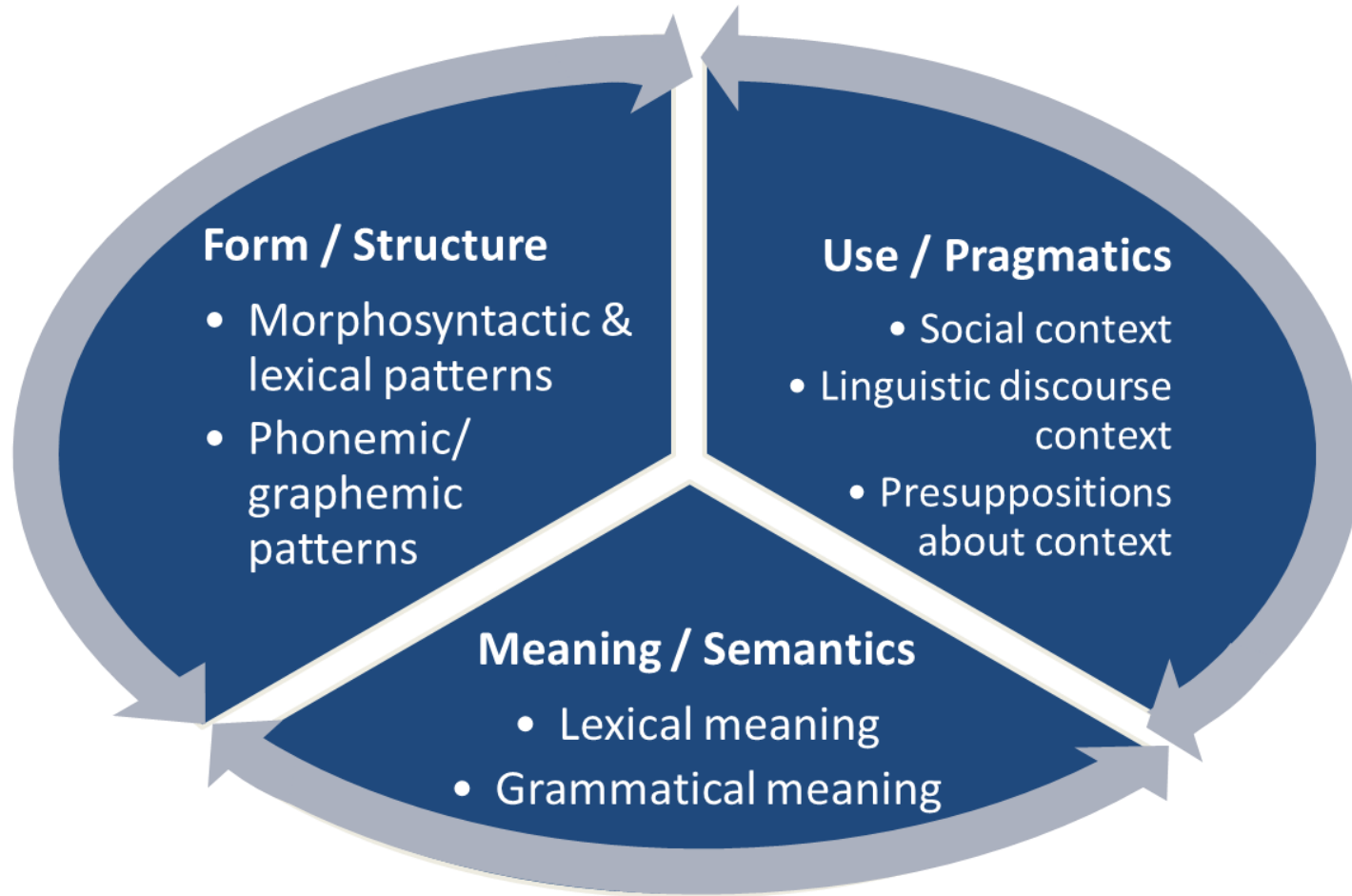
Grammar in the communicative approach (4/5)

When presenting new language items, attention should be given to their form, meaning and use.

- **Form:** how the structure is formed.
- **Meaning:** what meaning the structure entails (autonomously – not in context)
- **Use:** how language patterns operate in specific contexts of situation, and specific discourses and texts.
 - When or why does a speaker/ writer choose a particular grammar structure over another that could express the same meaning or accomplish the same purpose?
 - When or why does a speaker/ writer vary the form of a particular linguistic structure?



Three-Dimensional Grammar Framework



Example: the possessive

- **Form:** inflecting regular singular nouns and irregular plural nouns not ending in s with 's or by adding an apostrophe after the s' ending of regular plural nouns and singular nouns ending in the sound /s/.
e.g., dog's / men's / dogs' / bus'.
- **Meaning:** indicates description (a debtor's prison), amount (a month's holiday), relationship (Jack's wife), part/ whole (My brother's hand), and origin / agent (Shakespeare's tragedies).



Example: the possessive

- Possession can be expressed in other ways: with a possessive determiner (e.g., his) or with the periphrastic **of the** form (e.g., the legs of the table).
- The **of the** form is used with nonhuman head nouns and 's with human head nouns.
- Native speakers prefer to use the 's with inanimate human head nouns if the head nouns are performing some action.
- E.g., the train's arrival was delayed
- A noun compound (table leg) is more appropriate than either the 's form for the **of the** form.



Form, meaning or use? (1/8)

Task 1: Suppose that a teacher had shown her/his students the contents of the table below. Decide if her/his intention is to present them with:

- a. the meaning of the present continuous tense,
- b. the form of the present continuous tense,
- c. a series of meaningful sentences.

- I am sitting.
- You are sitting.
- He/she/it is sitting.
- We are sitting.
- You are sitting.
- They are sitting.



Form, meaning or use? (2/8)

Grammar presentation steps:

- **Step 1:** S/he mimes certain actions and asks the class to tell her/him what s/he is doing, choosing sentences among those in Column A from the Table.



Form, meaning or use? (3/8)

- **Step 2:** S/he hands individual or pairs of pupils in the class pieces of paper with instructions written on them, telling her/him to mime the action, and asks the class to choose among those in Column B the sentence that best describes what the pupil(s) is(are) doing.



Form, meaning or use? (4/8)

- **Step 3:** Now, s/he tells pupils that each will each mime an action choosing among those in Column C and s/he will ask them questions about what they are doing. They have to respond by selecting cues from Column C.



Form, meaning or use? (5/8)

COLUMN A. What am I doing?	COLUMN B. What is [name] doing?	COLUMN C. Are youing?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. You are holding a pen.2. You are writing a word on the blackboard.3. You are singing.4. You are laughing.5. You are showing us an old photo of somebody.6. You're just thinking.7. You're turning in circles.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. He/She is reading a book.2. He/She knocking on the door.3. They are talking.4. They are working.5. He/She is opening the door.6. They are listening to music and dancing.7. They're playing hangman.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. No, I'm standing next to my desk.2. No, I'm standing next to Maria.3. No, I'm looking at page 25 in my coursebook.4. No, I'm looking out the window.5. No, I'm putting my things in my schoolbag.



Form, meaning or use? (6/8)

Grammar task 3: The teacher has presented the present progressive to her class and is now doing some additional work with pupils based on the following audio text.



Tape-script of the telephone conversation

Mary: Hello, Joan. This is Mary. Are you busy?

Joan: Oh, Mary, hi. Yes, I'm working right now. What about you?

Mary: I'm... [doorbell rings] oops... the doorbell... Just a minute. The doorbell is ringing [after a few seconds]... Sorry.... It's Liz. She's coming up. But she has a key.

Joan: Are you coming to the cinema with us tonight?

Mary: Thanks, but no. David is coming over, and he's cooking dinner.

Joan: That's great. So, what are you working on?

Mary: I'm answering e-mails and looking for information on the web.

Joan: Aha, for the class project, right? Are you handing it in tomorrow?

Mary: Probably. But I've still got a lot of writing to do and... Oh, sorry, my sister is calling me... I've got to go.

Joan: Ok, then. Have a good time tonight. Dave is a fun guy!

Mary: Thanks. You too. Bye. See you at the gym on Tuesday.



Form, meaning or use? (7/8)

TABLE A	T	F
1. Mary and Joan are talking on the phone.		
2. Mary's asking Joan to dinner.		
3. Jenny's coming over to Joan's house to study with her.		
4. David's going to Mary's house tonight and bringing some take-out.		
5. Joan is not watching TV right now. She's e-mailing.		
6. Mary's sister is ringing her up while she's speaking with Joan.		
7. Joan and Mary are doing a project together.		
8. Joan and Mary are not seeing each another at the gym next Tuesday.		



Form, meaning or use? (8/8)

COLUMN A. Things happening while the two women are talking on the phone	COLUMN B. Things happening later in the day, not while they're talking on the phone
.....



Grammar beyond the sentence level (1/2)

- Understanding how language operates at sentence level, does not help learners understand how language is used purposefully on oral and written discourse.
- It is one thing to be able to understand and create sentences and quite another to be able to put sentences together and taking into account features of the context to produce socially purposeful meanings.



Grammar beyond the sentence level (2/2)

- Current view of teaching/learning grammar also focuses students' attention at how grammar operates in context and how discourse and genre determine our linguistic choices.



Discourse, genre and text (1/3)

Discourse (talk - λόγος): Forms of “talk” (oral and written) which are institutionally delineated and ordered (e.g. political discourse, medical discourse, pedagogical discourse).



Discourse, genre and text (2/3)

Genre (κειμενικό είδος) particular categories of texts with relatively stable structural forms (e.g. particular beginnings, middles and ends) and with well-established names which encode the functions, purposes and meanings of various social occasions of a particular culture (e.g. news report, letter, interview, promotional leaflet, novel, office memo, political speech, editorial, etc.). The rules that determine genres are institutionally bound and determine what kind of language (lexicogrammar) is appropriate in each instance and how language is organized into text.



Discourse, genre and text (3/3)

Text (κείμενο): A piece of writing of a particular discourse and genre which is intended to convey an overall message and particular bits of information, feelings, attitudes etc.



Activity (1/2)

Look at the two different texts. They are related discourse-wise, but they lexicalized/grammaticalized differently because each text is of a different genre. Guess what is which and explain what helped you decide.

Welcome to Sunset !

We're delighted to have you here. Our staff is at your disposal to make your stay comfortable and pleasant. Ring us if you need us. Dial 0 for the information desk. For all other calls and for Internet connection look at the directory on your bedside table. Other services and facilities in your room: TV, mini-bar, room-service, cleaners upon request.

The flowers and wine are compliments of the manager
Ms Olivia Sukiyama



Activity (2/2)



[1]

A luxurious, five-star hotel in Honolulu, conveniently located near one of the most beautiful beaches in Waikiki, not far from the centre of town. With its own shopping centre, two swimming pools, conference rooms and more services than you can imagine, with staff to please and service you, and prices to surprise you, watching the Hawaiian sunset in Paradise is a must!



Presenting language in context (1/3)

- **Grammar is not an abstract system** detached from contexts of use.
- **Context** is the situation or the linguistic and non-linguistic information surrounding the new grammatical form and results in the new language being used.



Presenting language in context (2/3)

Characteristics of context:

- The context should show what the language means and how it is used.
- It should be interesting to students; something that students can relate to.
- It should be simple enough to show the form and rich enough to show the meaning and its use. Too many new words will distract students; a poor context will not be able to reveal meaning and use.



Presenting language in context (3/3)

Types of context:

- The classroom.
- Situations.
- Formulated information (tables, graphs, maps etc.).
- Dialogues and texts.



The importance of context (1/2)

How will students react to this?

- Teacher writes 'I went shopping yesterday' on the board.
- Teacher translates.
- Teacher explains the Past Simple form and meaning in L1.



The importance of context (2/2)

How about this activity?

- Fairy tale – Little Red Riding Hood.
- Adapt story to suit age/language ability.
- Students listen and understand the story by sequencing pictures.
- Students listen and act out story.
- Focus on the past simple used to sequence the events in the narrative.
- Teacher checks meaning and highlights form.



Present- Practice – Produce (1/2)

- **Presentation:** The teacher selects new materials, presents new language items/information in a meaningful context (dialogue/text), explains new language and makes sure students understand it. This stage helps students assimilate new facts about the language and produce language for the first time. Focus is on accuracy.



Present- Practice – Produce (2/2)

- **Practice:** This stage falls between the two extremes. Students are given opportunity to practise new language for themselves in meaningful contexts.
- **Production:** In this stage students are engaged in free, uninhibited communication. Focus is on fluency, on getting messages across.



Characteristics of a good presentation (1/2)

A good presentation should be:

- **Efficient:** The aim is to get to the accurate reproduction and practice stage as soon as the students can manipulate the new language.
- **Lively and interesting:** Students must be interested and involved in the presentation; if they are they will remember the new grammar more easily.



Characteristics of a good presentation (2/2)

- **Appropriate:** However interesting, funny or demonstrative a situation is it should be appropriate to the language being presented.
- **Productive:** The situation should allow students to make sentences and/or questions with the new language. (Harmer, 1987:18)



Characteristics of effective explanations

- The explanation should be clear.
- The explanation should include simple vocabulary.
- The explanation should encourage the active involvement of students.
- The explanation should relate new information to old.
- The explanation should be sequenced clearly and signposted.



Approaches to teaching grammar

- **Deductive**– teaching through rules (the rule is provided followed by the provision of examples in which the rule is applied).
- **Inductive**– teaching through examples (students are provided with several examples from which a rule is inferred).

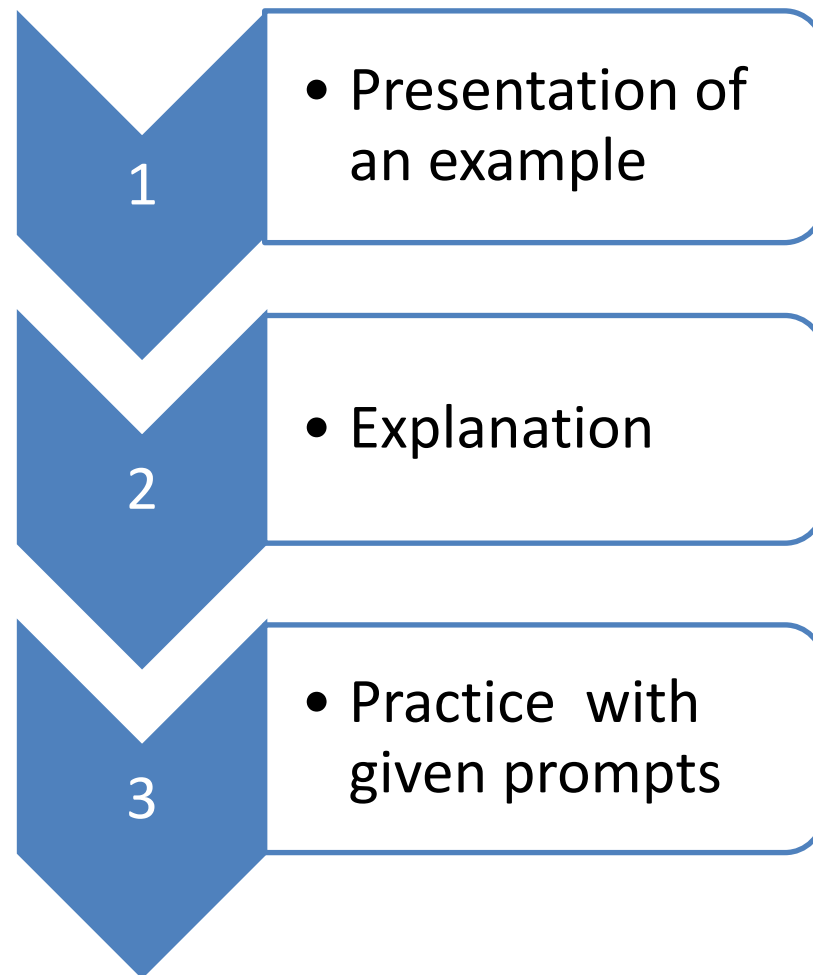


The deductive method

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

The deductive method is criticized because:

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



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.



Inductive grammar teaching

- In the inductive method, the teacher induces the learners to realise grammar rules **without any form of explicit explanation**.
- The rules will become **evident** if the students are given enough appropriate examples.
- The inductive method is more effective in that students **discover** the grammar rules themselves while engaged in language use.



Effective grammar instruction (1/2)

Noticing:

- **Paying attention** to grammar as it occurs in different contexts, e.g. grammar input in lessons, structures in texts and listening material, language practice activities and spoken interactions.



Effective grammar instruction (2/2)

- **Noticing the gap:** Learners become aware of differences in their performance and L1 competence. For example, you read something, or hear something about a grammar item which seems to be new to you and sticks in your mind. In fact, it is probably not new, but you are ‘noticing’ it for the first time. Having ‘noticed’ it you will see it or hear it regularly and wonder how you could have failed to notice it before.



Noticing

- Is necessary for learning.
- Intake is that part of the input which has been noticed.
- Incidental learning is possible, provided that noticing takes place.



Noticing tasks (1/2)

Two friends bump into each other in the street. Read their conversation then answer the questions which follow.

- In lines 1-4 and 6, they use the present continuous form. Why?
- In lines 5 and 7 Sara uses the 'will form'. Why?
- Is it possible to reverse this, ie, use will in lines 1-4 and 6 and use the present continuous in lines 5-7? What would the effect be?

1. **Sara:** Hi Jane, where are you going?
2. **Jane:** The gym – I'm trying to get fit for my holidays, Sara.
3. **Sara:** Oh good for you Jane. Are you doing a class?
4. **Jane:** Yes – aerobics twice a week and I'm taking swimming lessons too.
5. **Sara:** Oh, that's a good idea. Listen, I need to get fit. I'll come with you.
6. **Jane:** That's great Sara. By the way, I'm dieting too.
7. **Sara:** Really? I won't join you on that!



Practice is necessary

- Teaching through practice:
 - **Drills:** activities that are structured to allow only one correct answer.
 - **Exercises:** Open-ended grammar activities
- Practice leads to the creation of a continuum ranging from text manipulation activities to text creation activities.



Text manipulation activities (1/2)

- Provide students with sentences that they will be required to operate on in some limited manner such as:
 - fill-in-the blank,
 - make a choice from items provided,
 - substitute another item, or
 - transform into another pattern.



Text manipulation activities (2/2)

- Provides opportunities for focused practice (restricted to a main grammar area) after language has been contextualised and form/meaning established.
- Should be enjoyable, meaningful, give students a reason to use the language, full of practice.



Examples

1. Focus on meaning, but controlled form.

Find someone who...

...has slept in a cave. _____ .

... has eaten caviar _____ .

... has visited India _____ .

... has been in a car accident _____ .



Text creation activities

- Require learners to produce language creatively using the target structure (these activities are not truly communicative because the students are aware that the purpose of the activity is to practice a specific structure).
- They offer semi - controlled and freer practice.
- Chance for learners to experiment a little, integrate new language with old and personalise the language. Students will use the grammar in focus and also other language they know.



Other examples

2. Focus on meaning, semi-controlled form (sentence completion): e.g. Since this time last year, I have

3. Focus on meaning, free sentence-making.

e.g. Think of a situation (using the present perfect) that would produce the reaction:

Oh dear! / Wonderful! / What a surprise! Help!

Congratulations! / What a relief! / What a pity! /

Thank you! / I'm sorry! / Oh no! / (sigh).



Meaningful practice

- Happens when the focus is on the **production, comprehension or exchange of meaning**, while the students “**keep an eye on**” the way newly learned structures are used in the process.



Sample Exercise

Look at the table. Rank the items on the left column according to the criteria listed on the top. (After the presentation and mechanical practice of adjective comparatives and superlatives.)

Items	Cheap	Healthy	Tasty	Fattening	Important
Beer					
Water					
Fruit					
Cigarettes					
Alcohol					
Milk					



Tasks for meaningful grammar practice (1/2)

- **Jigsaw:** learners combine different pieces of information to create a whole.
- **Information-Gap:** learners have different information. They negotiate to find the other individual's information.
- **Problem-Solving:** students must find a solution for a problem (typically there is one resolution).



Tasks for meaningful grammar practice (2/2)

- **Decision-Making:** students solve an open-ended problem by discussing multiple options and choosing the best
- **Opinion Exchange:** learners exchange ideas without needing to come to a consensus



Focus on meaning

Full paragraph writing:

Today is picture B.

What has happened since yesterday (picture A)?

Picture A



Picture B



[2]



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End of Unit

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Notes

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