THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR AND SYNTAX IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: This research paper examines the essential role of grammar and syntax in the process of foreign language teaching and learning. Grammar provides the fundamental rules of language structure, while syntax determines how words and phrases are arranged to form meaningful sentences. The study analyzes the evolution of grammar teaching methods - from traditional rule-based instruction to communicative and task-based approaches. It highlights the importance of integrating grammar and syntax with communicative competence, emphasizing the role of context, interaction, and learner autonomy.

Keywords: grammar, syntax, language teaching, communicative approach, linguistic competence, digital pedagogy, second language acquisition

Introduction: Grammar and syntax form the intellectual foundation of every natural language. For teachers and learners alike, they are not merely sets of rules, but essential tools for expressing meaning, understanding context, and achieving fluency. Grammar defines the patterns that shape linguistic accuracy, while syntax determines how these patterns combine to create meaningful utterances. In traditional pedagogy, grammar teaching focused on correctness and memorization, often separating it from communicative practice. However, language is not static - it evolves through interaction. Therefore, the modern teacher must help learners use grammar dynamically and creatively, not mechanically. This article investigates how grammar and syntax should be taught in contemporary language classrooms. It also evaluates teaching strategies that integrate linguistic theory, practical communication, and technological innovation to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

Grammar is the set of structural rules that governs the composition of words, phrases, and sentences in a language. Syntax, a branch of grammar, studies the arrangement of words and their relationships within sentences.

Linguists like Noam Chomsky (1965) introduced the concept of Universal Grammar, suggesting that humans are born with an innate ability to acquire language. Michael Halliday (1978) emphasized the functional role of grammar, arguing that grammar should serve meaning and social interaction. These two perspectives - formal and functional - continue to shape grammar instruction today. In the classroom, understanding both perspectives enables teachers to design lessons that are analytical (rule-focused) yet practical (communication-based).

Evolution of grammar teaching methods: a. The Grammar-Translation Method. This method emphasized grammatical accuracy, translation, and rote
memorization. Students learned rules deductively - from explanation to
example - but communicative use was minimal.

b. The Direct and Audio-Lingual Methods

In the 20th century, methods shifted toward oral practice. The Audio-Lingual Method focused on repetition and habit formation, using drills to internalize structures. However, it lacked creativity and contextual relevance.

c. The Communicative Approach

Emerging in the 1970s, this approach transformed grammar teaching. Grammar was taught implicitly within communicative activities - dialogues, simulations, and role-plays. Learners were encouraged to focus on meaning before form.

d. Task-Based Learning (TBLT)

Introduced by Nunan (2004), this approach integrates grammar with purposeful communication. Learners complete real-world tasks, discovering grammatical rules through usage. This promotes autonomy and natural acquisition.

Syntax is central to producing meaningful and grammatically coherent speech. For example, changing the order of words can alter meaning entirely: The cat chased the mouse ≠ The mouse chased the cat. Therefore, syntactic awareness helps learners express nuances, build complex sentences, and improve comprehension.

Teachers can incorporate syntax teaching through:

Sentence-combining exercises to build complexity.

Error correction activities to enhance awareness.

Discourse-level grammar tasks, linking syntax with meaning and context. When students understand syntax as a meaning-making system rather than a set.of rules, they become more confident and flexible communicators.

The cognitive approach views grammar learning as a process of mental pattern recognition. Learners notice, analyze, and internalize rules through exposure. Meanwhile, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory stresses that grammar develops through interaction - communication between teacher and student helps
internalize linguistic norms. Thus, grammar and syntax instruction should not isolate learners but engage them in collaborative learning: discussions, pair work, and peer feedback sessions.

Grammar and syntax are the essential frameworks through which language operates. Their effective teaching requires more than memorizing rules - it demands meaningful, contextual, and communicative engagement.

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