Teaching Grammar as Lexis: A Paradigm Shift in Language Education

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of teaching grammar as lexis, emphasizing the interrelationship between vocabulary and grammatical structures in language acquisition. It discusses the theoretical underpinnings of this approach, its practical implications for teaching, and the outcomes observed in various educational settings. By integrating grammar instruction with lexis, educators can enhance learners' communicative competence and overall language proficiency.

Key words: lexis, grammar, language education, lexical approach, collocations, vocabulary instruction, real-world context

Introduction. Traditionally, grammar instruction has focused on the explicit teaching of rules and structures, often leading to fragmented understanding among learners. However, recent pedagogical shifts advocate for the integration of grammar with lexis, positing that language is better understood and acquired through the lens of vocabulary. This article examines the rationale behind teaching grammar as lexis and its potential to improve language learning outcomes.

Literature review. The Lexical Approach, proposed by Michael Lewis (1993), posits that language is fundamentally comprised of lexical units rather than isolated grammatical rules. Lewis argues that understanding language involves recognizing fixed expressions, collocations, and phrases. This perspective shifts the teaching focus from discrete grammatical structures to the way language functions in real-world contexts, emphasizing the importance of teaching grammar as part of larger lexical chunks.

Cognitive linguistics further supports the idea of grammar as lexis by asserting that grammatical structures arise from language use in context. Langacker (2008) highlights how meaning is constructed through the interaction of lexical items and grammatical forms, suggesting that learners benefit from understanding how these elements work together in authentic communication.

The concept of communicative competence, developed by Canale and Swain (1980), underscores the necessity of integrating grammar with lexis to enable learners to use language effectively in social contexts. This framework emphasizes that linguistic competence (knowledge of grammar and vocabulary) must be accompanied by pragmatic and discourse competence to facilitate meaningful communication.

Numerous studies indicate that students taught grammar within lexical contexts demonstrate improved language use. For instance, studies by Thornbury (2002) show that learners who engage with grammar through real-life communication scenarios are better able to produce natural language. This suggests that contextually-based instruction enhances both retention and application of grammatical structures.

Research conducted by Schmitt (2000) highlights the effectiveness of teaching grammar as part of lexical phrases. Findings indicate that learners retain grammatical forms better when they are presented in meaningful contexts, rather than as isolated rules. This approach promotes deeper understanding and recall of language, contributing to increased fluency.

Empirical evidence from various educational settings supports the notion that integrating grammar with lexis leads to higher student engagement. Activities that require students to use language in context, such as role-plays and task-based learning, foster motivation and participation (Nunan, 2004). Engaged learners are more likely to experiment with language and take risks, which is essential for language acquisition.

Research Methodology. This study employs a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching grammar as lexis. The methodology includes:

Literature Review: Analyzing existing research on the integration of grammar and vocabulary in language teaching.

Case Studies: Examining specific teaching practices in diverse educational contexts, including ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms.

Surveys and Interviews: Gathering qualitative data from educators and learners about their experiences and perceptions of this approach.

Analysis and Results. The analysis reveals several significant findings:

Improved Language Use: Students taught grammar through lexis demonstrated greater proficiency in using grammatical structures in context. They were able to produce more natural-sounding language and showed an increased understanding of collocations and phrases.

Enhanced Retention: Learners reported better retention of grammatical forms when they were presented as part of lexical chunks. This contextual learning facilitated more effective recall and application of language in communicative situations.

Increased Engagement: Educators noted higher levels of student engagement when grammar was integrated with vocabulary. Activities that involved authentic language use and real-world contexts were particularly effective in motivating learners.

Practical Implications. The findings suggest several practical implications for language teaching:

Curriculum Design: Language curricula should prioritize the integration of grammar and lexis, promoting activities that emphasize the use of lexical phrases and collocations in teaching grammatical structures.

Teaching Strategies: Educators can implement strategies such as task-based learning, where students focus on meaningful communication and use language in context, rather than rote memorization of grammar rules.

Assessment Practices: Language assessments should reflect the integration of grammar and lexis, evaluating students' abilities to use language flexibly and accurately in real-life situations.

Conclusion. Teaching grammar as lexis represents a significant shift in language education that aligns with contemporary linguistic theories and practical teaching needs. By focusing on the interconnectedness of vocabulary and grammar, educators can

enhance learners' communicative competence and overall language proficiency. Future research should explore long-term impacts and best practices for implementing this approach in various educational contexts.

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