

*Teaching Grammar Communicatively at State Polytechnic of Lampung*

**Pengajaran Grammar secara langsung di Politeknik Negeri Lampung**

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**Abstrak**

Pengajaran *grammar* secara langsung dalam proses belajar mengajar bahasa Inggris baik sebagai bahasa asing atau bahasa kedua seringkali diperdebatkan di kalangan pengajar bahasa Inggris itu sendiri. Ada yang beranggapan pengajaran *grammar* akan menghambat proses pemerolehan bahasa Inggris, karena pembelajar akan lebih terfokus untuk menghafal rumus-rumus dan peraturan dalam berbahasa Inggris daripada belajar menggunakan bahasa Inggris sebagai alat komunikasi. Namun demikian, banyak yang masih menekankan pentingnya peranan *grammar* dalam berkomunikasi, karena bagaimanapun kemampuan gramatikal seseorang sangat mempengaruhi kemampuan berkomunikasi. Oleh karena itu, para pengajar bahasa Inggris dituntut untuk mampu meramu pengajaran *grammar* agar lebih komunikatif. Sehingga para pembelajar bahasa Inggris tidak merasa *grammar* sebagai hal yang menghambat kemampuan mereka untuk berkomunikasi. Melainkan, para pembelajar mampu berkomunikasi dengan menggunakan *grammar* yang tepat. Banyak pendekatan dan teknik yang dapat diterapkan oleh para pengajar bahasa Inggris dalam mengajar *grammar* agar lebih komunikatif dan tidak terkesan membosankan dan sulit seperti teknik-teknik yang digunakan dalam *Grammar Translation Method (GTM)* seperti *drilling* dan menghafal. Dalam era *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*, para pengajar dapat menggunakan teknik yang bervariasi, dari mulai penggunaan tabel hingga dialog dalam pengajaran *grammar*. Sehingga pengajaran *grammar* dapat lebih komunikatif.

**Kata Kunci :** *grammar, grammar teaching, Grammar Translation Method (GTM), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), communicative competence*

## **Introduction**

The teaching of grammar has always been a central aspect of foreign language teaching. In the past, the teaching of grammar was the only activity of language classroom. However, in the last half of the twentieth century, it has changed dramatically. At the present time, language teachers are often eliminating the place of grammar in the communicative language classroom. Many teachers feel guilty when they teach grammar directly in the classroom. Moreover, when the students say that the most frightening parts in learning English is grammar. The teachers will conclude immediately that grammar should be abandoned to make the language teaching and learning be friendlier for students so that they can develop their communicative competence faster.

Many questions come up from the those circumstances above. Can teachers teach grammar in CLT framework? Or should it be somehow absorbed without direct teaching? Is it possible to make the teaching of grammar be more communicative? If it is possible, how to make it more communicative? These questions are important to formulate a communicative approach to language teaching, especially the teaching of grammar.

According to Kess (1992), grammar is set of rules regarding the knowledge that the native speakers have. Furthermore, as a knowledge, grammar itself has developed from traditional grammar or structuralism to transformational generative grammar. Structuralism viewed language as a descriptive science, charged with the description of a language system. While transformational generative grammar was posed as a solution to problems found in dealing with sentence relationships, ambiguity, and the general lack of semantic answer.

The image that grammar will hinder the students communicative competence comes from the practice of Grammar Translation Method in the past. The methods used at

that time were mostly designed to enable people to speak, read and write Latin. Setiyadi (2006) said that GTM was developed based on the following assumptions:

1. Through the GTM, language is believed to consist of written words which exist in isolation.
2. In language teaching what should be taught is not the language itself but the faculty of logical thought and provided valuable mental discipline.
3. The medium of instructions is the mother tongue, which is used to explain conceptual problems and to discuss the use of particular grammatical structure.
4. Learning a foreign language needs feeling secure and this condition may take place whenever language learners know how to say in the target language.

Principally, the GTM focuses on translating grammatical forms, memorizing vocabulary, learning rules, and studying conjugations. In the classroom learners are not expected to be able to use the target language for communication. No class time is allocated to allow language learners to produce their own sentences and little time is spent on oral practice. As the result, the students can master the grammar of the target language, yet can not engage in simple conversations. Even though the method is believed to be ineffective to teach target language communicatively, this method is still in use in some parts of Indonesia.

Since the function of a language is a tool for communication, many educators start thinking to reduce and even eliminate grammar from the language learning process. This consideration makes a new method in teaching English come up. It is called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), one of the elements of learning theory of CLT is activity that involves real communication that promotes learning. This implies that language learners will learn the target language optimally when they communicate in the language.

In Communicative Language Teaching, there are some principles that are worth considering according to Larsen-Freeman (1986) as follow:

1. Whenever possible, language as it is used in real context should be introduced.
2. The target language is a vehicle for classroom communication, not just the object of study.
3. Students should work with language at the discourse level.
4. Games are important because they have in common with real communicative events.
5. Students should be given an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions.
6. One of the teachers' major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication.
7. The social context of the communicative event is essential in giving meaning to the utterances.
8. Learning to use language forms appropriately is an important part of communicative competence.
9. The teacher acts as an advisor during communicative activities.
10. Students should be given opportunities to develop strategies for interpreting language as it is actually used by native speakers.

Furthermore, Larsen-Freeman (1986) stated that a principle that may be regarded as another assumption about language learning in CLT is that the grammar and vocabulary the students learn from the function, situational context, and the roles of the interlocutors. It is accordance to the assumptions that the emphasis of teaching a language is communication After communication has finished, the students may discuss the elements of the language : grammar and vocabulary.

Based on the description above, the writer assumes that grammar is still very important in language learning and it is not wise to abandon it in the practice of language teaching. However, the emphasis on the language learning is not to make the students be able to comprehend the grammar rules only or any other linguistics features but more to make the students be able to use it as a tool of communication. Therefore, English teachers should find the way how to teach grammar communicatively.

## Method

This was a literatures study. It was an interpretative study and conducted at State Polytechnic of Lampung in November 2007. The focus of the study was to offer some solutions to the problems in the practice of English teaching, especially in the controversy of teaching grammar in English classroom. The writer gathered written data from literatures related to the topic. Then, after doing a careful interpretation and analyzing the results based on the writer experiences as an English learner few times ago as well as an English teacher at the moment, conclusion and suggestion to the topic are taken.

## Findings

The study showed that in widely accepted definition of communicative competence, grammatical competence occupies a prominent position as a major component of communicative competence. Without the grammatical competence, our communicative attempts or our language would simply be chaos. Marianne Celce Murcia (1991) offered six easily identifiable variables that can help teachers to determine the role of grammar in language teaching (see table 1).

Table 1. Variables That Determines the Importance of Grammar

	<b>Less Important</b>	← Focus on Form	→ <b>More Important</b>
Learner Variables			
Age	Children	Adolescents	Adults
Proficiency Level	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced
Educational background	Proliterate	Semiliterate	Literate
	No formal	Some formal	Well educated

	education	education	
Instructional Variables			
Skill	Listening,reading	Speaking	Writing
Register	Informal	Consultative	Formal
Need/Use	Survival	Vocational	Professional

Clearly, due to normal intellectual developmental variables, young children can profit from a focus on form only if the focus is very, very simple and stated or illustrated concrete form. Adults can use grammatical pointers to advance their communicative abilities. Further, if too much grammar focus is forced to beginning level learners, it might block the acquisition of fluency skills.

Grammatical competence is necessary for communication to take place, but not sufficient to account for all production and reception in language. As Larsen-Freeman (1991) pointed out, grammar is one of three dimensions of language that are interconnected. Grammar gives us the form or the structures of language themselves, but those forms are meaningless without the second dimension, that is meaning/semantics, and the third dimension, pragmatics. In other words, grammar tells us how to construct a sentence.

Eventhough, in recent decades a few extrimists have advocated no teaching of grammar whatsoever, the importance of grammatical competence in learners communicative competence can not be denied. Hence, many techniques are invented to teach grammar communicatively, as follow:

1. are embedded in meaningful, communicative contexts.
2. contribute positively to communication goals.
3. promote accuracy within fluent, communicative language.
4. do not overwhelm students with linguistics terminology
5. are as lively and intrinsically motivating as possible.

## **Discussion**

After knowing the importance of teaching grammar as well as communicative competence in language learning. English teachers should think of approaches in teaching grammar communicatively.

Generally, an inductive approach is more in favour to teach grammar since it is more in keeping with natural language acquisition (where rules are absorbed subconsciously). It also allows students to get a communicative “feel” for some aspect of language learning before getting possibly overwhelmed by grammatical explanation.

Besides, it builds more intrinsic motivation by allowing students to discover rules rather than being told them. However, there may be occasional moments, of course, when a deductive approach- a blend between the two- is indeed more appropriate. In practice, the distinction is not always apparent. So, the teachers should be smart enough to see the distinction.

Secondly, the use of grammatical explanations and terminology must be approached with care. Teachers sometimes are so eager to display their superiority and forget that their students are busy enough only to understand the language. Teachers should keep the explanation brief and simple. Teachers are also allowed to use mother tongue if students cannot follow an explanation in English. Clear illustrations and unambiguous examples are not less important. And if the teachers don't know how to explain something (e.g., if a student asks about a point of grammar and the teachers are not sure about the rule), teachers should not risk giving false information. It is better for the teachers to tell the students that they will research that point and bring an answer back the next day.

Thirdly, teachers should be very careful in correcting students grammatical errors. It is important for teachers to maintain communicative flow, maximize student self-correction, and consider the affective and linguistic place the learner is in.

Based on the approaches above in teaching grammar communicatively, teachers can adopt some grammar techniques as Sandra McKay's (1985) has classified:

1. Using Charts;

Charts and graphs are useful devices for clarifying relationships. Another grammatical system that lends itself well to charts is the verb system.

2. Using object;

Object brought into the classroom to provide the kinesthetic learners media. To teach the possessive teachers can bring objects or collect objects in the classroom and ask the students to identify the things based on the owner by using possessive adjectives.

3. Using maps and simple drawing ;

Maps can be used as illustrations for example when teachers should explain the prepositional phrases (up, on the left, on the right, etc). Maps also can be used to teach question formation ( where, how do I get to, can you tell me, is this, etc.) and imperatives (go, walk, look out for, etc.). McKay (1985) suggests using drawings of circles, squares and other familiar shapes to teach locative words.

4. Using dialogues;

Dialogues can be used by practicing the grammatical points at the dialogues.

5. Using written text;

Certain texts can be used to explain about certain verb tense. The text is describing activities that people do in different time markers.

Beside those techniques, teachers also can use games in teaching grammar. The use of games is suggested in CLT. By using games, teachers can teach grammar full of fun. Usually when the students feel at ease, they will receive the knowledge easier. Be creative and don't stop trying different games. A good teacher will try to equip him/herself with



various techniques in order to make his/her teaching interesting for students. It is true, that preparing games will spent few times, but those time is worthful when teachers see the students are able to absorb the materials that the teachers explains through those games.

Don't worry if the teacher feel he /she is not creative enough to create games that are suitable with the grammar points, because there are thousands and even millions of references the teachers can use to find the right game to teach some grammatical points, for example the series of Grammar Games from Longman. Or, teachers can just download games from internet. Since everybody usually loves games, the teaching of grammar will be no longer frightening or boring for students.

The approaches, methods and techniques applied in teaching grammar in language classroom also need to consider the students characteristics. Some students might be lookers, the other students might be listeners and the rest might be movers. Therefore, in designing the classroom activities, teachers also need to consider the students characteristics. Hence, the classroom will be more lively and communicative, since the students feel that they are treated personally and humanly.

## **Conclusion and Suggestion**

After examing the development of language teaching from the era of GTM untill CLT , now grammar has returned as a more balanced view points that is seen as one of the several organizational aspects of communicative competence. The teachers obligation is to bridge the students fear in learning grammar by applying communicative approaches and techinques.

It is true that the GTM has been so long ago blamed as the cause of the learners failure in using English as tool for communication but it doesn't reduce the important of teaching grammar in English classroom itself. No wonder, if at the present time, many

English teachers leave GTM and apply CLT which they consider is better and more communicative. Therefore, English teachers should be very creative in formulating approaches as well as techniques in presenting grammar communicatively. Hence, the learners will be both good at grammar and also fluent on speaking.

Teachers are suggested to teach grammar not in a rigid and old fashioned techniques such as drilling, memorizing and answering written exercise on grammar rules. It is because the goal of language teaching is not only to make the students are able to memorize some grammatical points, but more to have communicative competence which covers speaking, listening, reading and writing. It is better for teachers to teach grammar through various techniques like using charts, objects, drawings and even dialogues.

Furhermore, teachers also need to be creative in inventing games that are suitable to teach a certain aspects of grammar. Or, teachers can just copy the ready to use references of games that are available everywhere. Therefore, the learners do not feel that that they are learning grammar rules but they feel they are learning the language it self in order to make their communicative competence better.

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