

Workshop: Communicative Grammar in Practice

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Some quotations from applied linguists

'The integration of grammar in communicative models currently constitutes one of the hardest pedagogical challenges foreign-language teachers face.' (Achard, 2004: 165)

'Most SLA theories, and most SLA theorists, are not primarily interested in language teaching, and in some cases not at all interested.' Long (2000: 4-5)

'No pedagogical decision can be made in the absence of a learning theory.' (Achard: 2004: 176)

Main tasks of grammar pedagogy

Pedagogical grammar refers to measures taken by teachers, learners, materials designers, grammarians etc. to facilitate the development of grammatical competence and the skill of using grammar.

- a) **Grammar rules:** describe grammar based on a suitable theoretical model in ways that are transparent for learners; use of appropriate metalanguage/terminology
→ pedagogical reference grammar, school textbook, lessons etc.
Question for teacher: how shall I explain grammar to my students?
- b) **Grammatical objectives:** decide how to specify grammatical objectives
→ reference grammar, school textbook, lesson plans, teaching materials etc.
Question for teacher: what exactly am I teaching?
- c) **Selection & grading:** delimit those areas of grammar to be presented to the learner and establish criteria for the sequencing of grammar
→ curriculum, school textbook etc.
Question for teacher: how much shall I teach and when shall I teach it?
- d) **Learning aims and processes:** consider aims of individual exercises of sequence of teaching in terms of learning processes; how can learning processes be activated and supported?
→ lesson plans, school textbook, teaching materials etc.
Question for teacher: what do I expect the students to learn from an activity?
- e) **Methodology:** devise methodology to facilitate learning - presentation forms, exercises, activities etc.
→ school textbook, teaching materials etc.
Question for teacher: how can learning aims best be achieved?
- f) **Testing grammar:** select areas of grammar and exercise types which fulfil criteria of testing theory (validity, reliability etc.)
→ Class test design, Matura etc.
Question for teacher: what exactly do I want to test and how can I best do this? Am I testing something that reflects the overall aims of learning and teaching grammar?

Traditional grammar

Traditional grammar refers to a set of pedagogical practices which, it should be noted, would appear to have little theoretical basis, and which can be briefly characterised as follows:

- grammar is regarded as *static knowledge* rather than as a communicative skill;
- grammatical objectives are defined in terms of *grammatical forms*, as opposed to meanings;
- methodology is essentially *teacher-centred*;
- grammar rules are made explicit *by coursebook* and *teacher* and used *deductively* by students;
- a *limited range* of *heavily guided* exercises types is used.

Cognitive+Communicative Grammar (C+CG)

(The following is based on Newby, 2003, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015)

C+CG is a theoretical approach to the description and learning of grammar whose principles serve as a comprehensive basis for the design of grammar pedagogy. C+CG theory relates to two separate but complementary aspects of analysis: **language description** and **language learning**. It draws on theories and principles from **Cognitive Linguistics** and the **Communicative Approach**, or **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** and from **cognitive psychology**. It thus draws on insights both from linguistics, second-language acquisition and language didactics.

Underlying the C+CG approach are three guiding principles which steer the development of grammar pedagogy:

- the importance of seeing the process of using/ learning grammar from the **perspective of the language user/learner**;
- the need to understand the **cognitive resources** available to the learner and the **cognitive processes** which are activated when human beings use and learn grammar;
- a belief in the **centrality of meaning** both in the use and in the learning of grammar – grammar is used and learned to *express messages*.

Notional grammar

- 'Language is a system for the expression of meaning' (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 161)
- 'Grammar is conceptualisation' (Croft and Cruse, 2004)

Figure 1: Notional vs. Formal objectives (based on 'Grammar for Communication')

Notional objective	Utterance	Formal objective
[referring to a present activity]	You're <i>being</i> stupid!	present progressive
[arranged activity]	I'm <i>playing</i> tennis tonight.	present progressive
[expressing intention]	I'm <i>going to use</i> my new racket.	'going to' future
[interpreting signs]	It's <i>going to be</i> a tough match.	'going to' future
[making a prediction]	I'll probably <i>be</i> back by six.	'will' future
[spontaneous decisions]	I think I'll <i>change</i> my racket.	'will' future
[reporting experiences]	<i>Have you ever been</i> to France?	present perfect
[expressing duration]	She's <i>been</i> away for hours.	present perfect
[making an assumption]	I think they <i>must</i> be Irish.	modal - 'must'
[expressing compulsion]	Your <i>must</i> go to bed now.	modal - 'must'
[reporting compulsion]	I <i>have to</i> do my homework.	modal – 'have to'

Notional objectives can be expressed in terms of 'I can' self-assessment descriptors like those found in the *Common European Framework* and *European Language Portfolio*:

- ✓ I can express an intention using 'going to'.
- ✓ I can refer to past events using the past tense
- ✓ I can talk about my experiences using the present perfect.

Exercises and activities

It is the task of learning theory to help materials designers and teachers to address three fundamental questions:

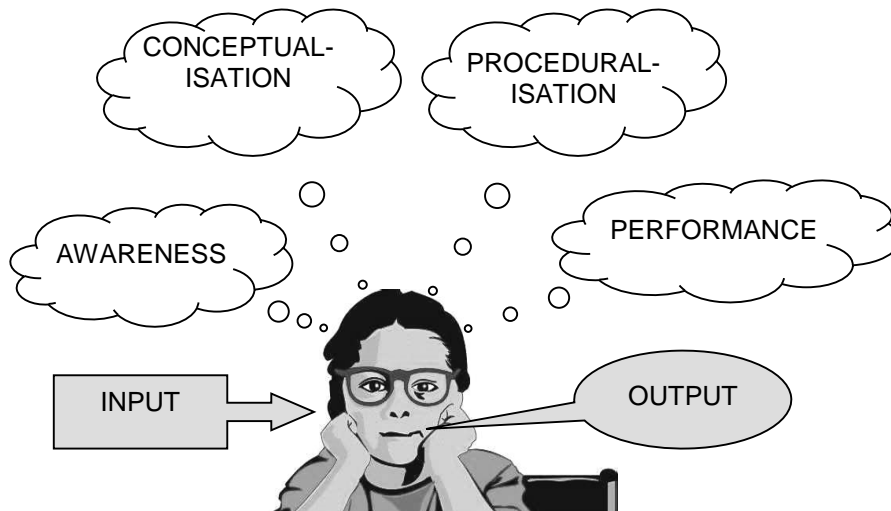
- What causes students to *pay attention* to, *process* and *make sense* of new items of grammar?
- How do grammatical concepts and forms become *stored in long-term memory*?
- How does this new knowledge become *automatised* so that it is available when students *engage in real-time authentic communication*?

Learning stages

'Learning a language entails a stagewise progression from initial awareness and active manipulation of information and learning processes to full automaticity in language use' (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990: 217).

Figure 2 shows the C+C view of learning stages which can be used in the analysis and design of grammar activities.

Figure 2: A cognitive model of learning stages



Explanation of cognitive learning stages

<i>Input</i> – material provided by the teacher/coursebook with new input + and <i>how it is processed by learners using existing knowledge und schemata and cognitive processes</i>		
Learning stages	<i>Awareness</i>	students <i>attend, focus on</i> and <i>notice</i> a new grammar concept or pattern
	<i>Conceptualisation</i>	students <i>internalise</i> a rule/generalisation (e.g. through explanation or discovery), and <i>confirm and consolidate</i> this rule (e.g. by heavily guided exercises) so that it <i>enters long-term memory – declarative knowledge</i>
	<i>Proceduralisation</i>	students do scaffolded but <i>open-ended</i> activities; they further <i>consolidate</i> the rule and <i>store it long-term memory</i> ; they embed the rule within their <i>personal experiences and schemata</i> , the rule become <i>automatised</i> as they use the grammar to generate their own utterances; grammar becomes a <i>skill – procedural knowledge</i>
	<i>Performance</i>	<i>skill development</i> , students are able to <i>use grammar in open contexts</i> ; focus on the <i>overall message</i>
<i>Output</i> – what students say/ write and their <i>monitoring</i> of their own, and other students', production		

Principles and criteria for assessing grammar activities

Pedagogical Principles – to what extent does a grammar activity support learning by *activating and optimising learning processes* and thus contribute to the overall aims of learning grammar?

Communicative Criteria – to what extent does a grammar activity support the development of both grammatical and communicative performance by *simulating conditions of language use*?

Pedagogical principles for evaluating grammar activities

1. Repetition

Learners need multiple contacts with the new language. However, quantity alone is not a sufficient criterion: the quality of the contacts must also be taken into account.

2. Depth of processing

The extent to which a new item of grammar becomes stored in the memory of the learner is partly dependent on how *mentally active* the learner is when doing grammar tasks. A cognitive view stresses the maximising of mental resources, and tasks are designed with this in mind. Depth of processing will be determined by the nature of the grammar task given to students. "The general principle that deeper and more elaborate processing leads to better memory has been supported by many other studies" (Baddeley et al., 2009:100). Traditional methodology tends to provide activities which are '*cognitively shallow*'.

3. Commitment filter

Students must be encouraged to '*commit themselves*' to learning grammar. The degree of commitment will be partly dependent on the extent to which certain needs are met: cognitive (curiosity, problem solving etc.), affective (enjoyment, fun, feeling of success/ *Erfolgslebnisse* etc.), communicative (self-expression, creativity, interaction etc.)

4. Peer/social learning

All learning is influenced by the learner's social environment. The contribution to learning made by interaction between learners and their peers is an important factor. Group work activities can include *peer monitoring* as part of their design.

5. Summative vs. formative exercises (testing vs. teaching/supporting learning)

A *summative* exercise has the main aim of testing whether an item of grammar has been learnt, whereas a *formative* activity has the specific aim of *supporting the learning process*. A shorthand way of distinguishing between them is *testing vs. learning activities*. Many exercises found in school coursebooks do not help the learner to learn but merely test declarative knowledge – whether a rule has been learnt.

6. Do you know vs. can you use?

A distinction is often made between declarative and procedural knowledge. Many grammar exercises focus only on the former. However, students need exercises which require them to *use* grammar if they are to foster *skill development*.

Communicative criteria for evaluating grammar exercises

1. Contextualisation (communicative value)

Language used in an explanation or exercise is *embedded in a clear context*, or the exercise *facilitates contextualisation* (imagining a context) by the student. This, its *communicative value* becomes apparent.

2. Personalisation

When we produce language we are drawing on our personal bank of information, ideas, knowledge etc. and representing it from our own personal perspective. Grammar activities need to take into account this 'personalisation' aspect of language use and to provide students with activities which give them the opportunity to apply their *own schematic constructs*, and *express their own ideas, from their own perspective*.

3. Complex encoding

Whenever human beings produce language, they are processing two general areas of cognition. On the one hand, they represent the world around them – what they see, think, remember, experience etc.; on the other hand, they map their perceptions of the world onto language. If students are to get to the Performance stage of the Cognitive Stage model, they must be given

the opportunity to rehearse this complex encoding. Grammar exercises in which students merely fill in prompted gaps require grammar encoding but no other language encoding. More complex encoding is required if the student has to produce both grammar and lexis – for example, in unprompted fill-in-the-gap exercises. In order to increase the complexity of encoding so that students encode whole sentences, different exercise formats such as composition must be used.

4. Authenticity of process

This criterion is concerned with the extent to which the various exercise formats require learners to use language *in 'language-like' ways*. Prompted fill-in-the-gap or transformation (active → passive; direct → indirect speech) are totally lacking in process authenticity, whereas paraphrasing an utterance or composition correspond more closely to authentic processing.

5. Interaction (applies to oral activities)

Learners use the grammar item to interact with other learners in ways which require a response – for example, in an oral group work activity.

6. Task-based

In addition to producing correct utterances, students fulfil a purposeful task which will have some kind of outcome or end product .

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Teaching Objectives:

My students should be able to write effective, spooky stories.

- In order to do this they need to be able to SET THE SCENE
- describe the BACKGROUND and CIRCUMSTANCES in detail (sound effects, dark shadows dancing on the walls....)
- and develop the plot by describing a series of EVENTS

Age group: AHS, 2nd grade (age 11)

I: Awareness raising and first conceptualisation

1. Reading

comprehension:

Work in pairs. Cut up the text and glue the sentences on a sheet in the correct order.

2. Noticing the 2 forms and making hypotheses:

Use two colours: one for the simple past and one for the past progressive (-ing form). What do you notice? Find a rule.

3. Acting out and seeing the scene:

Whole class activity: Act out the story in class in the style of "jeux dramatiques". Every student plays a role.

- First we need the "background activity" actors: full moon...clouds moving across sky,....

A Horror Scene (scrambled sentences)

A dark, skinny figure rushed out of the cemetery and ran across the street.

A huge cloud covered the moon and all of a sudden it was pitch-dark.

and behind the wall some strange animal was howling like a dog in severe pain.

and the cemetery wall on the other side of the street.

and the last leaves were falling down.

but big clouds were moving across the sky quickly, sometimes covering the moon completely.

It said: "property of GIBS: bio-lab Nr: 9999".

It was a cold night in late October.

It was a heap of bones.

ravens were screeching loudly

Suddenly there was a scream.

the children could see something white lying in the middle of the street a few meters ahead of them.

The children were walking quietly but quickly.

The skull even had a small label tied to it.

The wind was whistling through the trees

There was a forest on one side

There was a full moon in the black sky

There were strange noises in the air:

They were clean and white – just like the skeleton they had in the bio-lab at school.

They were cold and scared.

Tom and Sarah were walking down a dark, narrow street.

When the moonlight came back a minute later

- Then we need the "events" actors who will appear on the scene: scream, skeleton...
- Your teacher will read the story – you act it out without words.

II. Conceptualisation:

Students work out their rules and design their own grammar-rule pages. For each notion they find some typical examples and draw a logo that will remind them of this notion.

The Past Tenses

- Background
- Circumstances
- Atmosphere

The sun was shining.
The birds were flying.
It was raining.
He was walking.

Past Events / Action

Suddenly the monster came.
It came towards me.
I ran every.
I jumped into the pond.

Background **Circumstances**
Atmosphere

Ex: It was a warm sunny afternoon. The cat was lying in its basket. My grandma was watching TV. Sara was looking out of her window. She was seeing the big yellow moon. It was really stormy. The bright yellow sun was shining in my face. The birds were flying through the air. The squirrels were climbing up and down the tree. Sometimes the clouds were covering the moon completely. It was raining.

Action

Ex: Suddenly there was a scream. Suddenly she looked into red big eyes. And she screamed. Suddenly a thin hand shot out of the car. Suddenly big green eyes looked out of the tree. Suddenly there was a lightning. Suddenly a creature jumped to the right. Suddenly she was shocked from the man. And then she ran out, to her mother and her dad.

III. Proceduralising: Practicing in scaffolded conditions

Flip-Flap Stories:

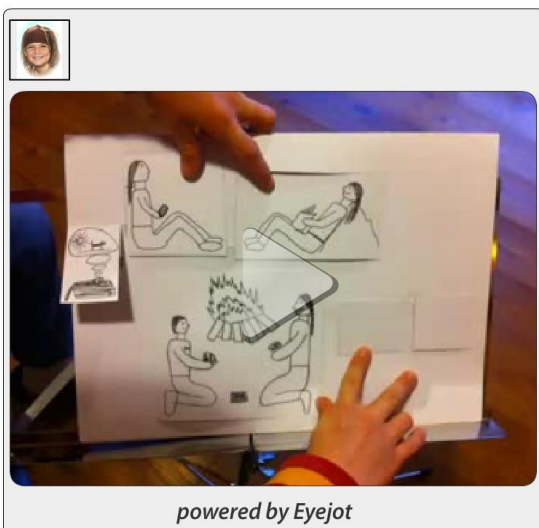
Plan a short spooky story that you can tell in about 10 sentences.

Decide which parts of your story are PAST EVENTS

and which parts describe the BACKGROUND and CIRCUMSTANCES.

To prepare your fold an A4 sheet in half. Draw simple pictures for the CIRCUMSTANCES on the front of the sheet. Then cut some windows or doors into the sheet and draw pictures for the EVENTS behind these doors.

Practice telling your story. Then record it on Eyejot and post it on Moodle.



more examples on www.epep.at

IV. Performance TASK: Write a spooky story.

Students plan and write their own spooky stories. In order to make the stories really spooky they add lots of background details (an owl was hooting, the storm was howling...)




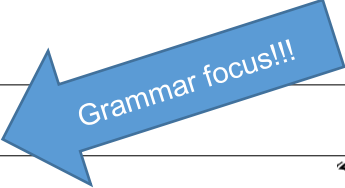




Vocabulary phrases for these details have previously been collected in a story reading phase where the learners collected “spooky vocabulary”.

After writing a first draft the students meet in groups of 3 to give each other feedback on their stories. The criteria sheet on the right guides them through their peer-conferences.

What makes a good, spooky story?



Check if your story (or your partner's story) meets all the following criteria.

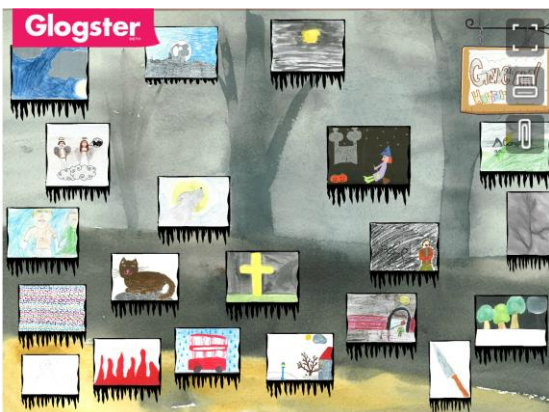
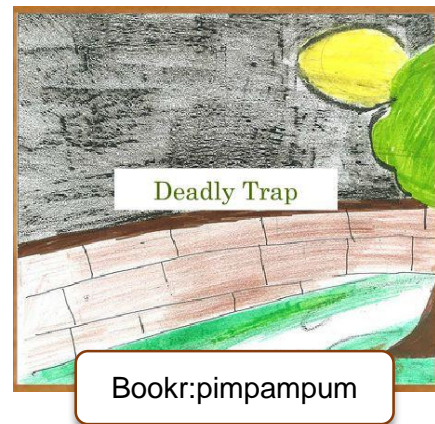
Criteria	
 	You can give up to 3 stars for each category.  If you only give 1-2 stars explain what could be improved and how this can be done best.
Title: The story has a promising, spooky title.	
Setting and Vocab: The setting is described well. I can hear spooky sounds and I can see the scene in front of my eyes. The writer has used lots of good, spooky vocabulary.	
Grammar: The setting/background is described in the past progressive tense (the moon was shining...)	 
Grammar: The actions /events are told in the past simple tense. (the door flew open, lightning struck...)	
Characters: The characters react like normal human beings. We can see that they are scared and they have good reasons for their actions.	
Ending and suspense: I am surprised by the ending – it is not predictable. The story is interesting to read – it is full of suspense (Spannung). 	
Further tips: How else could this story be improved?	

V. Publishing the stories as audio-storybooks:

Online storybooks: In order to create an incentive to create really good stories that will give the readers goose bumps, the learners “publish” their stories in online picture books with hand-drawn pictures.

We use the online software “bookr pimpampum” to create these books.

In the last step the learners practice reading their stories and then record them using simple screen recording software such as Jing or Screencast-o-matic.



Listen to the stories on http://eep.at/?page_id=2490

Or follow the path: www.eep.at → Writing → Intermediate learners → Spooky Stories

Grammar Quick-Checkers:

A tool to assess the quality of grammar exercises

Quick Check Grammar Chart		-	✓	+
Learning Stages	Awareness raising			
	Conceptualization and hypothesis building			
	Proceduralization in scaffolded conditions			
	Performance in real-time context			
Pedagogical Principles and Communicative Criteria	Depth of processing and Complex encoding : Will the learners be mentally active and process grammar, lexis and their “world knowledge”?			
	Commitment filter: Will the learners`cognitive and affective needs be met? (e.g.: curiosity, problem solving, enjoyment, fun, success)			
	Peer and social learning and interaction: Pair – or groupwork, sharing, oral activities, jigsaw activities...			
	Personalisation: Do the learners have the opportunity to draw on their personal experiences and express their own ideas?			
	Contextualisation: Is the exercise embedded in a clear communicative context?			
	Authenticity of process: Will the learners use language in natural, “language-like” ways (rather than manipulate forms)?			
	Task-based: Do the students fulfil a purposeful task that will have an outcome or end product?			
	Testing versus teaching: Does the exercise support learning or only test it?			
This exercise supports learning processes...		☆	☆	☆