Teaching Grammar

DIANE LARSEN-FREEMAN

In "Teaching Grammar," Larsen-Freeman challenges conventional views of grammar. Instead of simply analyzing grammatical form, she includes grammatical meaning and use as well. Then, building on what is known about the way grammar is learned, she offers ways to teach grammar consistent with contemporary theory and the need to "focus on form" within a meaning-based or communicative approach.

INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, second language educators have alternated between two types of approaches to language teaching: those that focus on analyzing the language and those that focus on using the language. The former have students learn the elements of language (e.g., sounds, structures, vocabulary), building toward students' being able to use the elements to communicate. The latter encourage students to use the language from the start, however falteringly, in order to acquire it. Early in the previous century, this distinctive pattern was observable in the shift from the more form-oriented grammar-translation approach to the use-oriented direct method (Celce-Murcia 1980). A more recent example of the shift is the loss of popularity of the cognitive-code approach, in which analyzing structures and applying rules are common practices, and the rise of more communicative approaches, which emphasize language use over rules of language usage (Widdowson 1978).

Even though such language use approaches as task-based and content-based are in favor these days, educators agree that speaking and writing accurately is part of communicative competence, just as is being able to get one's meaning across in an appropriate manner. Further, it has been observed that although some learners can "pick up" accurate linguistic form from exposure to the target language, few learners are capable of doing so efficiently, especially if they are postpubescent or if their exposure is limited to the class-

room, as is the case when English is taught as a foreign language. In contrast, research has shown that teachers who focus students' attention on linguistic form during communicative interactions are more effective than those who never focus on form or who only do so in decontextualized grammar lessons (Spada and Lightbown 1993; Lightbown 1998). It follows, then, that most educators concur with the need to teach grammatical form. However, they advise doing so by "focusing on form" within a meaning-based or communicative approach in order to avoid a return to analytic approaches in which decontextualized language forms were the object of study.
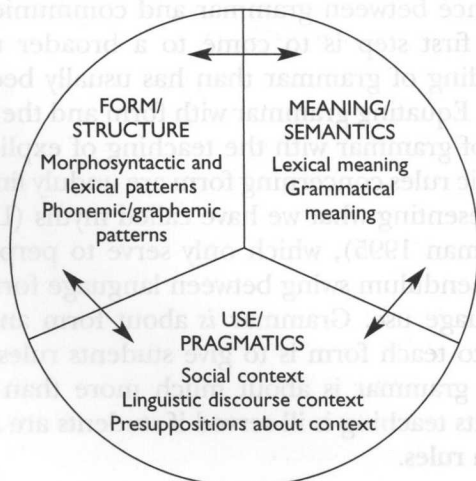
Focusing on grammatical form during communicative interactions rather than forms in isolation (Long 1991) is one way to prevent the pendulum from swinging beyond its point of equilibrium. In this chapter, we will encourage a balance between grammar and communication. The first step is to come to a broader understanding of grammar than has usually been the case. Equating grammar with form and the teaching of grammar with the teaching of explicit linguistic rules concerning form are unduly limiting, representing what we have called myths (Larsen-Freeman 1995), which only serve to perpetuate the pendulum swing between language form and language use. Grammar *is* about form and one way to teach form is to give students rules; however, grammar is about much more than form, and its teaching is ill served if students are simply given rules.

Thus, in this chapter, we will entertain a more robust view of grammar. Then, we will briefly touch upon issues concerning its learning. Finally, we will discuss its teaching.

A Three-Dimensional Grammar Framework

Since our goal is to achieve a better fit between grammar and communication, it is not helpful to think of grammar as a discrete set of meaningless, decontextualized, static structures. Nor is it helpful to think of grammar solely as prescriptive rules about linguistic form, such as injunctions against splitting infinitives or ending sentences with prepositions. Grammatical structures not only have (morphosyntactic) form, they are also used to express meaning (semantics) in context-appropriate use (pragmatics). In order to guide us in constructing an approach to teaching grammar that strives to meet this definition, it would be helpful to have a frame of reference.

Our framework takes the form of a pie chart. Its shape helps us to make salient that in dealing with the complexity of grammar, three dimensions must concern us: structure or form, semantics or meaning, and the pragmatic conditions governing use.[1] Moreover, as they are wedges of a single pie, we note further that the dimensions are not hierarchically arranged as many traditional characterizations of linguistic strata depict.[2] Finally, the arrows connecting one wedge of the pie with another illustrate the interconnectedness of the three dimensions; thus a change in any one wedge will have repercussions for the other two.

FORM/STRUCTURE
Morphosyntactic and lexical patterns
Phonemic/graphemic patterns

MEANING/SEMANTICS
Lexical meaning
Grammatical meaning

USE/PRAGMATICS
Social context
Linguistic discourse context
Presuppositions about context

In the wedge of our pie having to do with structure, we have those overt lexical[3] and morphological forms that tell us how a particular grammar structure is constructed and how it is sequenced with other structures in a sentence or text. With certain structures, it is also important to note the phonemic/graphemic patterns (see the discussion of possessives and phrasal verbs below for examples). In the semantic wedge, we deal with what a grammar structure means. Note that the meaning can be lexical (a dictionary definition for a preposition like *down*, for instance) or it can be grammatical (e.g., the conditional states both a condition and outcome or result). It is very difficult to arrive at a definition of pragmatics distinct from semantics, and thus we are sympathetic to Levinson's (1983) suggestion that pragmatics deals with all aspects of meaning not dealt with by semantic theory!

Since this definition is too broad for our purposes here, however, we will limit pragmatics to mean "the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language" (Levinson 1983, p. 9). We will leave the term *context* broad enough though, so that context can be social (i.e., a context created by interlocutors, their relationship to one another, the setting), or it can be a linguistic discourse context (i.e., the language that precedes or follows a particular structure in the discourse or how a particular genre or register of discourse affects the use of a structure), or context can even mean the presuppositions one has about the context.

The influence of pragmatics may be ascertained by asking two questions:

1. 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? For example, what factors in the social context might explain a paradigmatic choice such as why a speaker chooses a yes-no question rather than an imperative to serve as a request for information (e.g., *Do you have the time?* versus *Please tell me the time*)?

2. When or why does a speaker/writer vary the form of a particular linguistic structure?

For instance, what linguistic discourse factors would result in a syntagmatic choice such as the indirect object being placed before the direct object to create *Jenny gave Hank a brand-new comb* versus *Jenny gave a brand-new comb to Hank?*
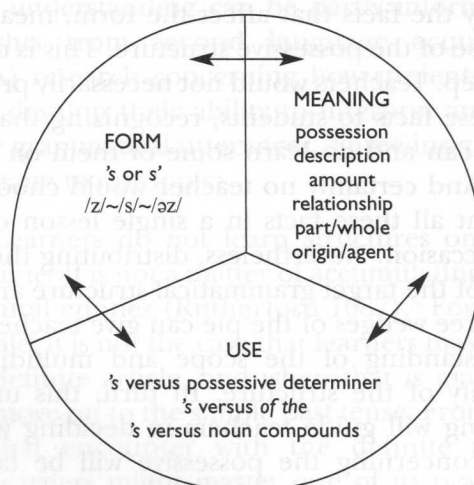
Despite the permeable boundaries between the dimensions, we have found it useful to view grammar from these three perspectives. We trust that the utility of this approach will become clearer as we proceed. A teacher of grammar might begin by asking the questions posed in the three wedges of our pie (for the sake of simplicity, labeled *form, meaning,* and *use*) for any given grammar point.

FORM — How is it formed? / **MEANING** — What does it mean? / **USE** — When/Why is it used?
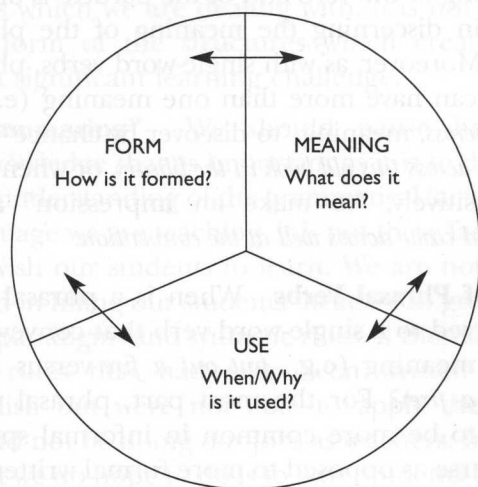
Let us consider an example. A common structure to be taught at a high-beginning level of English proficiency is the *'s* possessive form. If we analyze this possessive form as answers to our questions, we would fill in the wedges as below (analysis based on Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999).

Form of Possessive   This way of forming possessives in English requires 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/. This form of the possessive has three allomorphs: /z/, /s/, and /əz/, which are phonetically conditioned: /z/ is used when it occurs after voiced consonants and vowels, /s/ following voiceless consonants, and /əz/ occurs after sibilants.

POSSESSIVES

FORM — 's or s' — /z/~/s/~/əz/

MEANING — possession, description, amount, relationship, part/whole, origin/agent

USE — 's versus possessive determiner / 's versus *of the* / 's versus noun compounds

Meaning of Possessive   Besides possession, the possessive or genitive form can indicate 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*).

Also, although all languages have a way of signaling possession, they do not all regard the same items as possessable. For example, Spanish speakers refer to a body part using the definite article instead of a possessive form. ESL/EFL students will have to learn the semantic scope of the possessive form in English.
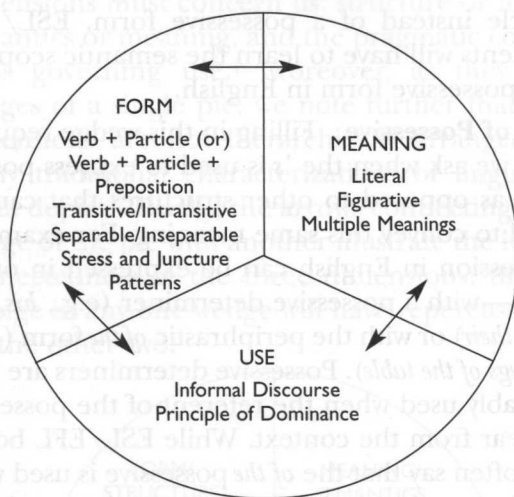
Use of Possessive   Filling in this wedge requires that we ask when the *'s* is used to express possession as opposed to other structures that can be used to convey this same meaning. For example, possession in English can be expressed in other ways—with a possessive determiner (e.g., *his, her,* and *their*) or with the periphrastic *of the* form (e.g., *the legs of the table*). Possessive determiners are presumably used when the referent of the possessor is clear from the context. While ESL/EFL books will often say that the *of the* possessive is used with nonhuman head nouns and *'s* with human head nouns, we are aware of certain conditions where this rule does not apply. For example, native speakers often prefer to use the *'s* even with inanimate head nouns if the head nouns are performing some action (e.g., *the train's arrival was delayed*).[4] Finally, students will have to learn to distinguish contexts in which a noun compound (*table leg*) is more appropriate than either the *'s* form or the *of the* form.

Thus, by using our ternary scheme, we can classify the facts that affect the form, meaning, and use of the possessive structure. This is only a first step. Teachers would not necessarily present all these facts to students, recognizing that students can and do learn some of them on their own. And certainly no teacher would choose to present all these facts in a single lesson or on one occasion. Nevertheless, distributing the features of the target grammatical structure among the three wedges of the pie can give teachers an understanding of the scope and multidimensionality of the structure. In turn, this understanding will guide teachers in deciding which facts concerning the possessive will be taught and when and how to do so.

Before continuing to explore these decisions, however, it might be worthwhile to apply our approach to another grammar structure. Let us analyze phrasal verbs this time. By considering the three questions posed earlier, we can state the following about phrasal verbs (analysis based upon Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999):

PHRASAL VERBS

FORM
Verb + Particle (or)
Verb + Particle + Preposition
Transitive/Intransitive
Separable/Inseparable
Stress and Juncture Patterns

MEANING
Literal
Figurative
Multiple Meanings

USE
Informal Discourse
Principle of Dominance

Form of Phrasal Verbs Phrasal verbs are two-part verbs comprising a verb and a particle (e.g., *to look up*). Sometimes, they can be constructed with three parts in that a preposition can follow the particle (e.g., *to keep up with*). As with all other verbs, phrasal verbs are either transitive or intransitive. A distinctive feature of phrasal verbs is that for many of them the particle can be separated from its verb by an intervening object (e.g., *Alicia*

looked the word up in the dictionary). Phrasal verbs also have distinctive stress and juncture patterns, which distinguish them from verb plus preposition combinations:

Alicia looked úp#the word.

Alicia wálked#úp the street.

Meaning of Phrasal Verbs There are literal phrasal verbs, such as *to hang up,* where if one knows the meaning of the verb or the particle or both, it is not difficult to figure out the meaning of the verb-particle combination. Unfortunately, for the ESL/EFL student there are far more instances of figurative phrasal verbs (e.g., *to run into,* meaning "meet by chance") where a knowledge of the meaning of the verb and of the particle is of little help in discerning the meaning of the phrasal verb. Moreover, as with single-word verbs, phrasal verbs can have more than one meaning (e.g., *to come across,* meaning "to discover by chance" as in *I came across this old book in the library,* or when used intransitively, "to make an impression" as in *Richard came across well at the convention.*

Use of Phrasal Verbs When is a phrasal verb preferred to a single-word verb that conveys the same meaning (e.g., *put out a fire* versus *extinguish a fire*)? For the most part, phrasal verbs seem to be more common in informal spoken discourse as opposed to more formal written discourse. When is one form of a phrasal verb preferred to another; i.e., when should the particle be separated from its verb (e.g., *put out a fire* versus *put a fire out*)? Erteschik-Shir's (1979) principle of dominance seems to work well to define the circumstances favoring particle movement: If a noun phrase (NP) object is dominant (i.e., a long, elaborate NP representing new information), it is likely to occur after the particle; if the direct object is short, old information (e.g., a pronoun), it would naturally occur before the particle.

Identifying the Challenge Again, we would like to underscore the fact that it would not be reasonable for the ESL/EFL teacher to present all of this information to students at once. The framework does, however, help to organize the facts. Furthermore, by doing this, teachers can more easily identify where the learning challenge(s)

will lie for their students. Identifying the challenging dimension(s) is a key step which should be taken prior to any pedagogical treatment.

All three dimensions will have to be mastered by the learner (although not necessarily consciously). For phrasal verbs, it is the meaning dimension which ESL/EFL students struggle with most. It is often the fact that there is no systematic way of learning to associate the verb and the particle. Adding to the students' woes, new phrasal verbs are constantly being coined. By recognizing where students will likely struggle, an important clue is given the teacher as to where to focus work on phrasal verbs. We will amplify this point later. For now, however, it is worth noting that although it is grammar structures which we are dealing with, it is not always the form of the structures which creates the most significant learning challenge.

"Grammaring"   We should pause here to acknowledge that as important as it is to develop our understanding of the grammatical facts of the language we are teaching, it is not these facts that we wish our students to learn. We are not interested in filling our students' heads with grammatical paradigms and syntactic rules. If they knew all the rules that had ever been written about English but were not able to apply them, we would not be doing our jobs as teachers. Instead, what we do hope to do is to have students be able to use grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. In other words, grammar teaching is not so much knowledge transmission as it is skill development. In fact, it is better to think of teaching "grammaring" (Larsen-Freeman 1997; 2001), rather than "grammar." By thinking of grammar as a skill to be mastered, rather than a set of rules to be memorized, we will be helping ESL/EFL students go a long way toward the goal of being able to accurately convey meaning in the manner they deem appropriate.

The Learning Process

However important and necessary it is for teachers to have a comprehensive knowledge of their subject matter, it is equally important for them to understand their students' learning process. This understanding can be partly informed by insights from second language acquisition (SLA) research concerning how students naturally develop their ability to interpret and produce grammatical utterances. Three insights are germane to our topic:

1. Learners do not learn structures one at a time. It is not a matter of accumulating structural entities (Rutherford 1987).[5] For example, it is not the case that learners master the definite article, and when that is mastered, move on to the simple past tense. From their first encounter with the definite article, learners might master one of its pragmatic functions—e.g., to signal the uniqueness of the following noun. But even if they are able to do this appropriately, it is not likely that they will always produce the definite article when needed because learners typically take a long time before they are able to do this consistently. Thus, learning is a gradual process involving the mapping of form, meaning, and use; structures do not spring forth in learners' interlanguage fully developed and error-free.

2. Even when learners appear to have mastered a particular structure, it is not uncommon to find backsliding occurring with the introduction of new forms to the learners' interlanguage. For example, the learner who has finally mastered the third person singular marker on present-tense verbs is likely to overgeneralize the rule and apply it to newly emerging modal verbs, thus producing errors such as *She cans speak Spanish*. Teachers should not despair, therefore, at regressive behavior on the part of their students. Well-formedness is usually restored once the new additions have been incorporated and the system self-organizes or restructures.

3. Second language learners rely on the knowledge and the experience they have. If they are beginners, they will rely on their L1 as a source of hypotheses about how the L2 works; when they are more advanced, they will rely increasingly on the L2. In understanding this, the teacher realizes that there is no need to

teach everything about a structure to a group of students; rather, the teacher can build upon what the students already know. It also follows that the challenging dimension for a given grammatical structure will shift from class to class depending on the students' L1 backgrounds and level of L2 proficiency. Successful teaching involves identifying the relevant challenge for a particular group of students.

To these three observations, we will add a fourth one that is not to our knowledge treated in the SLA research literature, but rather one based upon our observations and supported by learning theorists (e.g., Gagné and Medsker 1996).

4. Different learning processes are responsible for different aspects of language. Indeed, given that language is as complicated as it is, one would not expect the learning process to be any simpler. It is clearly an oversimplification to treat all grammar learning as resulting from habit formation or from rule formation. Being aware that different learning processes contribute to SLA suggests a need for the teaching process to respect the differences. How the nature of the language challenge and the learning process affect teaching decisions is the issue to which we turn next.

The Teaching Process

Consistent with the way we are conceiving grammar in this chapter, teaching grammar means enabling language students to use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. In this section we discuss various teaching strategies that can be employed to meet this goal.

In keeping with language form approaches, traditional grammar teaching has employed a structural syllabus and lessons composed of three phases: presentation, practice, and production (or communication), often referred to as "the PPP" approach. As we saw earlier, underlying this approach is the assumption that one systematically builds towards communication. However, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, these days, most teachers embrace a more communicatively oriented approach, starting with a communicative activity such as task- or content-based material (see chapters by Savignon and Snow in this volume). The grammar that is taught is not scheduled in advance as it is with a structural syllabus/PPP approach, but rather supports students in their completion of the communicative task or their making sense of a particular content area. In addition, or alternately, teachers respond to grammar errors that students commit when engaged in communication. As such, it reverses the normal sequence (Skehan 1998b), putting communication first, rather than selecting and presenting a grammar structure in advance of its use in context.

Even if the grammar to be worked on is derivative rather than scheduled in advance, a teacher must still decide how to address it. A variety of options have been suggested (see Doughty and Williams 1998; R. Ellis 1998), although the research findings underpinning them are somewhat sparse and sometimes contradictory (see Mitchell 2000 for a recent review). One option is simply to bring to students' attention, or to promote their *noticing* of, some feature of a grammatical structure. For example, if a student makes an error and the teacher decides to respond to it, then the teacher might *recast* or *reformulate* what the student has said or written incorrectly in a more accurate, meaningful, or appropriate manner. For instance, if it is an error of form, the teacher would recast the student's production accurately.

STUDENT: This is Juan notebook.
TEACHER: Oh. That is Juan's notebook. (perceiving the error to be the form of the possessive)

If meaning is the problem, the teacher would recast what the student has said in a meaningful way.

STUDENT: I need to look at the word in the dictionary.
TEACHER: You need to look up the word in the dictionary. (perceiving the phrasal verb *look up* to be a better form for what the student means to say)

And if use is the problem, the teacher would recast what the student has said in a more appropriate manner:

STUDENT: I arise at six in the morning.
TEACHER: OK. You get up at six in the morning.
(perceiving that a phrasal verb would be more appropriate to convey the student's intended meaning)

A more proactive way to promote students' noticing a particular grammatical structure is to highlight it in a text in some fashion. *Enhancing the input* (Sharwood Smith 1993) might be an especially effective way to focus students' attention on grammar structures that operate at the discourse level of language, such as articles or verb tenses. By boldfacing all the normally insalient articles in a given passage, for instance, the students' attention could be drawn to them. Even simply choosing texts in which a particular structure or structural contrast is especially frequent would enhance its saliency and thus might promote noticing, a practice sometimes called *input flooding.*

Still another option is to use a *consciousness-raising task,* in which it is the students' job to induce a grammatical generalization from the data they have been given. For example, Fotos and Ellis (1991) ask students to work out the rule for indirect object alternation in English (e.g., *They gave a gold watch to him./They gave him a gold watch.*) by giving the students example sentences where indirect object alternation can and cannot be successfully applied. Indirect object alternation is difficult in English and therefore is an ideal candidate for this sort of explicit rule articulation. Indeed, Carroll and Swain (1993) suggest that when the rules are not that clear-cut, detailed instruction with explicit metalinguistic feedback may be the most helpful response to student errors.

Another option for promoting students' awareness is to use *the garden path* strategy (Tomasello and Herron 1988; 1989). As applied to grammar teaching, this means giving students information about structure without giving them the full picture, thus making it seem easier than it is, or in other words, "leading them down the garden path." If ESL/EFL students were told that the English past tense is formed with *-ed,* for example, this would be leading students down the garden path as there are many irregular verbs in English where this rule will not work to produce the past tense. The reason for giving students only a partial explanation is that they are more likely to learn the exceptions to the rule if they are corrected at the moment the overgeneralization error is made than if they are given a long list of "exceptions to the rule" to memorize in advance.

Another technique for directing students' attention to form is called *input processing* (Van Patten 1996). Rather than working on rule learning and rule application, input processing activities push learners to attend to properties of language during activities where the structure is being used meaningfully. For instance, if students are asked to carry out commands that teachers issue, they are working on matching the imperative form to its use in a meaningful way.

Of course, sometimes a communicative task itself requires that students attend to relevant features of the target language (Loschky and Bley-Vroman 1993), such as when using a particular grammatical structure is essential to completing the task. An example of this is when students have to use particular prepositions to accurately give each other directions using a map. The added value of using a communicative task to promote noticing is that students are encouraged to use the target structures, thereby generating "output" that attracts feedback from a teacher or another student.

Speaking of output, it might be surprising to experienced teachers to read descriptions of all these teaching options with very little mention of student production. But, of course, students' production plays a very important role in learning grammar. It is not enough to have awarenesses raised if students can't produce the language. *Output production* is, therefore, extremely important. For one thing, it pushes students to move beyond semantic processing to syntactic processing (Swain 1985). Then, too, when students attempt to produce structures, they get to test their hypotheses on how the structure is formed or what it means or when it is used. Following these

attempts, as we have seen, they can receive feedback on their hypotheses and modify them as necessary.

Indeed, Donato (1994) has shown how students' participation in *collaborative dialogue,* through which learners can provide support for each other, has spurred development of learners' interlanguage. Other research (Swain and Lapkin 1998) corroborates the value of an interactive dialogue as both a cognitive tool and a means of communication which can promote grammatical development.

Beyond these reasons for giving students an opportunity to produce the target grammatical structures, we have already presented the idea that grammar teaching can better be thought of as developing "grammaring," i.e., helping students be able to use grammar skillfully, a goal that requires significant practice. To this point, Gatbonton and Segalowitz (1988) have argued that practice of grammatical patterns can lead to automatization of certain aspects of performance, which, in turn, frees up students' attentional resources to be allocated elsewhere.

It used to be that the practice phase of a lesson was devoted almost exclusively to grammar drills and exercises. Ever since the ineffectiveness of using drills which do not engage students' attention was acknowledged, there has been little by way of guidance offered on how to give students meaningful practice. What follows, therefore, is an attempt to fill this void. Practice activities will be addressed in terms of which dimension of language they relate to.

Form

From what we know of skill acquisition theory (e.g., Anderson and Fincham 1994), fluency or proceduralization of declarative knowledge (e.g., knowledge of a grammar rule or pattern) requires practice in which students use the target language point meaningfully while keeping the declarative knowledge in working memory (DeKeyser 1998).

It is important to emphasize *meaningful* practice of form for several reasons. First of all, meaningless mechanical drills, such as repetition drills, commonly associated with behaviorist approaches to learning, do not engage the learner in the

target behavior of conveying meaning through language. Furthermore, because students are not engaged in target behavior, the inert knowledge problem (Whitehead 1929) is likely to materialize. Inert knowledge is knowledge that can be recalled when students are specifically asked to do so but is not available for spontaneous use, in, say, problem solving, even when the knowledge is relevant to the problem at hand. Knowledge remains inert when it is not available for transfer from the classroom context to the outside world. We know that when the psychological conditions of learning and application are matched what has been learned is more likely to be transferred (e.g., Blaxton 1989). Thus, rules and forms learned in isolated meaningless drills may be harder to retrieve in the context of communicative interaction (Segalowitz and Gatbonton 1994). Finally, student motivation is likely to be enhanced if students are able to interact in a way that is meaningful to them. Then, too, they are likely to be more attentive if they are saying something meaningful.

Identifying the type of learning involved helps us to think about the desirable characteristics of any practice activity. For instance, for declarative knowledge to be proceduralized a great deal of *meaningful* practice would be required. Further, students would have to receive feedback on the accuracy with which they produced the target form. They would have to be restricted to using just the particular target form; in other words, structural diversity would not be permitted.[6] Finally, for proceduralization to occur, it would seem important to concentrate on only one or two forms at a time, although, of course, the target form could be introduced in contrast to forms that the student already controls.

Let us take an example and see how these characteristics are applied. If our students show us that they are struggling with the inversion of the subject and operator in yes-no questions, it would be clear that their immediate learning challenge is linguistic form. We will need to design or select an activity that encourages *meaningful* practice of the pattern, not verbatim repetition. We want the students to concentrate on producing only yes-no questions. A game like Twenty Questions would appear to meet the criteria. Students get to ask 20 yes-no questions about an

object or person in an attempt to guess the identity; hence, they receive abundant practice in forming the questions, and the questions they produce are meaningful. The teacher would work with each student to enable him or her to produce the pattern accurately, perhaps providing an explicit rule, perhaps not.

An example of a game that would work on the form of the English possessive comes from Kealey and Inness (1997). Students are given a family portrait in which the child's face is missing. They are also given clues as to what the child looks like, e.g., the child has the mother's eyebrows or the father's chin. A person from each small group into which the students are divided comes to the front of the room, takes a clue, memorizes it, and brings it back to his or her group so that the feature in the clue can be drawn. This continues until the child, a composite of his mother and father, is fully drawn.

In sum, certain games are good devices for practicing grammar points where the challenge resides in the formal dimension. While not an activity in and of itself, another useful device for working on the formal dimension is the use of cuisenaire rods. The rods are ideal for focusing student attention on some syntactic property under scrutiny. One example that comes to mind is an adaptation of Stevick's (1980) Islamabad technique. Practicing the form of OS[7] relative clauses, students might be asked to use the rods to construct a view of some spot in their hometown. The students would be encouraged to use OS relative clauses where appropriate (e.g., *There is a fountain that is located in the center of my town; Around the fountain there are many people who sell fruits, vegetables, and flowers,* etc.).

One final example of a type of useful activity for working on the formal dimension is a problem-solving activity. The problem to be solved could be most anything, but if we are dealing with the formal dimension, then we would want it to conform to the characteristics described above. An example might be an information-gap activity where the students are given a class information sheet with certain items missing (see bottom of this page).

Students could circulate asking one another *Wh*-questions (e.g., *What is Beatriz's major? How old is Werner?*) in order to complete the chart. Another example might be a sentence-unscrambling task. This is a useful problem-solving activity when the challenge is getting students to produce correct word order, such as when the objective is to have students use auxiliary verbs in the proper sequence.

It is important to take note that there is nothing inherent in the three examples we have provided (games, use of rods, problem-solving activities) which make them useful for addressing the formal dimension; i.e., we could easily use rods to work on some aspects of the meaning or use dimensions. What is significant to remember is that the activity should be structured in such a way that it is compatible with the characteristics presented earlier.

Meaning

If the teacher has decided that the challenge of a particular structure lies in the semantic dimension, then a different sort of practice activity should be planned. It would seem that meaning would call for some sort of associative learning (N. Ellis 1998), where students have opportunities

Name	Age	Country	Language	Major	Hobby
Beatriz	18	Bolivia	Spanish	Dentistry	
Mohammed	19	Algeria		Accounting	Going to the movies
Jean Claude		France	French		Painting
	18	Brazil		Education	Hiking
Werner	17		Swiss German	Business	

to associate the form and the meaning of the particular target structure. It has been our experience that repetition is not needed to the same extent as it is when teaching some aspect of the formal dimension. Sometimes a single pairing of form and meaning suffices. Due to memory constraints, it seems prudent to restrict the number of new items being practiced at any one time to between two and six (Asher 1996). The students would receive feedback on their ability to demonstrate that they had acquired the form-meaning bond.

Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988) mention that when dealing with the semantic dimension, realia and pictures are very useful. Thus, for example, if the teacher has decided to work on the semantics of comparative forms in English to support some communicative task or content, he or she might show students pairs of pictures and work with them to make comparisons using the form that reflects the relation depicted (e.g., *as _____ as, more _____ than, less _____ than*).

Actions, too, can make meaning salient. The initial challenge for ESL/EFL students grappling with prepositions is to associate the "core" meaning with each. Thus, prior to having students work on direction-giving tasks using maps (*Walk to the corner. Turn right at the corner. The cinema is near the corner, next to the bank.*), a good strategy might be to work with students on having them make an association between a preposition and its meaning in locating objects in space. One way of doing this is to conduct a Total Physical Response sequence where students act out a series of commands along with the teacher, involving the placement of objects in various parts of the room; e.g., *Put the book next to the desk, Put the pen on the book, Walk to the door, Stand near the door*, etc. Once students appear to have made the connection between form and meaning, the teacher can assess their ability to discriminate one form-meaning bond from another by having them carry out commands on their own and by issuing novel commands—e.g., *Put the pen on the desk*—and assessing their ability to comply.

We said earlier that a persistent challenge for students' learning phrasal verbs was the fact that the meaning is often not detectable from combining the meaning of the verb with the meaning of the particle. Sometimes teachers have had their students play Concentration, a version of the game in which the students have to associate a phrasal verb written on one card with its definition written on another card. Another example of an activity that would address this semantic challenge is an operation (Nelson and Winters 1993). In an operation, a series of separate actions are performed to accomplish some task. The teacher might issue commands, or mime the actions with the students as she or he describes them.

> *I want to call up my friend. First, I look up the phone number. Then I write it down. I pick up the receiver and punch in the number. The number is busy. I hang up and decide to call back later.*

By practicing this operation several times, the students can learn to associate the form and meaning of certain phrasal verbs (*call up, look up, pick up*, etc.). If students are given an operation with which to associate phrasal verbs, recall at a later time will likely be enhanced. To determine if students can distinguish among the various phrasal verbs, students might be given phrasal verbs out of sequence and asked to mime the appropriate action. Feedback on their ability to match form and meaning can be given.

Use

When use is the challenge, it is because students have shown that they are having a hard time selecting the right structure or form for a particular context. Working on use will involve students learning that there are options to be exercised and that they must select from among them the one which best suits a given context.

Thus, relevant practice activities will provide students with an opportunity to choose from two or more forms the one most suitable for the context and how they wish to position themselves (e.g., in a cooperative way, a polite way, an assertive way, etc.). Students would receive feedback on the appropriateness of their choice. In some cases, their choice might involve selecting between two options (e.g., when to use the passive versus the active voice). Other times, their choice would be from among an array of options (e.g., which

modal verb to use when giving advice to a boss); hence, the number of forms being worked on at one time would be at least two, but could involve many more.

Role plays work well when dealing with use because the teacher can systematically manipulate social variables (e.g., increase or decrease the social distance between interlocutors) to have students practice how changes in the social variables affect the choice of form.

For example, if students have shown that they do not know how to use modals to give advice, they might be asked to role-play having a "dilemma." In this role play, one person has a problem; (e.g., the keys to the car have been lost. The car is locked and the person wants to get in.) Students are asked to use modal verbs to give advice to the person with the problem; e.g., *You might try breaking the window, You could try calling the police.* The teacher could next alter a salient feature of the context, thus creating a new social context in which a different modal verb would be more appropriate. For example, the teacher might ask, "What if it were a young child that had this dilemma?" A more appropriate form and content for the advice, then, might be *You had better wait for your mother to come!*

On another occasion, students might be asked to play the role of an advice columnist. They are to write a column and give advice to a classmate who is having a particular problem. Having students work with the same structure in writing and in speaking activities can highlight differences between written and oral grammars (Carter and McCarthy 1995).

Role plays are useful for highlighting other structural choices as well. Often we find that it is neither the form nor the meaning of the English tenses that presents the greatest long-term challenge to ESL/EFL students; rather it is when/why to use one tense and not the other. In other words, it is the pragmatic usage of the tenses that is the major obstacle to their mastery. Giving students practice with situations in which a contrast between two tenses is likely to arise may sensitize students to the usage differences. For instance, a notorious problem for ESL/EFL students is to know when to use the present perfect versus when to use the past tense. A situation where a contrast between them would occur might be a job interview. In such a context, the perfect of experience is likely to be invoked (e.g., *Have you ever done any computer programming?*). An elaboration to an affirmative answer is likely to contain the past tense (e.g., *Yes, I have. I once worked on . . .* or simply, *Yes. When I worked at . . .*). Students can take turns role-playing the interviewer and interviewee.

As was mentioned earlier, it is not only the social context that will be involved in the choice of which forms to use, but also it is often the linguistic discourse context that will make a difference. Thus, it is very important to consider teaching discourse grammar (Celce-Murcia 1991a; Hughes and McCarthy 1998). Such is the case with the passive voice. Its use is not particularly sensitive to social factors; i.e., whether one is using the active or passive voice does not necessarily depend upon with whom one is conversing. What usually does cause students considerable difficulty with the passive voice, however, is determining when to use it. The fact that the agent of an action is defocused motivates the use of the passive. Furthermore, if the agent has already been established in the linguistic discourse, it would likely not even be mentioned in subsequent discourse. Thus, most passive sentences are agentless.

Challenges of this nature call for text-generation or text-manipulation-type exercises. As the passive is used more often in written than in spoken English, teachers might give their students a text-completion exercise in which the first few lines of the text are provided. For example, from the first few lines in the following text, it should be clear to the students that the theme of discourse is on the "issues," not the agents (i.e., participants), at the town meeting.

> Town meetings were held throughout New England yesterday. Many issues were discussed, although the big one for most citizens was the issue of growth. Many changes have been made recently. For example, . . .

Students then are asked to complete the text using the appropriate voice. As not all the sentences should be in the passive voice, students will be making choices, in keeping with a characteristic of practice activities designed to work on the use

dimension. The teacher will give feedback to the students on the appropriateness of their choices.

Before leaving our discussion of the passive voice, it would be useful to illustrate why we feel that identifying the challenging dimension is a worthwhile step to take before teaching any grammar structure. When we are clear where the challenge lies, the challenge can shape our lessons. For instance, as we stated earlier, it has been our experience that the greatest long-term challenge for students working on the passive voice is for them to figure out when to use the passive. Keeping this in mind will help us avoid a common practice of ESL/EFL teachers, which is to introduce the passive as a transformed version of the active (e.g., "Switch the subject with the direct object . . ."). Presenting the passive in this way is misleading because it gives the impression that the passive is simply a variant of the active. Moreover, it suggests that most passive sentences contain agents. What we know in fact to be the case is that one voice is not a variant of the other, but rather the two are in complementary distribution, with their foci completely different. We also know that relatively few passive sentences contain explicit agents. Thus, from the first, the passive should be taught as a distinct structure which occurs in a different context from the active. (See Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999, for several examples of how to do this.)

It should be noted that the pie chart, the observations about learning, and the characteristics of practice activities enumerated here may not significantly alter the way grammar is taught today. Indeed, many of the activities recommended here are currently being used. What these tools do offer, how-ever, is a principled means for dealing with grammar. They should help teachers to make clear decisions they teach grammar. They should help teachers to design effective activities or to choose from among those in a textbook without assuming that just because a textbook activity deals with the target structure, it necessarily addresses the particular learning challenge that their students are experiencing.

This brings us to the close of our discussion on how to design practice activities for grammar points.

Providing Feedback

Providing learners with feedback, negative evidence which they can use to correct their misapprehensions about some aspect of the target language, is an essential function of language teaching. Even such indirect feedback as asking a learner for clarification of something he or she has said may be helpful (Schachter 1986). It has always been a controversial function, however (Larsen-Freeman 1991). There are, for instance, those who would proscribe it, believing that a teacher's intervention will inhibit students from freely expressing themselves or that there is little evidence demonstrating that learners make use of the feedback they have been given—there is little immediate "uptake" of the correct form. While there are clearly times that such intervention can be intrusive and therefore unwarranted (e.g., in the middle of a small-group communicative activity), at other times focused feedback is highly desirable. Further, immediate uptake cannot be the sole criterion of its usefulness. Negative evidence gives students the feedback they need to reject or modify their hypotheses about how the target language is formed or functions. Students understand this, which explains why they often deliberately seek feedback.

The same pie chart that we used when identifying the learning challenge and creating practice activities can also be a useful aid in diagnosing errors. When an error is committed by a student, a teacher can mentally hold it up to the pie chart to determine if it is an error in form, meaning, or use. Of course, sometimes the cause of an error is ambiguous. Still, the pie chart does provide a frame of reference, and if the diagnosis is accurate, the remedy may be more effective. More than once we have observed a teacher give an explanation of linguistic form to a student, when consulting the pie chart would have suggested that the student's confusion lay with the area of use instead.

As for how the feedback is to be provided, we have already mentioned several useful options—recasting, for instance. Getting students to self-correct is another (see Lyster and Ranta 1997). Giving students an explicit rule is a third. Some teachers like to collect their students' errors,

identify the prototypical ones, and then deal with them collectively in class in an anonymous fashion. Which of these options is exercised will depend on the teacher's style, the proficiency of the students, the nature of the error, and in which part of the lesson the error has been committed.

None of these have to be used exclusively, of course. For instance, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) offer a graduated 12-point scale ranging from implicit to explicit strategies, beginning with student identification of errors in their own writing, moving to where the teacher isolates the error area and inquires if there is anything wrong in a particular sentence, to where the teacher provides examples of the correct pattern when other forms of help fail to lead to a self-correction on the part of the student.

RELATED PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES

Sequencing

Earlier we noted that grammar structures are not acquired one at a time through a process of "agglutination" (Rutherford 1987). Rather, different aspects of form, meaning, and use of a given structure may be acquired at different stages of L2 development. This observation confirms the need for recycling—i.e., working on one dimension of a form and then returning to the form from time to time as the need arises. To some extent this will occur naturally, as the same structures are likely to be encountered in different communicative tasks and content areas. However, it is also the case that not all linguistic structures that students need to learn will be available in the language that occurs in the classroom.

Therefore, it will be necessary for the teacher to "fill in the gaps," i.e., to introduce structures that don't naturally arise in classroom discourse (Spada and Lightbown 1993). For this reason, teachers might think in terms of a *grammar checklist,* rather than a grammatical sequence. By this, I mean that it would be a teacher's responsibility to see that students learn certain grammatical items by the end of a given course or

period of time, but not by following a prescribed sequence. Many structures would arise naturally in the course of working on tasks and content and would be dealt with then. Other structures might be introduced as the teacher determined that the students were ready to learn them. Rather than adhering to a linear progression, the choice of sequence would be left up to the teacher and would depend on the teacher's assessment of the students' developmental readiness to learn.

Many teachers, of course, have little control over the content or sequence of what they work on. They must adhere to prescribed syllabi or textbooks, although even in such a situation, it may be possible for teachers not to follow a sequence rigidly. But for those teachers who have more flexibility, research on acquisition orders is germane. Some SLA research has shown that learners progress through a series of predictable stages in their acquisition of particular linguistic forms. One explanation for the order rests on the complexity of the speech-processing strategies required. Thus, all structures processable by a particular strategy or cluster of strategies should be acquired at roughly the same developmental stage. This approach has been shown to account for certain acquisition orders in ESL (Pienemann and Johnston 1987).

Despite these findings and their potential implications for grammatical structure sequencing, there has been no definitive acquisition order established, and thus teachers are still left to their own resources for judgments on how to proceed. We should also note that even if an acquisition order were to be fully specified for English, there might be justification for preempting the acquisition order when students' communicative needs were not being met and when, therefore, certain structures would need to be taught, at least formulaically. Furthermore, Lightbown (1998) has suggested that even if students are asked to work on structures before they are ready to acquire them, such effort may not be in vain because such instruction might prime subsequent noticing on the part of the students, thereby accelerating acquisition when they are indeed ready.

Inductive Versus Deductive Presentation

An additional choice teachers face is whether to work inductively or deductively. An inductive activity is one in which students infer the rule or generalization from a set of examples. In a deductive activity, on the other hand, the students are given the rule and they apply it to examples. For instance, when practicing an inductive approach to the mass/count noun distinction in English, students could be presented with a language sample, such as a grocery advertising circular. They then would be encouraged to make their own observations about the form of mass and count nouns. The teacher might listen to their observations and then might summarize by generalizing about the two categories of nouns. If practicing a deductive approach, the teacher would present the generalization and then ask students to apply it to the language sample.

As we see, if a teacher has chosen an inductive approach in a given lesson, a further option exists—whether or not to give or have students articulate an explicit rule. Earlier, we stated that equating the teaching of grammar with the provision of explicit rules was an unduly limited view of what it means to teach grammar. We said this because what we are trying to bring about in the learner is linguistic behavior that conforms to the rules, not knowledge of the rules themselves. Having said this, we see no reason to avoid giving explicit rules as a means to this end, except perhaps if one is working with young children. Usually students request rules and report that they find them helpful. Moreover, stating a rule explicitly can often bring about linguistic insights in a more efficacious manner, as long as the rule is not oversimplified or so metalinguistically obtuse that students must struggle harder to understand the rule than to apply it implicitly (Robinson 1996).

Returning now to the inductive versus deductive question, we again find that the choice is not one resolvable with an either/or approach. There are many times when an inductive approach such as using a consciousness-raising task is desirable because by using such an approach one is nurturing within the students a way of thinking, through which they can arrive at their own generalizations. In addition, an inductive approach allows teachers to assess what the students already know about a particular structure and to make any necessary adjustments in their lesson plan. Clearly, a teacher's anticipation of where the challenge lies is not always borne out when he or she assesses students' actual behavior.

Other times, when students have a particular cognitive style that is not well suited for language analysis or when a particular linguistic rule is rather convoluted, it may make more sense to present a grammar structure deductively. Indeed, Corder's sensible observations offer comfort:

> What little we know about . . . second language learning . . . suggests that a combination of induction and deduction produces the best result. . . . The old controversy about whether one should provide the rule first and then the examples, or vice versa, is now seen to be merely a matter of tactics to which no categorical answer can be given (Corder 1973 in Rutherford and Sharwood Smith 1988, p. 133).

Patterns and Reasons, Not Rules

Before concluding, we should make two final observations about grammar teaching. With the increased access to large corpora of language data that computers afford, it has become clear that grammatical structures and lexical items occur in a large number of regularly occurring patterns (Sinclair and Fox 1990; Biber, Conrad, and Reppen 1998). Not all lexical items can be freely substituted into a particular pattern. Once one lexical item is selected, the likelihood of a particular item or phrase following is increased. For example, if the verb *insist* is chosen, either *on* or *that* is very likely to follow. An implication of corpus-based research is that teachers of grammar should pay more attention to conventionalized lexicogrammatical units, and not simply focus on teaching grammatical rules (Pawley and Syder 1983; Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992;

Lewis 1997). Indeed, connectionist modeling has demonstrated that morphology (Ellis and Schmidt 1997) and syntax (MacWhinney 1997) acquisition may be accounted for by simple associative learning principles (N. Ellis 1998), rather than as a product of rule application.

Another challenge to equating the teaching of rules with the teaching of grammar comes from Larsen-Freeman's (2000a) suggestion that teachers concentrate on teaching "reasons, not rules." Larsen-Freeman points out that although rules don't allow for change, language is changing all the time. A consequence is that most rules have "exceptions." Furthermore, many rules appear arbitrary because they are form based, ignoring the meaning and use dimensions. For instance, rather than telling students they must use an indefinite noun phrase after the verb in a sentence beginning with existential *there,*

There is a snowstorm coming.

help them understand the reason: *there* introduces new information in the noun following the verb, and in English, new information is marked with indefinite determiners. This reason is broad based and explains a number of English word-order phenomena. While rules provide some security for learners, reasons give them a deeper understanding of the logic of English and help them make it their own. Besides, reasons are meaning based and use based and are in keeping with the more robust view of grammar we have been promoting in this chapter.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Finally, the form, meaning, and framework can be used by teachers to assess where there are gaps in their own knowledge of English grammar. When they can't fill in all the wedges in the pie chart for a given structure, they can consult reference grammars. Of course, there are many gaps in what is known about the three dimensions. In particular, there is much to learn about the pragmatic conditions governing the use of particular structures. For this reason, the pie chart can also be used to generate items for a research agenda. By exploring the three dimen-

sions of grammar and how to teach them, teachers will continue to develop their professional knowledge base, which will, in turn, benefit their students as they strive to enhance their grammatical proficiency.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think of all the language teaching approaches with which you are familiar. Can you categorize them according to whether they favor language form or language use?
2. In explaining the pragmatics of phrasal verbs, the principle of dominance was invoked. Explain why the principle of dominance falls in the pragmatic dimension.
3. The effect of the native language on second language learning has traditionally been seen to be one of *interference.* How does observation 3 on the learning process (pp. 255–256) differ in its perception of L1 influence?
4. Why was it stressed that the repetition in a practice activity for working on form should be meaningful?
5. Why is it important to identify the challenge in a particular grammar structure for a particular group of students, even if the aspect of structure you are planning to teach lies in a different wedge of the pie from where the challenge lies?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Think of a language teaching approach which tends to favor language use over language form. How could the approach incorporate more language form? Now think of an approach that favors language form over language use. How could a focus on language use be integrated?
2. Analyze restrictive relative clauses in terms of the three dimensions of the pie chart. What has been the most challenging dimension for the students with whom you have worked?
3. Design practice activities for dealing with the pragmatics of the following:

a. falling versus rising intonation in tag questions

b. indirect object alternation

c. presence or absence of existential *there*
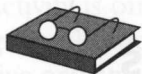
FURTHER READING

Bygate, M., A. Tonkyn, and E. Williams, eds. 1994. *Grammar and the Language Teacher.* Hemel Hempstead. UK: Prentice Hall International.

Offers ways that grammar in language teaching can be reaffirmed and maintained in order to avoid the pendulum swing.

Celce-Murcia, M., and S. Hilles. 1988. *Techniques and Resources in Teaching Grammar.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Discusses issues germane to teaching grammar and provides abundant examples of techniques and materials applied to teaching English structures.

Celce-Murcia, M., and D. Larsen-Freeman. 1999. *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course.* 2d ed. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

Seeks to guide teachers to an understanding of the grammar of those structures they will have to teach (their form, meaning, and use in context) and offers relevant teaching suggestions for those same structures.

Doughty, C., and J. Williams, eds. 1998. *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Provides an overview of second language acquisition research that has investigated "focus on form."

Larsen-Freeman, D. 2001. *Teaching Language: From Grammar to Grammaring.* Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

Argues for a reconceptualization of grammar and the way it is taught, featuring grammar as a complex, nonlinear, dynamic system.

Rutherford, W. 1987. *Second Language Grammar: Learning and Teaching.* London: Longman.

Treats grammar in an interesting and provocative way that challenges the view that learning grammar is an "accumulation of entities."

Ur, P. 1988. *Grammar Practice Activities: A Practical Guide for Teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Discusses pedagogical issues followed by a number of grammar teaching activities grouped according to the grammar structure for which they work best.

ENDNOTES

1 Some time after I had begun view grammar in this way, the work of Charles Morris (1939) was brought to my attention. Although he uses the terms in a somewhat different manner, Morris applies the ternary scheme of syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics in portraying the field of semiotics or the study of signs. The ternary scheme we are adopting here may also sound reminiscent of Kenneth Pike's "particle, wave and field" (1959). Although there is some overlap, there is no isomorphism between the models.

2 For example, the model of language that descriptive linguists prefer is one in which various areas of language are depicted as strata in a linguistic hierarchy, beginning with the sounds of language as the lowest level from which all else is composed and following in turn with morphemes, lexicon, syntax, and discourse.

3 We include lexis here, acknowledging that grammar and lexis are just two poles on a continuum and that there are many patterned multiword phrases that are basic intermediate units between lexis and grammar. Following Halliday (1994), then, it is probably more accurate to think in terms of "lexicogrammar."

4 For more exceptions to this rule, consult Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, pp. 314–316).

5 For this reason, Rutherford has suggested that an optimal approach to dealing with the nonlinearity of grammatical acquisition might be one where teachers help students achieve an understanding of general principles of grammar, e.g., how to modify basic word order, rather than concentrating on teaching structure-specific rules.

6 Such a restriction might seem uncharacteristically autocratic in today's climate, where one of the features of the Communicative Approach is that students be given a choice of how they wish to express themselves. It is our contention, however, that students have a true choice only if they have a variety of linguistic forms at their disposal which they can produce accurately. Without being restricted to using a particular target form during a form-focused activity, students will often avoid producing the structure and, hence, never have an opportunity to truly learn it.

7 An OS relative clause is one in which the subject of the embedded sentence is replaced by a relative pronoun because the subject is identical to an object or objectlike noun in the predicate of the preceding main clause. (For example: I like the book that he wrote.)