

Communicative Grammar: An Effective Tool to Teach a Second Language in Today's Classes

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Abstract

This paper looks briefly at the advantages of implementing the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the traditional grammar lessons, and the way it makes the students learn a second language in an interactive and creative classroom environment. Also, it discusses current teaching strategies and the methodological transformation of grammar in the language courses. Data was collected through a mixed investigation, which includes information extracted from a student's survey and some other digital resources, and that was synthesized and analyzed by the researchers with the main objective of, with the results, helping English teachers at Universidad Nacional to improve their grammar lessons through the use of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach.

Key words: Communicative Language Teaching, Traditional Grammar Method, Grammatical Competence, Communicative Competence, Deductive Approach, Teachers' methodological transformation

Resumen

Este documento examina brevemente las ventajas de la aplicación de la Enseñanza Comunicativa de la Lengua (ECL) en las clases de gramática tradicional, y la forma en que esta metodología hace que los estudiantes aprendan un segundo idioma en un ambiente de aula interactivo y creativo. Además, se discuten las estrategias actuales de enseñanza y la transformación metodológica de la gramática en los cursos de idiomas. Los datos se recolectaron a partir de una investigación mixta, que incluye información extraída de una encuesta a estudiantes y algunos otros

recursos digitales, y que fueron sintetizados y analizados por las investigadoras con el objetivo principal de que con los resultados obtenidos se ayude a los profesores y las profesoras de inglés de la Universidad Nacional a mejorar sus lecciones de gramática con el uso de la ECL.

Palabras claves: Enseñanza comunicativa de la lengua, método tradicional de enseñanza de la gramática, competencia gramatical, competencia comunicativa, enfoque deductivo, transformación metodológica del profesor de lengua

Introduction

Professors' understanding of the adequate teaching of grammar in the classroom can vary according to the language teacher's perspective and methodology. Each instructor looks for the best teaching strategy to force their students to learn the grammar structures in a clear and precise way. Through their search, they can implement several strategies; nevertheless, some of them are not effective enough to make students learn this skill. For this reason, this paper explains the advantages of implementing the Communicative Approach in the traditional teaching of English grammar. This suggestion is not new or a trend; it has been used by many language teachers and professors who believe that this method provides students with the necessary skills to learn the language effectively.

However, the term communicative has been misunderstood since many instructors believe that students should simply articulate the language without following any rule or sentence pattern. But, as Richards (2006) stated, "CLT can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom". (p. 2). But language teachers' ideas about the concept can vary and they might visualize their methodology in terms of making grammar classes more interactive and productive.

On the other hand, the main goal of CLT is the teaching of communicative competence, which refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences (e.g. parts of speech, tenses, a teaching methodology which deals with certain aspects of language knowledge such as: knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions, how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants, e.g. knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use languages appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication, how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g. narratives, reports, interviews, conversations), and how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g. through using different kinds of communication strategies).

Taking all these aspects into account, professors can analyze and choose the best teaching activities or tasks to develop students' learning skills. This way, their input will make learners view the second language (L2) as a practical and useful tool to communicate, interact, discover and create their own ideas and goals. Based on the idea of making class activities more talkative, communicative language teaching plays a main role today in the English professors' course syllabus and lesson planning.

Communicative language teaching: a tool to teach grammar

For years, many English language teachers have taught grammar classes following just prefabricated structures as groups of sentence patterns without any possible flexibility or transformation. But, since the 1990s the Communicative approach has been widely implemented in these classes because "it describes a set of general principles grounded in the notion of communicative competence as the goal of second and foreign language teaching. A new approach that has evolved as our understanding of the processes of second language learning has developed" (Richards, 2006: 23).

Consequently, a set of principles based on communicative language teaching can be applied according to the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, and their learning goals. This way, English language teachers can adapt their teaching strategies to the subject matter and create and apply activities each lesson. This will awaken students' intuition and creativity when using the language.

Through this application of principles, some core assumptions of the current communicative language teaching cited by Richards (2006) will be assumed:

- Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
- Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful intrapersonal exchange.
- Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
- Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as those involving language analysis and reflection (p. 23).

These assumptions help language teachers analyze the approaches used while teaching grammar and make students internalize and use it in a natural and spontaneous way. Here, it is also relevant to mention two approaches that can bring a light to language teaching using communicative activities: the inductive approach and the deductive approach. The inductive approach provides students

with some examples from which a rule is inferred, and the deductive approach with the presentation of rules and some examples in which the rule is applied.

At the same time, Thornbury (1999) mentioned some advantages and disadvantages of these approaches such as:

The inductive Approach's advantages:

- Rules learners discover for themselves are more likely to fit their existing mental structure than rules that have been presented to them. This in turn will make rules more meaningful, memorable and applicable.
- Students are more actively involved in the learning process, rather than being simply passive recipients: they are therefore likely to be more attentive and motivated.
- If the problem-solving is done collaboratively, and in the target language, learners get the opportunity for extra language practice (Thornbury, 1999: 59).

Some disadvantages are:

- The time and energy spent in working out rules may mislead students into believing that rules are the objective of language learning, rather than the means.
- The time taken to work out a rule may be at the expense of time spent in putting the rule to some sort of productive practice.
- Students may hypothesize the wrong rule (Thornbury, 1999: 59).

On the other hand, some advantages of the deductive approach are:

The deductive approach:

- It gets straight to the point and saves time. Many rules can be simply and quickly explained rather than elicited from examples.
- It respects the intelligence and maturity of many—especially adult—students, and acknowledges the role of a cognitive process of language acquisition.
- It allows the teacher to deal with language points as they come up, rather than having to anticipate them and prepare them in advance (Thornbury, 1999: 59).

Some disadvantages:

- Starting the lesson with a grammar presentation may be off-putting for some students, especially younger ones. They may not have sufficient metalanguage (language used to talk about language such as grammar) and may not be able to understand the concepts involved.

- Grammar explanation encourages a teacher-fronted, transmission-style classroom; teacher explanation is often at the expense of student involvement and interaction.
- Explanation is seldom as memorable as other forms of presentation, such as demonstration (Thornbury, 1999: 59).

Certainly, both approaches display advantages and disadvantages in their applicability in the teaching process; however, the deductive approach relates more strongly to the main objective of this research, for teaching grammar in a communicative manner helps students explore the given example and deduce why certain rules are applied to those specific examples. Through this process, learners may have the possibility to adapt those rules to some other examples, create some other rules and develop their own learning process (Thornbury, 1999).

As Borg, (1998: 17) said, the use of a particular teaching technique, approach, or methodology will be influenced by the language teacher's educational background, and by the formal training that this teacher had. Consequently, a teacher whose educational background was firmly influenced by the idea of making students enjoy thinking about grammar, and applying rules in a practical and updated way, will implement methodologies based on context-based activities, and will use this skill like a tool to allow language learners to learn, possess, and analyze the second language while they interact with native speakers and classmates. In this constant search to innovate and make classes dynamic and inspiring, two teaching strategies will be mentioned: the communicative strategy and the explicit strategy.

Teaching strategies: The Communicative strategy and the Explicit strategy

Two teaching strategies pointed out by Ulrich (1994: 4) are the Communicative strategy and the explicit strategy. The combination of these two strategies provides students with a clear and well-explained theoretical framework and a contextualized and natural environment to make them use the language in a native-like way. This way, language teachers must include communicative activities in their lesson plans such as oral presentations, individual or group projects, free written production, spontaneous speech, and the development of their own written and oral style. This can be done without violating the target language rules and students of a second language can implement all the theoretical aspects in their oral and written performance. In this way, learners will visualize grammar classes as an enjoyable experience that becomes the basis of a lifelong learning process.

Advantages and disadvantages of traditional grammar

Traditional grammar emphasizes learning technical vocabulary for nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives; learners are taught grammatical rules to master

sentence patterns. In this approach, a grammar rule is explicitly presented to students and followed by a practice exercise to apply the rule. So, the learners are in control during the practice and have less fear of drawing an incorrect conclusion related to how the target language is functioning.

On the other hand, Ellis (1995), Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) suggested that this type of language learning may not have major effects on sequences of acquisition, but it has facilitative effects on both the rate and the ultimate level of second language acquisition.

Similarly, other studies on the effectiveness of second language instruction (Norris & Ortega, 2000) concluded that this type of explicit instruction (presenting the structure, describing and exemplifying it, and giving rules for its use) results in important improvements in the learning of target structures. However, implicit instruction (usually consisting of communicative exposure to the target form) alone can delay students to achieve their learning goals.

According to Ulrich (1994), grammatical rules enable learners to know and apply how such sentence patterns should be put together, and the teaching of grammar should focus its attention on the way grammatical items or sentence patterns are correctly used. In other words, teaching grammar should encompass language structure or sentence patterns, meaning and use.

Indeed, in traditional language teaching, what students learn and how they learn are determined with reference to the classroom situation, rather than with reference to the learners' real communicative needs in real situations. As a result, learners often have difficulty using what they have learned, beyond the classroom. For this reason, Skehan (1996) advised that the traditional model is not supported by current research; he maintains that the belief on a precise focus of a particular form leads to learning, but it doesn't mean that to practice drills or diagram sentences has little relevance to use grammar effectively. Besides, this type of logical approach encourages the belief that learning a language is simply a case of knowing rules. However, the traditional methodology can be combined with a new communicative teaching methodology since the latter brings benefits to the students' learning process.

Advantages of implementing the communicative teaching methodology in the Grammar classes

Learning a language through a communicative method can provide the learner a better opportunity to communicate than a grammar-based approach. But, there are several aspects that make the Communicative Approach and the traditional grammar method useful tools for students to learn the second language. Some of which there are:

- Make real communication the focus of language learning.
- Provide opportunities to experiment and try what they know.

- Be tolerant of learners' errors as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence.
- Provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency.
- Link the different skills, such as speaking, reading and listening, together in the real world.
- Let students induce, or discover, grammar rules. (Richards, 2006: 13)

Applying these principles in the classroom will require language teachers to modify their teaching methodology. Consequently, activities that demand accurate repetition, memorization of phrases, sentence patterns and grammatical rules, drills, and multiple choices must be substituted for activities that require learners to organize their knowledge about language, to negotiate meaning, interact with their peers, plan activities that require logical thinking and defend their point of view.

Teachers' methodological transformation: an educational shift

Language teachers should visualize the shift towards CLT as an open door to implement new teaching strategies. This way, they will have the opportunity to develop their creativity and interest in topics to be developed in the class. Those activities will have grammar as their focal point. Jacobs and Farrel (2003) identify key components of this shift. They are:

- Focusing greater attention on the role of learners rather than the external stimuli learners are receiving from their environment. Thus, the center of center of attention shifts from the teacher to the student. This shift is generally known as the move from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered instruction.
- Focusing greater attention on the social nature of learning rather than on students as separate individuals.
- Focusing greater attention on diversity among learners and viewing these differences not as impediments to learning but as resources to be recognized, catered to and appreciated. This shift is known as the study of individual differences.
- Along with this emphasis on context comes the idea of connecting the school with the outside world as a means of promoting holistic learning.
- A whole-to-part orientation instead of a part-to-whole approach. This involves such approaches as beginning with meaningful, whole text, e.g. the choice of words and the text's organizational structure.
- An emphasis on the importance of meaning rather than drills and other forms of rote learning.
- A view of learning as a life-long process rather than something done to prepare students for an exam (p.1).

Through those principles, teachers implement strategies to develop oral and written activities to promote interaction among students, students' individual searches, personal and group challenges, diverse and innovative projects, and students' learning autonomy.

Certainly, Communicative Learning Teaching forces language teachers to integrate the curriculum. This way, grammar is not seen as a stand-alone subject but will be linked to other subjects in the curriculum. Language teachers can conclude that a close connection between all subjects in the curriculum will allow students to develop projects in language outside of regular classroom activities.

These changes in approach must not be based on just a single model of CLT. They can also be supplemented by the traditional grammar method (TGM). An adequate implementation of the TGM and the CLT can provide different responses to the questions teachers have about the effective and practical teaching of grammar. Based on the premise that both methodologies are equally effective when they are combined, some communicative teaching strategies will be mentioned.

Communicative teaching strategies: practical and enjoyable activities

To make grammar classes active, vivid and creative is a constant challenge for most grammar teachers. This is not an easy task since it requires language teachers to develop and implement catchy activities to provoke students' enthusiasm and interest. The traditional exercises such as fill-in-the-blanks, drills, multiple choice and rewriting sentences, among others, have not sufficed to fulfill the teacher's main objective, which is to enable students to learn grammar. Teachers feel they should push students to memorize structures that are not contextualized or used in everyday speech, and this is why students don't know how to use those structures in a flexible and practical way. However, there are some helpful and enjoyable activities proposed by various specialists that can make language teachers' classes more fun and task-oriented:

1. Choose a topic in which specific noun phrases must be used. Provide the list of noun phrases and verbal phrases you want the students to use. Using that information, students (individually or in groups) will write a story of three or four paragraphs. Here, they will focus on meaning and organization.
2. Have students write a questionnaire including open or closed questions as well as pictures or paragraphs. Once it is checked by the language teacher, students will look for three or four interviewees to answer the questions about different topics, the content in the paragraphs, or to describe the pictures. The main purpose of this activity is to monitor others' grammatical structures and be capable of identifying grammatical errors. Testing others' knowledge allows students to go through self-assessment process.

3. Students sit down in a circle. The language teacher asks the students for a catchy and challenging topic to talk about. When the topic is chosen, the teacher chooses a verb tense and begins the story by providing the thesis statement to be developed orally by the students. Then, the first student on his right side continues by adding two or three sentences. Each student adds something until finally the last participant gives the concluding sentence to end the story. The idea is to keep the same verb tense throughout the story and see how students insert new information and vocabulary, and use simple or complex verbal phrases. They become story-tellers.
4. Give students a history textbook, a paragraph, or a newspaper article in English. Ask students to identify the tense, key words, simple or complex sentences, and use of connectors. They must also analyze the discourse pattern that alternates between subjects or perspectives. This task will make students anticipate the forms and structures the text will have since it follows a predictable format. This will develop their predicting skills.
5. Teacher and students can ask and answer questions about any topic. Here, the teacher will implement communicative drills that will encourage students to connect form, meaning, and use several grammatical structures to enable the speaker's message to be understood by the listener. Students are not repeating the same idea or set content; they will develop the ability to use language to convey ideas and information and to encounter the grammar rule in a variety of contexts. This encourages speaker-listener communication.
6. The teacher matches grammatical patterns to particular communicative meanings, and the learners choose the right pattern to express ideas and feelings about a particular topic. This will help them to use grammar to express different communicative meanings, thus to see the connection between form and function.
7. The teacher encourages students to bring their own authentic data into the classroom, and assists them in seeing how grammatical forms operate in context by enabling speakers and writers to make communicative meanings through different tasks. Learners encounter target language items in the kinds of contexts where they naturally occur and experience language items in interactions with other closely related grammatical and discourse elements.
8. The teacher and students engage in a short discussion on ways of relating the content of a grammar structure to picture sequences of learners' own lives. Learners are encouraged to bring their background knowledge to the discussion. In doing so, the teacher focuses on the use of referential questions in order to review grammar forms with the students, while genuine communication, content-based topic nominations, student/student interactions and the negotiation of meaning by students and teacher are used.

Method

The purpose of the study is to help English professors at Universidad Nacional to improve their grammar lessons through the usage of communicative activities. For this reason, a student's survey- which includes 8 different parts and 22 different questions in order to know the English Teaching Bachelor's Degree and English for Other Majors' students' opinions in relation to their grammar classes, professors' teaching strategies, in-class activities and possible recommended communicative activities grammar teachers can implement in the classroom- was carried out. The information collected helped to mention some practical and useful communicative activities professors can put into action when teaching grammar.

Discussion

To gather the information on the students from the English Teaching Bachelor's Degree and English for Other Majors' students at the Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje at Universidad Nacional, the investigators used a questionnaire technique that allowed a detailed analysis of the various issues on the implementation of communicative teaching strategies in teaching grammar. The questions asked in this instrument were the same for all students, which were selected according to criteria established by the investigators and the general objective of this research.

Sixty nine questionnaires were handed in personally to each student who has already attended grammar courses in each level of their majors (See annex 1). The main purpose was to know about the students' perceptions about the professor's teaching strategies and language proficiency they have achieved after attending some grammar courses. Also, it was asked of the learners to offer some suggestions about possible activities their professors can develop to improve their understanding and use of the different sentence patterns, phrases and words in context. Once the information was collected, it was synthesized, and analyzed; based on the results some recommendation about possible teaching grammar strategies were included in this paper.

In regards to general information, parts 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, most of the students' age goes from 18 to 30 years old and they have been at the university for around 5 years. Some of them study the English Teaching Bachelor's Degree and some others are from Other Majors. All of them have studied English before coming to study at the UNA from one to twelve years.

In part 6, they are asked to indicate their level of English; most of them considered themselves intermediate students. In part 7, question a (How does the English teacher commonly start the grammar lesson?), they replied that the English professor used the grammar book to explain the grammar topic; consequently, most of the exercises tend to consist on filling in the blanks or choosing the best alternative, and to check the homework. They don't really

contextualize grammar or are forced to create their own structures. In question b (Could you mention some of the methods your English teacher uses in the grammar classes?), they said that teachers use textbooks, drills, writing tasks, exercises from the books, filling in the blank exercises, explanations of structures with real examples, some practices given in handouts and booklets, explanations using the whiteboard, memory activities, and multiple choices. All those strategies are clear examples of the traditional methodology. However, a few students mentioned that some professors use more communicative strategies such as making sentences, writing short paragraphs or inventing role plays. Definitely, those activities inhibit learners from using grammar to create their own sentences according to the context.

In question c (Does the English teacher include communicative activities during the Grammar lessons? Which ones?) they indicate that some of the communicative activities they practice in class are to give the responses of each exercise orally, to go to the board to check the exercises, to describe adjectives, and use tenses, to give examples of the target topic, and to do some exercises in groups. Also, some of them tend to use grammar in context through activities such as role plays, debates, oral presentations, dialogues, and video makers. However, communicative activities are not considered in the teaching plan, making students attend tiring and boring classes.

In question d (Does the professor use any type of oral or written practice after she has explained the grammatical structures?), they indicated that their professors' usual methodology is to make them practice the subject matter through written exercises given in handouts or books; they are commonly checked orally or in the blackboard. A few professors plan oral activities to make students apply grammar in daily conversations. Grammar is not contextualized in communicative activities; classes are taught through written production in the majority of the cases. It simply makes students imitate structures that are not taught to be used in real settings.

In question e (Do you consider that your professor adapts his teaching strategies to the grammatical structure you are studying? Does he/she plan and implement activities according to this specific structure? How?), they answered that the activities developed during the class were the ones from the book; they consisted of written exercises, filling in the blanks, memorizing structures to write down sentences. A few professors really plan and implement activities that require students to use their knowledge in grammar and create sentences that can be inserted in a conversation, role play or monologue.

In question f (which of the classroom activities used by the teacher of English facilitates your learning?), they replied that they practice the theory through activities such as providing examples on the board, doing fill in the blanks exercises, combining two sentences into one, planning communicative and visual activities (dynamic ones), doing a research project , going to the lab to listen to dialogues and readings, producing videos or multimedia activities, creating sentences with new knowledge, interacting with their partners, using grammatical structures, and getting listening comprehension exercises in the lab. They just

learn the rules without knowing how to use them in formal or informal contexts, so this methodology does not trigger their personal usage of the structures to make their language clear and precise.

In question g (After a syntactic structure has been explained, are you exposed to some oral and written practice to contextualize the structure?), they wrote that most of the practice was based on written production; it was focused on written exercises that did not make them see the grammar beyond simple words or sentences.

In part 8, "The learning of Grammar rules and their usage," question a (Does the English language represent a practical and useful tool to communicate, interact, discover or create your own ideas and goals for you?) and b (Is the learning of Grammar rules meaningful, memorable and applicable for you? Why? Why not?), they mentioned that the English language allows them to communicate their ideas using structures they have studied in class, opens the door to job opportunities, gives them the chance to speak and interact with native speakers, provides the opportunity to be part of a globalized world that shows new customs, food and beliefs and gives them the chance to use the different grammatical structures in several contexts. Also, they see grammar rules as essential tools to produce and implement the language in a communicative way through simple and complex structures, since they think that through it, their level of proficiency improves and makes them more effective in the classroom and work places. Finally, they see the learning of the grammatical structures as a vehicle to transmit the knowledge they have learned to their future students.

In question c (How do you measure your ability to apply the grammar rules in sentences or paragraphs?), they consider their level of proficiency is very good; and it reflects a perception of the necessity to handle the grammar rules in their daily conversations and academic activities.

In question d (After the teacher's explanation of any of the grammar rules in English, were you able to use, transform or adapt this structure to your real-life context? Why? Or Why not?), they stated they use the grammar input to talk to other people, adapt and apply them correctly in context, and use those rules in oral courses; however, sometimes they don't remember how to use them. Some of them mentioned that once they have internalized the grammar rules, they are able to transform, understand and apply them in real life contexts. However, some of them require practicing more at home since classes are not enough to use the rules and learn how to contextualize them.

In question e (When you write paragraphs, essays or a dialogue, are you able to use the grammar structures learned in your English classes? Why? Why not?), most of them agreed that writing allows them to be more careful when using the grammatical rules than producing spontaneous speech. Students have more time and opportunity to monitor themselves in their written production; also they can go to the theory if they don't remember or understand a structure. Finally, they are very conscious and careful when writing their own ideas in the target language.

In question f (During the Grammar lessons, are you engaged in interactive and meaningful communication? How?), the students declared that oral or communicative activities are not the norm in daily grammar classes since most of the contents and activities are given in a written way. Consequently, students spend most of their time doing exercises that only require filling in the blanks or writing down some sentences.

In question g (During the Grammar lessons, are you able to negotiate meaning, expand your knowledge of the language or take part in meaningful intrapersonal exchanges? How?), most of them see the learning of rules and complex structures as a tool to know how to communicate in different contexts and how to address native speakers and classmates. Also, they have learned that grammar is not so rigid; it can change depending on the intention, speaker and style. Also, it allowed them to interact through dialogues with their partners, negotiate meaning and apply the rules in a formal or informal setting.

In question h (During the grammar lessons, do you have the possibility to adapt the grammar rules to some other examples, create some other rules and develop your own learning process? How?), they mentioned that they learned the rules to be used in the written exercises given in the book. Also, some feel incapable of making those rules flexible according to the situation, listener or register. However, some of them said that the use of the rules allowed them to write paragraphs, sentences, short essays, dialogues, and work on a research paper. Finally, a few professors encourage students to create their own examples or transform those examples into other grammatical structures.

In question i (Do you consider that grammar rules learned during the English classes help you interact with native speakers and classmates? How?), they stated that basic rules and norms are mandatory to achieve an effective communication with native speakers, classmates and professors. They can make themselves clear when speaking if the rules and different structures are respected and used correctly. Also, the knowledge of basic and advanced grammar rules give them the tools to develop confidence to talk with others.

In question j (Could you give some recommendations in order to improve the teaching of grammar in the English lessons?), some of the recommendations given by the students were to plan more communicative and interactive oral activities such as role plays, oral presentations, impromptu speeches, dialogues, and group or pair conversations. This way, students will get a space for communication and provide examples in real life context. Now, professors should change their traditional methodology, evaluation and objectives to more dynamic activities; they should keep a balance between oral and written activities since grammar classes are boring due to the excess of written exercises. Certainly, this field work provides a clear and real situation of language teachers' traditional methodology when teaching grammar; however, this traditional methodology cannot be taken apart since it has advantages and disadvantages.

Conclusions

Teaching grammar requires more than making students memorize lists of words, noun phrases, verbal phrases, prepositions, articles and other grammatical structures. It urges the implementation of effective and useful teaching methodologies to guide, help, and induce students to visualize grammar as an efficient tool for transmitting their ideas in a clear and precise way. Grammar can be the vehicle to encourage a student's social integration into foreign cultures and peer interactions.

Consequently, language teachers must see grammar teaching strategies as a way to develop techniques to teach the grammar subjects by implementing communicative activities in the classroom. Teachers must understand that students learn in different ways and have different strengths and abilities. This way, they must adjust classroom activities to various student intelligences rather than force everyone into a single mould. This diversity in methodology and written and oral activities allows learners to develop their own learning strategies and self-confidence toward the second language.

Through the survey, students mentioned their disappointment in the methodology used by most of the professors. It consisted on written activities that did not allow them to see the grammatical rules and sentence structures as mere tools to write down sentences that will be inserted in conversations with their classmates, professors or native speakers. That is why the professors' duty is to combine traditional teaching of the theory and communicative activities to make grammar fun and catchy.

Another important factor in teaching grammar is Task-Based instruction (TBI). TBI requires language teachers to plan and implement tasks to engage students in interactive activities (Richards, 2006). These tasks should require learners to use existing language resources, focus on meaning and grammatical structures, and develop communicative strategies and interactional skills. As a result, learners will gain competence in the use, transmission and applicability of the language. It is mandatory to teach learners that rules and meaning are key elements in developing those tasks. The violation of those issues can affect communication in the target language negatively. This way, Communicative Language Teaching and Traditional Grammar Teaching can become perfect complements rather than separate issues.

Finally, language teachers must be viewed as facilitators who are in a constant search for alternative teaching strategies. They must be willing to modify, adjust or implement new methodology to make the teaching of grammar a challenging and rewarding experience for learners. Teachers must become co-learners who see their students' learning experiences as an opportunity to learn grammar from a different perspective.

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ANNEX

Universidad Nacional
Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje

Proposal for improving grammar classes and making them more communicative

Dear Student

With the main objective of improving the quality of professors' teaching strategies and methodologies in Grammar courses, we would like to ask for your help in order to complete the following questionnaire.

A. Personal Information

1. Gender
 - a) Feminine
 - b) Masculine
2. Age
 - a) 18-20
 - b) from 21-30
 - c) 30 and more
3. Years studying at UNA
 - a) 1-2 years
 - b) 3-5 years
 - c) More than 5 years
4. Major: _____
5. Have you studied English before coming to study at UNA? How many years? _____
6. How do you consider your level of English?
 - a) Beginner
 - b) Intermediate
 - c) Advanced
7. In relation to your English Grammar Lessons
 - a) How does the English teacher commonly start the Grammar lesson?
 - b) Could you mention some of the methods your English teacher uses in the Grammar classes?
 - c) Does the English teacher include communicative activities during the Grammar lessons? Which ones?
 - d) Does the professor use any type of oral or written practice after she has explained the Grammatical structures?
 - e) Do you consider that your professor adapts his teaching strategies to the grammatical structure you are studying? Does he/she plan and implement activities according to this specific structure? How?
 - f) Which of the classroom activities used by the teacher of English facilitates your learning?
 - g) After a syntactic structure has been explained, are you exposed to some oral and written practice to contextualize the structure?
8. In relation to the learning of Grammar rules and their usage
 - a) Does English language represent a practical and useful tool to communicate, interact, discover or create your own ideas and goal? Why?

- b) Is the learning of Grammar rules meaningful and applicable for you? Why? Why not?
- c) How do you measure your ability to apply the Grammar rules in sentences or paragraphs?
a) good b) very good c) Outstanding
- d) After the teacher's explanation of any of the English Grammar rules, were you able to use, transform or adapt this structure to your real-life context? Why? Or Why not?
- e) When you write paragraphs, essays or a dialogue, are you able to use the Grammar structures learned in your English classes? Why? Why not?
- f) During the Grammar lessons, are you engaged in interactive and meaningful communication? How?
- g) During the Grammar lessons, are you able to negotiate meaning, expand your knowledge of the language or take part in meaningful intra-personal exchanges? How?
- h) During the Grammar lessons, do you have the possibility to adapt the Grammar rules to some other examples, create some other rules and develop your own learning process? How?
- i) Do you consider that the Grammar rules learned during the English classes help you interact with native speakers and classmates? How?
- j) Could you give some recommendations in order to improve the teaching of Grammar in the English lessons?

Thanks for your help!

