THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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Abstract: This article investigates the role of communicative activities in teaching English grammar at the secondary and tertiary levels of education. Drawing on communicative language teaching (CLT) theory and empirical classroom research, the study examines how task-based, interactive, and meaning-focused activities contribute to grammar acquisition. Key issues addressed include the integration of form and meaning, the design of effective communicative tasks, and the balance between explicit instruction and communicative practice. The findings suggest that carefully structured communicative activities significantly enhance grammatical accuracy and communicative competence.

Keywords: communicative activities, English grammar teaching, communicative language teaching, task-based learning, form-focused instruction, EFL classroom, language acquisition.

The teaching of English grammar has long been a central concern in applied linguistics and foreign language pedagogy. Traditional approaches, which prioritized the explicit memorization of grammatical rules and paradigms, have increasingly given way to methods that situate grammar learning within authentic, meaning-driven communication. This shift reflects a broader theoretical reorientation toward communicative language teaching (CLT), which holds that language is best acquired through its purposeful use rather than through decontextualized drills. Communicative activities, ranging from role-plays and information-gap tasks to collaborative discussions and problem-solving exercises, place learners in situations where they must deploy grammatical knowledge to convey real meaning, thereby fostering both accuracy and fluency. Despite the widespread adoption of CLT principles in curriculum design worldwide, questions remain about the most effective ways to integrate grammar instruction into communicative practice. This article addresses those questions by examining the theoretical foundations of communicative grammar teaching, reviewing the methodological approaches employed in current research, and analyzing the findings that emerge from classroom-based studies.

This study employs a descriptive and analytical methodology, synthesizing theoretical literature and empirical research on communicative grammar instruction. Data were collected from peer-reviewed academic sources, including foundational works in communicative language teaching by scholars such as Dell Hymes, Henry Widdowson, and Michael Canale, as well as more

recent task-based learning research by Rod Ellis and Peter Skehan [Ellis, 2003; p. 4]. In addition, classroom observation reports and experimental studies conducted in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts across secondary and university settings were reviewed to identify patterns of pedagogical effectiveness. Particular attention was paid to studies that compared communicative activity-based instruction with traditional form-focused teaching, enabling a nuanced assessment of the relative merits of each approach.

The review of theoretical frameworks reveals that communicative competence, as conceptualized by Hymes and later refined by Canale and Swain, encompasses not only grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse coherence, and strategic competence [Canale & Swain, 1980; p. 29]. This broader conception of competence positions grammar not as an end in itself but as one component of the learner's capacity to communicate effectively. Task-based language teaching (TBLT), a prominent strand within CLT, operationalizes this view by organizing instruction around tasks—real-world activities that learners must accomplish through language use. Research by Ellis demonstrates that when learners engage in pre-task planning, they produce grammatically more complex and accurate language during task performance, suggesting that communicative activities can be scaffolded to promote formal precision [Ellis, 2005; p. 16].

Classroom studies further indicate that information-gap activities are particularly effective at generating target grammatical structures in a naturalistic context [“Communicative Grammar Tasks”]. For instance, a study involving Uzbek university EFL learners found that students who practiced the present perfect tense through structured information-gap tasks outperformed peers taught through traditional paradigm drills on both accuracy measures and spontaneous production tests. Similarly, role-play activities that require negotiation of meaning have been shown to prompt learners to notice and self-correct grammatical errors, a process Swain terms “pushed output” [Swain, 1995; p. 128]. This noticing function is significant because it bridges communicative fluency and conscious attention to form, addressing one of the central criticisms of pure CLT—namely, that it neglects systematic grammar development.

The findings reviewed here underscore a central pedagogical insight: effective grammar teaching in communicative contexts requires deliberate task design rather than incidental exposure alone. Communicative activities are most productive when they are structured to create communicative necessity for specific grammatical forms, when they include a pre-task phase that activates relevant schemata, and when post-task feedback draws learners' attention to formal accuracy without undermining communicative confidence. This position aligns with Long's interaction hypothesis, which argues that negotiation of meaning during communicative exchanges provides the interactional conditions necessary for acquisition [Long, 1996; p. 451].

At the same time, the evidence cautions against an uncritical abandonment of explicit instruction. Learners with limited grammatical knowledge may lack the formal resources needed to engage productively in communicative tasks, suggesting that a judicious combination of focus-on-form episodes and communicative practice yields superior outcomes. The ethical dimension of task design also merits attention: activities must be culturally sensitive and contextually meaningful to the learner population, particularly in settings such as Uzbekistan, where the communicative traditions and pragmatic norms of learners differ substantially from those embedded in Western-produced EFL materials. Adapting communicative tasks to reflect local cultural realities not only

increases learner engagement but also ensures that grammatical knowledge is developed alongside culturally appropriate communicative behavior.

Communicative activities occupy a vital place in contemporary English grammar pedagogy. When thoughtfully designed, such activities create the conditions under which learners simultaneously develop grammatical accuracy and the ability to deploy that accuracy in real communication. The theoretical frameworks reviewed here—CLT, TBLT, the interaction hypothesis, and the output hypothesis—converge in their support for meaning-driven practice as the primary vehicle of grammar acquisition. Practically, however, teachers must navigate the tension between communicative fluency and formal precision, ensuring that their learners receive sufficient explicit guidance while being afforded ample opportunities for authentic use. As the demand for English language proficiency continues to grow globally, the development of pedagogically sound, culturally responsive communicative grammar activities remains an urgent priority for language educators and curriculum designers alike.

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