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GRAMMATICAL CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING AND GRAMMAR TYPOLOGY

Introductory word

Given the recent return to fashion of teaching grammar as a part of the language teaching process, it is the main aim of this paper to discuss the issues provoked by the technique of grammatical consciousness-raising. In addition to this, it is thought necessary to give a brief outline of the main body of grammar classifications which have been postulated by various authors of linguistic literature. In order to establish the current position of grammatical C-R¹, the first part of this paper is devoted to an overview of the present day state of affairs concerning various approaches taken to grammar instruction, with a particular stress on the cognitive approach to grammatical instruction, known as grammatical consciousness-raising. In a similar vein to other theories or models, grammatical C-R has both its supporters and opponents, whose cyclical arguments are summarised in the ensuing pages. Likewise, the results of certain experiments which examine the role of comprehensible input in Second Language Acquisition (henceforth: *SLA*) will also be discussed. Moreover, we will elaborate on selected types of grammars and point out various parameters according to which they are worked out.

Grammar – the teaching implications

The questions associated with the teaching of grammar have always preoccupied the minds of students of language and – quite frequently – they have revolved around the main issue of whether to teach grammar or not, rather than

¹ C-R is the commonly accepted abbreviation used in the literature of the subject to stand for consciousness-raising.

how to successfully apply grammar in language teaching curricula. Strange as it may sound, it is an attestable fact that there exist sources (e.g. Kelly 1969) that imply that teaching grammar, with a prominent role almost synonymous to formal language instruction, dates back to 2,500 B.C. Naturally, in the history of *ESL*, the importance of grammar teaching has varied depending on the popularity of various methods, approaches and fashions. Thus, at the one end of the methodology spectrum, with absolutely no emphasis on formal and explicit² grammar teaching there is, for example, the Direct Method – and at the other end we find the Grammar-Translation Method, whose prerequisite is the concentration on form and explicit account of grammatical rules practised through the medium of translation.³

If it could be proven that explicit grammar teaching were either a definite help or, quite to the contrary, a hindrance in the teaching/learning process, then it would be possible to assert that the purpose of research conducted in this field was either to determine the most adequate conditions for teaching grammar, or to look for other means and methodologies to teach the foreign language irrespectively of grammar. Note that the issue valid for this work is that both knowledge and awareness of grammar in foreign language learning might prove to be the main determining factor in the success or failure of the enterprise, and – therefore – the present day state of affairs concerning various approaches to grammar instruction will be scrutinised here.

One such approach is the cognitive approach to grammatical instruction, known widely as grammatical consciousness-raising, discussed among others by Sharwood (1981) and Rutherford (1987). Within this approach questions concerning which aspects of grammar require grammatical instruction can be addressed. In turn, in the communicative approach, grammar is treated as something marginal, whereas grammatical consciousness-raising holds this as its central role; therefore enabling the learners to observe ungrammatical structures and providing them with their correct corresponding items. Additionally, unlike traditional grammar teaching, the approach discussed here focuses on selected features of grammar with an attempt to avoid either the application of the complicated meta-language or purely explicit rules. In a nutshell, the main objective here is the promotion of the techniques that facilitate making inferences about the rules and principles, by concentrating the learners' attention on the target structures.

² The distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge is associated with the work of Bialystok (1982) among others. The former being perceived as the unanalysed type of linguistic knowledge while the latter, on the contrary, the analysed grammatical and lexical items that can be joined to form new and original utterances. For more information and a comparison of conscious vs. unconscious knowledge or Krashen's notions on acquisition and learning see Ellis (1994).

³ For a detailed account of his method see, for example, Johnson and Johnson (1998).

Yip (1997:124) discusses the results of several experiments conducted by Schachter (1991) and White (1991), which seem to provide evidence for the claim that exposure to comprehensible input on its own is neither adequate nor sufficiently complete to ensure desirable progress in *SLA*. It is necessary – though hardly sufficient – in pursuing and achieving the learners' linguistic precision, which often happens to be an issue. And let us express our belief that in certain contexts, such accuracy is a crucial factor and greatly influences the situation in which one makes use of a foreign language. It is simply insufficient that our level of language competence is merely communicative, as the properties of our speech or – more generally – production reveal excessively discouraging truths about the producers' intellectual abilities. It follows that grammatical consciousness-raising is supposed to reduce or fill in this disparity. Unsurprisingly, the extent to which the awareness of grammar should be demonstrated or raised to learners needs to be determined on the grounds of the needs brought into the process of *SLA* by the learner (cf. Yip 1997).

As with most theories, approaches or models, grammatical *C-R* has both its supporters and opponents, the repetitive arguments of whom are summarised below, on the basis of Rutherford (1987:211–212). The first argument to be advanced is perhaps the easiest to anticipate, namely, that learners are incompetent to bring consciously learnt grammatical structures into real communication (in the process of learning) on account of the fact that communication consists of the application of a separate system of rules which is to be acquired unconsciously and by exposure to the target language that is somewhat above their level of proficiency (the process of acquisition). The differentiation between the terms *learning* and *acquisition*, however, is renowned for the inconsistent and not particularly sound support in theoretical treatises on the issue.

Another claim advanced against grammatical *C-R* employs the notion of the built-in grammatical syllabus which establishes the final order of the acquisition of structural elements, a process which in no way needs the assistance of formal instruction, and – moreover – regards formal instruction as a hindrance. Here, the counter argument takes its power from the fact that neither the acquisition order nor the implications that this order leads to the extension of more complex syntax, are a consequence of solid theoretical research.

An obvious voice from the opposition to grammatical *C-R* may have its roots in the common belief that, since so many researchers into the *SLA* still cannot disentangle the puzzle of how languages are learnt, it seems pointless to expose a learner to the teaching of grammatical rules. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that these rules are supposed to serve as aids to learning and not – by any means – as hindrances to learning (Corder 1973:331).

The last major criticism frequently raised in this context pertains to the assertion that both the grammatical *C-R* and the help it is supposed to provide is practically useless, particularly in mother tongue acquisition, which is achieved

by children in a very short time. This equation of adult and child learning fails to consider crucial discrepancies between the two; that is affective factors, different “feels” for grammar, etc.

In search of a suitable conclusion, it is worthwhile to refer to a most accurate remark found in Rutherford (1987), who explains the role of grammatical *C-R* in the light of a “coalition” of several fields of the study, that is what we consider to be central assumptions of intrinsic language organisation, what we perceive as a manner in which languages are learnt and – finally – what we regard as the most effective styles of teaching. So, respectively, one may speak of a linguistic question, a psychological and *SLA* question and – finally – an education question.

Typology of grammaticographic works

In the tradition of applied linguistics manifold classifications of grammars have been postulated as, for example, Crystal (1997); Lehmann and Maslova (2004); Odlin (1994); Dik (1978); Halliday (1976/1985); Leech (1983). All the taxonomies that have been advanced are based on a range of parameters. Generally speaking, in a similar fashion to the typology of lexicographic works of reference, quite by analogy, grammatical description is organized and determined on the basis of a number of factors, to name but a few: audience (e.g. teachers, linguists or the native users of a language), goals (learner-oriented or reference grammar), direction (e.g. onomasiological or semasiological), function (descriptive or prescriptive), etc.

One of the distinctions that is made is between a grammar restricted to one language and a comparative grammar which can further be divided – depending on the purpose and method of comparison – into general comparative grammar – that is a systematic study of grammatical phenomena in the languages of the world – and a historical-comparative grammar which, by comparing various languages, examines the development of the grammar of a prototype language into its daughter-languages. Moreover, there is a contrastive grammar whose priority is the comparison of the grammatical trends of two languages (Lehmann and Maslova 2004).

Apart from this, grammars may be written following one of the two dimensions within linguistic investigations, that is either the synchronic or diachronic dimension.⁴ Synchronic linguistics requires the theoretical study of language at a particular point of time with regard to its present shape and – at the

⁴ The pioneer of the diachronic and synchronic perspectives in linguistic studies was Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) whose conceptions of language were reflected – in a variety of terms including – in the coinage of the terms such as: *langue* and *parole*, *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic*, *signifiant* and *signifié* (Crystal 1997).

same time – taking no notice of the modifications and alterations that may be taking place. Note that most synchronic accounts that are carried out are of contemporary language states, however, their significance for the diachronic studies has been emphasised since Saussurean times. Contrary to the synchronic dimension, the studies of language from the diachronic perspective in linguistics concentrate on its historical development and are alternatively termed *historical linguistics* (see Crystal 1997). Thus, grammars following the diachronic perspective are historical grammars which typically characterize one stage of a language, and trace the features of that stage back to the relevant proto-language. Synchronic grammars, in contrast, may alternately be termed as reference or textbook grammars (Lehmann and Maslova 2004).

Descriptive vs. prescriptive grammar

Yet another type or orientation of a grammar stems from the answer to the question of whether a given grammar work is descriptive or prescriptive. Pei and Gaynor (1954:54) define the term *descriptive grammar* in the following manner:

The presentation of grammar in terms of actual usage on different levels, comparing the formal and informal, standard and non-standard, written and spoken, etc., in the light of linguistic science, while prescriptive grammar is the presentation of grammar as a set of rules which must be obeyed by those who wish to be considered as employing the “standard language”. Also called normative grammar.

And so, prescriptivists are interested in orienting the readers towards the more or less precisely defined standard of a language; that is the choices are to be made between acceptable and unacceptable grammatical forms. However, it needs to be stressed that such decisions are often arbitrary since the rules imposed by prescriptive grammar writers become invalid with changes taking place in a language over time. On the whole, prescriptivism seems to have received a good deal of criticism on grounds of showing biased and unprofessional views of language. In spite of this, it seems more than adequate to appreciate prescriptive bias for making possible the standardization of languages, which has contributed greatly to the facilitation of communication between highly diversified dialect regions, and the simplification of second language teaching and learning. Furthermore, to a certain degree, prescription constrains divergence, thus helping to make manners of speaking and writing equally intelligible when learners modify their language towards some standard or a narrower range of standards.

On the other hand, one may say that descriptive grammars present grammatical phenomena without any evaluative judgements on their standing in the society. However, they seem to occupy a regular place in the field of linguistics, the common practice of which is to explore a body of spoken or

written material and then to provide an in-depth description of the patterns it contains. Apart from morpho-syntactic accounts, descriptive grammarians often furnish us with phonetic, phonological, semantic and also lexical information. But even if they confine their descriptions to morphology and syntax they still reflect on those structures that are ignored or treated marginally by prescriptivists. The same tendency seems to apply to the focus placed on the research into non-standard dialects (Odlin 1994).

With reference to descriptive grammar, Odlin (1994) remarks that while this type of grammar explores and provides information about the structures of the language, it seems to undervalue the role of mind in grammatical patterning. Note that the relation between mind and language has been the area of keen interest for both linguists and psychologists. However, it is fairly obvious that the precise object of inquiry is different for both groups, and can be determined on the basis of the distinction between competence (knowledge of language) and performance (the use of language in particular situations) – the distinction originally drawn by N. Chomsky.⁵

On the whole, linguists tend to be concerned with the study of abstract knowledge that makes production and comprehension possible, while psychologists take their main interest in the mechanisms of speech production and comprehension. The varied nature of interaction between competence and performance has inspired a number of studies on functionalist grammar where many “design features” of a language are seen as reflections of performance factors. In functionalist terms, grammar – as the internalized system – comprises both competence and performance. Such a wide perception of grammar and mind has contributed greatly not only to psycholinguistics but also other linguistic disciplines, such as discourse analysis and historical linguistics and even though this interdisciplinary correlation might raise some scepticism, it seems to reflect the ideas promoted by Jespersen (1929), for whom the quintessence of language equals the effort of the producer (speaker) to make himself understood, and the recipient (hearer) to understand what the former meant to communicate. And these two should never be underestimated by anyone who attempts to understand the nature of language.

Formal vs. functional grammars

Dik (1978) singles out two alternative approaches to grammar in linguistic theory; that is the formal and functional paradigms. In general, as noted in

⁵ The dichotomy was originally postulated by Chomsky (1964) and further elaborated on in Chomsky (1965).

Tomlin (1997), the research into the functional approaches in linguistics can be grouped into three main categories:

- 1) Praguean functionalism⁶ which serves as the foundation of contemporary endeavours,
- 2) The Functional Grammar of Simon Dik,
- 3) The Systemic Grammar of Halliday.

The last enumerated, which could alternately be referred to as North American functionalism, is represented by the key figures of Chafe (1971, 1980), Givón (1979, 1983) and Slobin (1973).

Let us start with the formal paradigm in which Dik (1978) compares a language to the abstract object which is described by a grammar with respect to the formal rules of syntax that are used regardless of the possible meanings and uses of the structures described. By definition, a grammar serves as an instrument which relates sound and meaning in terms of an independent system of rules that can not be reduced to either sub-component independently of the other. Primarily, formal syntax is conceived of as an arbitrary system of rules which should be determined before any studies of meanings and uses these structures may have in actual performance can be carried out. It follows that syntax is given precedence over semantics, and semantics – in turn – takes priority over pragmatics. This formal model of the study of language reflects the central tenets of Chomskyan linguistics.

On the contrary, in the functional paradigm, language is considered in the first place as an instrument of social interaction between human beings and this tool is used with the main aim of establishing communicative relations between speakers and addressees. In this paradigm, the stress is laid on revealing the instrumentality of language with respect to what people do with it in social situations. Note that verbal interaction, for example social interaction by means of language, may be viewed as a form of structured co-operative activity, in the sense that it is controlled by social rules, norms or conventions and – taken together – they form the system underlying verbal interaction. The „implements” that may be defined as the linguistic expressions which manifest themselves in the form of utterances, used in this co-operative activity are also structured as they are governed by rules which together constitute the language system. Let us quote Dik (1978:2) at this point who says:

From the functional point of view, linguistics has to deal with two types of rule systems, both of them social in nature: the rules which govern verbal interaction as a form of co-operative activity (pragmatic rules); the rules which govern the structured

⁶ For more detailed elaboration on the functional sentence perspective, which preoccupies the central position in Prague School see, for example, Daneš (1974a, 1974b).

linguistic expressions used as instruments in this activity (semantic, syntactic, and phonological rules).

On the basis of this description of the functional paradigm for the study of language, a conclusion can be formulated that since semantic, syntactic and phonological rules serve as a means to achieve the communicative goals of verbal interaction, the prominent principle within the functional paradigm is to describe the language with special regard to the pragmatic needs of verbal interaction.

Halliday (1985) seems to perceive functional grammar in three distinct, though closely related senses; that is in how it interprets texts, systems, and the elements of linguistic structures. The author observes that the grammar is functional in the sense that it is designed to account for how the language is used. Obviously, every written or orally produced text is set in some context of use and – what is more – it is the uses of language that have shaped the language system over generations. Also, language has developed to meet human needs, and the way it is organised is functional in regard to these needs. Additionally, Halliday (1985) calls functional grammar a „natural” grammar since everything in it can be explained, ultimately, by reference to how language is used.

Likewise, the components of meaning in language are also functional in nature. To start with, there are two main meanings around which all languages are organised, that is the *ideational* or – in other words – reflective meaning, and the *interpersonal* or active meaning. These components of meaning, called *metafunctions*, are the manifestations of the two very general purposes which underlie all uses of language: 1) to understand the environment (ideational) and 2) to act on others in it (interpersonal). Finally, the last metafunctional component is the *textual* one that adds relevance to the other two. All in all, Halliday (1976:19) calls these functions *macro-functions* and defines them as *being the underlying demands which we make on language and which it must serve in order to fulfil the more specific social purposes*.

Halliday (1976) explains that for a child, the use of language to assert some content is a special case of language use and it is merely one among many functions. However, for adults, this function of language is involved in practically all uses of language in which we engage, so an ideational (as well as representational) element is almost always incorporated in adult speech. The exceptions to this rule are utterances like *How do you do?*, which represent an abstract function underlying almost every specific use of language and can be observed even in some of the functions, though not the earliest, of child language. Obviously, this fact emerges from a steady separation of „function” from „use” which marks the development of the adult system. In child language, however, it is one utterance (one function), whereas in the adult language it is every utterance (all functions). All utterances have an *ideational* component incorporated in them though they also have something else besides. As far as the *interpersonal* element

is concerned, it is represented in the clause by mood and modality. The speaker selects a particular role in the speech situation both for himself and for the hearer; he also chooses judgements and assessments of probability. The *interpersonal* function underlies the uses of language, such as to approve and disapprove, to express personal feelings, beliefs, opinions, to greet, chat up and many others, in the sense that they form an interrelated set of options or – to put it differently – a definable area of meaning potential. The last function – that is *textual* function – is actually a prerequisite to the effective work of the other two.

It follows that each element in a language is explained by reference to its function within the whole linguistic system. In this case a functional grammar renders all the units of a language, that is its clauses and phrases which are the main configurations of functions. In other words, each part of the system is interpreted as functional with respect to the whole.

It is frequently pointed out that the term *grammar* is often replaced by the term *syntax*, in formal linguistics (see, for example, Holiday 1985). Note that this usage comes from that philosophy of language which puts syntax in opposition to semantics. On the other hand, some linguists regard syntax as merely one part of grammar which consists of syntax and vocabulary components together with morphology in languages which have word paradigms. The term *syntax* suggests that a language is interpreted as a system of forms to which meanings are attached. The history of linguistics seems to have followed this direction, first the forms were examined (morphology), and then – in order to explain the forms of words – grammarians studied the forms of sentences (syntax). Consequently, once the forms had been established, their meanings were explored. However, the direction in the functional grammar is reversed. A language is seen as a system of meanings with attached forms through which these meanings can be realised and the question that functional grammar poses for itself is how these meanings are expressed.

In an attempt to summarise the major differences between the two paradigms, which formal and the functional grammar originated from, it is necessary to emphasise that, in the formal paradigm, language is defined as a set of sentences and its primary function is the expression of thoughts. Here, the psychological correlate of a language is competence defined as the capacity to produce, interpret and judge sentences. Within this paradigm the study of competence has logical and methodological priority over the study of performance. Moreover, the context and situation are irrelevant for the study, as the sentences must be described independently of the setting in which they are used. In language acquisition, the child constructs a grammar of the language by making use of his innate properties on the basis of a quite restricted and unstructured input of linguistic data. The universals of language are supposed to be regarded as innate properties of the human organism. As far as the relation between syntax, semantics and pragmatics is concerned, syntax is autonomous

with respect to semantics and both syntax and semantics are autonomous with respect to pragmatics. The most prominent role is held by syntax, and in the scale of importance it is followed by semantics and pragmatics.

Within the functional paradigm, language, whose primary function is communication, is perceived as an instrument of social interaction. The psychological correlate of a language is communicative competence, understood as the ability to carry on social interaction by means of language. Obviously from a very early stage, the study of a language system must take place within the framework of the system of language use and the setting carries a very important role here. This is mainly due to the fact that the description of the linguistic expressions must conform to the description of their functioning in given settings. Naturally, in the process of language acquisition, the child discovers the system underlying language and language use which are to be accompanied by an extensive and highly structured input of linguistic data presented in natural settings. All in all, there are three constraints which are to be respected in the explanation of language universals, namely:

- 1) the goals of communication,
- 2) the biological constitution of language users,
- 3) the settings in which the language is used.

It is a strong conviction of many students of language that pragmatics is the framework within which semantics and syntax must be studied. In turn, semantics is helpful for pragmatics as is syntax for semantics. However, the dominant belief is that the priorities go from pragmatics via semantics to syntax (see, for example, Dik 1978).

Pedagogical grammars

When we ponder over the rudiments of pedagogical grammar, we tend to think of the teachers of foreign languages, and what they do and need when they want to confirm whether the corrections⁷ they make while editing their students' written papers are suitable and, indeed, enhance the quality and accuracy of their written work. It stands to reason that what they need is access to a certain reliable source of information on how different grammatical properties should be employed in written discourse, and the source they will commonly turn to for assistance are pedagogical grammars.⁸

⁷ The meaning of the word *corrections* adequate in this context is grammatical correction.

⁸ Among multifarious titles of pedagogical grammars available on the market, we can find: *English Grammar in Use* (Murphy 1994), *Advanced English Practice* (Graver 1986), *Longman*

We are inclined to agree with Tomlin (1997) who claims that a pedagogical grammar is largely dependent on the relationship between language learning and the critical assumptions about the nature of language, which tend to alter depending on linguistic theory, as well as language teaching theory. And so, in communicative language teaching theory, for instance, language learning is done in the process of the creative construction of an interlanguage grammar – that is a hypothesis about the structures and functions of the target language components is considered in real discourse contexts. The progress in this process is smoothed due to the input that should be – first of all – comprehensible to the learner and sufficient both in terms of amount and diversity of discourse contexts. Last but not least, with the affective environment it should in no way hinder the willingness to take risks and readiness to inference.

Naturally, the fulfilment of these conditions is to be catered for in language teaching. Therefore, teachers are interested in providing their learners with a satisfactory amount of comprehensible input taken from an infinite variety of real, authentic discourse contexts. The principles underlying communicative language teaching show how grammatical competence is perceived in language learning and – as a result – it constrains the arrangement of pedagogical grammar. The essence of these tenets (after Littlewood 1984; Piepho 1983; Johnson 1982) may be summarised in the following manner: systematic attention is supposed to be given to both structural and functional aspects of language, language in the classroom practice is to be situational and contextualised, the teaching/learning process is carried out through content represented by real pictures, sketches and similar representations, and – finally – the main focus is on the transfer of information, thus the ability to comprehend and communicate messages.⁹

Conclusion

In the preceding sections an attempt has been made to compare some approaches to and types of grammars pointing to the major differences that can be observed. The issues related to the field of grammar, grammar instruction and grammaticography have long attracted the attention of linguists, possibly due to the fact that grammar books are one of the most efficient forms of language documentation, which also become the basis for teaching materials, and – in consequence – contribute to the better acquisition and comprehension of the intricacies and complexities of a particular language. Therefore, one should bear

English Grammar (Alexander 1989), *Practical English Usage* (Swan 1997), *A Practical English Grammar* (Thomson and Martinet 1989).

⁹ For a more comprehensive account of the issues related to pedagogical grammar see Dick-Bursztyn (2007).

in mind that the better we understand the factors that should be considered in the process of the compilation of a particular type of grammar book, the higher the chances that it will help develop the literacy of its users, who can be – for example – linguists, teachers, students, specialists etc.

As far as teaching grammar is concerned, one cannot but support the view presented in this paper that to make use of the full potential a particular language can offer to its user, it is highly unsatisfactory that one is merely communicative, as the properties of such speech or – more generally – production usually reveal too discouraging truths about the producers' intellectual abilities which, in turn, can be enhanced by raising the level of grammatical consciousness. Obviously, the level to which this should be implemented in the didactic process will always be determined by a close inspection of the context in which learning/teaching takes place.

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