Chapter 1
Do ‘They’ Have to Learn Grammar?

1. Grammar in a CLT Context
2. Implicit Reference to Form
3. Explicit Reference to Form
4. The Role of Grammar in Language Teaching
5. How to Teach Grammar
6. Relevance of Grammar

1. Grammar in a CLT Context

During the past century or so, the focus of classroom instruction and the practice of language teaching have shifted depending on prevailing, customary methodologies and theoretical foundations of language teaching and learning. This has provided us with both interesting and varied interpretations of how best to teach a foreign language. Over the past few decades there has been a change of focus from an emphasis on language forms to more functional language within a communicative context. Initially, as mentioned by Brown (2000), the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a significant loss of focus on the forms of language. This approach introduced ‘real-life’ communication, characterised by authentic materials, true-to-life simulation and meaningful tasks. Learners were given a clear reason for communicating in the form of role plays and simulations. Accuracy was seen as less important than fluency and successful communication. The Communicative approach highlighted the importance of functional language as opposed to focusing specifically on grammar and vocabulary as was done in the past.
This was in stark contrast to the earlier traditional methods such as the Grammar Translation Method with its focus on vocabulary and grammar. This method did very little to encourage a learner’s communicative ability in the foreign language and is synonymous with memorising and regurgitating countless and tedious lists of grammar rules and vocabulary. Brown (2001) explains that despite the obvious shortcomings, Grammar Translation still remains extremely popular even today and cites a few reasons for this apparent popularity. This method requires that teachers possess few specialised skills and grammar tests are easy to formulate and design and also easy to mark objectively. Another reason for its popularity is that many standardised tests of foreign languages do not test communicative abilities, so students have little motivation to go beyond the immediate needs of grammar rules and translations. Richards and Rodgers (1986) note that the Grammar Translation Method has no supporters and that it is not based in any theory nor is there any justification for it.

With the general acceptance of Communicative Language Teaching as the most recognised, contemporary approach to language teaching, the question of the place of grammar or what has been termed form-focused instruction seemed uncertain within the curriculum. Spada (1997: 73) defines form-focused instruction (FFI) rather simplistically yet relevant to our purposes as, ‘any pedagogical effort which is used to draw the learners’ attention to language form either implicitly or explicitly.’ Brown (2000) distinguishes between the two different approaches to form as implied in Spada’s definition. Firstly, there is the implicit reference to form which includes what Richard Schmidt (1990) refers to as noticing (where the learner pays attention to certain linguistic features in input) and consciousness raising (including forms into communicative tasks). Closely tied to implicit reference to form, noticing and consciousness raising is discovering language. Secondly, there is the explicit discussion of rules and curriculum based on sequenced grammatical categories. The current universally held view is that some form-focused instruction is indeed important within the communicative framework, including explicit reference to rules as well as noticing and consciousness raising. We will consider these approaches to form in further detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Brown (2001) states that grammatical competence is an important component of communicative competence. He goes on to describe organisational competence as a complex set of rules which govern both sentences (grammar) and how we link these sentences together (discourse). It is this organisational competence which is seen as necessary for communication and to ensure that the language used is not disorganised and muddled. Diane Larsen-Freeman (1991) points out that although grammar provides us with the form or structures of language, these are inconsequential or meaningless without, at the same time, considering semantics (meaning) and pragmatics (meaning assigned given the context). These three aspects are interconnected and each is dependent on the other. Seen in this light, it should become
Chapter 1: Do 'They' Have to Learn Grammar?

It is overwhelmingly clear that grammar is not irrelevant and that it is both important and needed within a CLT framework.

In exploring the question, ‘Do ‘they’ have to learn grammar?’ we will begin with a focus of attention on: the implicit reference to form and the explicit reference to form within the context of the communicative approach and the generally held belief that some form-focused instruction is indeed important within such a context. We follow with an examination of the role of grammar in language teaching and how to teach grammar. These subsequent issues are also important when considering the importance attached to the teaching of grammar and they cannot be divorced from any discussion of whether learners have to learn grammar.

2. Implicit Reference to Form

Earlier interpretations of CLT advocated an ‘indirect’ approach, which promoted incidental learning or an implicit reference to form. Harmer (2001) raises the issue of whether traditional language teaching techniques such as drills, repetition and controlled practice of language items benefit the language learner at all. Some linguists, as mentioned by David Nunan (2004), believed that an explicit focus on form and grammatical structures was unnecessary and second language acquisition would develop almost automatically if learners focused on meaning while completing tasks. Krashen (1982) divided language learning into ‘acquisition’, and ‘learning’ prompting the notion that ‘language learning would take care of itself. He claimed that language which is acquired subconsciously is instantly available when we require it and can be readily used in spontaneous conversation. This is in contrast to language (grammar and vocabulary) which is learned and which is not available for spontaneous use. Krashen further stated that successful second language acquisition depended on the language input received by learners and whether this language was understood and received in a relaxing and conducive learning environment. A further attack on what we will refer to as the traditional forms of language teaching was launched by Willis (1996: 48) who described as a misleading notion the idea that drilling or controlled practice of a particular item would lead to the acquisition of that item or the mastery of the grammar.

Krashen considered the explicit teaching of grammar as merely language appreciation. Krashen’s claims were questioned as it is not possible to ascertain whether a person’s language has been ‘learnt’ or ‘acquired.’ Furthermore, his suggestion that ‘learnt’ language could never be ‘acquired’ language was observably false as stated by Rod Ellis (1982) who maintained that communicative activities were the catalyst which transferred language from the ‘learnt’ to the ‘acquired.’ Skehan (1998: 12) responded by suggesting that Krashen’s views ‘have been influential within second language education and have had considerable impact on the nature of pedagogic provision. Not surprisingly, therefore, they have been subjected to searching criticism, and it would
now seem that the claims that were made cannot be substantiated.’ Although controlled practice may not lead to the mastery of grammar, as expounded by Willis (1996), Harmer (2001) however ascertains that it may encourage motor skills in oral production and may provide learner motivation. Harmer (2001) refers to the considerable ease with which children subconsciously acquire language as opposed to adults. Even though teachers avoid teaching grammar to children as experience shows that it has little effect, form-focused instruction for adults is seen as both useful and desirable.

A premise closely related to the idea of incidental learning or implicit reference to form is often referred to as consciousness raising. It would seem that the majority of researchers today are advocates of consciousness raising as a means of facilitating second language acquisition. Consciousness raising is based on the concept that if repetition and controlled practice do not work as well as they should then the teacher should attempt to make the learners ‘aware’ of the language instead of actually teaching it. It is this proposed awareness which is thought to aid acquisition of the language so that when learners need it, they can produce the language both accurately and fluently. Consciousness raising is aimed at teaching learners how to learn and take responsibility for their own learning. Various techniques are available for raising awareness; many of these focus on the relationship between form and function. Willis (1996) offers a list of consciousness raising techniques including cross language exploration and reference training amongst others which are beneficial to the learner. Consciousness raising adopts an organic view of teaching, thereby rejecting the linear view that suggests that once something has been taught it has been learned (Nunan 1991: 149). Furthermore, consciousness raising encourages learners to form their own hypotheses about the language, by linking and associating language that they have already acquired with the new.

The term ‘noticing’ as coined by Robert Schmidt (1990) refers to the idea that unless students notice new language and are hence able to process it, there is little likelihood of them learning the language. Batstone (1996) refers to noticing as the ‘intake of grammar as a result of learners paying conscious attention to the input.’ Van Patten (1996) notes that it is the kind of input received that would appear to be crucial to noticing. Schmidt adds that foreign language learners will notice new language constructs if they are regularly exposed to them or they are noticeable in some way. It is important to recognise that learners will need to have attained a certain level in order to notice various language constructs. Schmidt adds that some people will be able to process input more effectively and therefore will be more adept at noticing. Moreover, this ability to notice will be affected by the learner’s readiness to attend to certain language at the time. Furthermore, it is suggested that very difficult and unfamiliar tasks will also affect a learner’s ability to notice.

This emphasis on consciousness raising and noticing suggests that instead of teaching a language item, the teacher should encourage students to notice it when it arises so
that it is subsequently processed and learnt (Harmer 2001). Even though the language may have been noticed, this does not necessarily mean that it has been acquired or learnt or that it can be used immediately or spontaneously. This may require further processing time or structuring on the part of the learner.

Another school of thought interconnected with implicit reference to form and the concepts of consciousness raising and noticing, is that of **discovering language**. Lewis (1986: 165) suggests that this conceptual understanding is arrived at through a process of exploration, thereby leading to true understanding. It is widely accepted that the things which we discover ourselves are more effectively taken in than those things that we are taught. Harmer (2001) outlines the practical implications of this particular view whereby, instead of teaching learners a linguistic item, teachers expose learners to examples of it, allowing them to figure out how it is used. This also encourages students to become more autonomous learners. Discovery learning may not however be suitable for all learners or cultures, nor is it certain whether it works well with all items of grammar. A further problem which might arise is that if a language item is too difficult or complex, learners may find it difficult to make meaningful analysis of it on their own.

### 3. Explicit Reference to Form

As already mentioned, the current universally held view is that some form-focused instruction is indeed important within the communicative framework. This includes both implicit and explicit reference to rules. Having dealt with implicit reference to form in the previous section, we will now consider **explicit** reference to form.

In our earlier discussion on implicit reference to form, David Nunun (2004) mentioned that some linguists believed that an explicit focus on form and grammatical structures was unnecessary and that the acquisition of a second language would develop almost automatically if learners focused on meaning while completing tasks. Nunan further proclaims that this focus on content at the expense of attention to form has come under increasing challenge in recent years resulting in a widespread acceptance that form has a place in the classroom. This has sparked debate as to the extent to which grammar should be included in the curriculum. Some argue that a focus on form should only be an incidental activity within the communicative language classroom while others believe that there should be an explicit reference to form. Littlewood (1981) makes a distinction between a weak and a strong interpretation of Communicative Language Teaching, where the strong interpretation avoids a focus on form and the weak interpretation recognises the need for such a focus. Littlewood, in his support of the weak interpretation, argues that a number of skills need to be considered:
• Learners must attain a high degree of linguistic competence so that it can be used spontaneously and flexibly in order to convey the intended message.

• A learner should distinguish between form learnt and the communicative functions which these forms perform.

• Learners must develop both language skills and strategies for communicating in real situations using feedback to check success and using different language when faced with failure.

• Learners must recognise the different social meanings of language forms, thereby using accepted forms for different circumstances and avoiding offensive or inappropriate ones.

Unlike earlier interpretations of CLT which advocated an ‘indirect’ approach, Brown (2001), like Littlewood, is in favour of the ‘direct’ approach with a more effective application of CLT principles that sequences and structures tasks for learners, offering the best possible intervention to assist learners in language acquisition. This earlier interpretation of CLT creates its own set of problems with little attention being given to the importance of form as teachers strived to present authentic, meaningful language in the communicative classroom. As noted by Brown (2001), we simply moved from one extreme to another where vocabulary and grammar took center stage with little regard to language forms, to vocabulary and grammar teaching being given very little attention. He further adds that we now seem to have a new gained respect for the place of teaching form in the interactive classroom which allows the teacher to find better techniques for presenting vocabulary and grammar in the communicative classroom. Dianne Larsen Freeman (1997) cites Pienemann (1984) who demonstrated that learners who received explicit grammar instruction progressed at a much more impressive rate than those learners not exposed to such explicit instruction. Although it was noted that only a small number of subjects were involved in this study, if corroborated it would provide evidence that teaching grammar is beneficial as opposed to allowing grammar to be acquired implicitly.

Krashen’s (1982) recommendation that the teaching of grammar be abandoned faced another problem as many learners and parents in different countries are convinced that learning grammar rules is of value and central in acquiring a second language. In Taiwan, for example, learners and parents alike will often complain to educational institutions if teachers are perceived not to be teaching sufficient grammar. Harmer (2001) adds that the Communicative approach, with its emphasis on pair and group work and minimal teacher intervention may in fact offend educational traditions that it initially aimed to displace. In Taiwan, tests are viewed as being incredibly important and surprisingly a high percentage of students either like or expect tests. In a society which is performance driven (and tests results are seen to reflect this) much of the motivation for completing a language course is to score well in the test. Failure
to score well is seen as a ‘loss of face’ and in some instances a failure on the part of the educational institution or teacher. This highlights an important issue, touched upon in the first section, regarding standardised tests of a foreign language. As many of these tests such as the TOEFL do not test communicative abilities, students have a desire to learn grammar rules in the classroom in preparation for these tests.

Further research by Swain (1985) reveals that learners in immersion classrooms that have been exposed to ample target language continue to make many grammatical errors. This observation would therefore seem to disclaim the notion of forms being acquired incidentally. The idea that Communicative Language Teaching with its implementation of fluency-based activities would develop communicative and linguistic competence did not always occur. It was soon realised that CLT programmes involving extensive use of authentic materials witnessed learners who often developed fluency at the expense of accuracy. This situation resulted in learners who were competent communicators but who had a poor command of grammatical structures. It is important that fluency should not be encouraged at the expense of unambiguous and clear communication.

**4. The Role of Grammar in Language Teaching**

Following our discussion of the two different approaches to form-focused instruction in the communicative context, we will now explore the role of grammar in Communicative Language Teaching. Larsen-Freeman (1997) adds that grammar is often misunderstood and that this misconception is perpetuated by the idea that grammar is simply an assortment of arbitrary rules concerning static structures. She further questions the claims that learners will in fact acquire structures on their own without being taught. Consequently, Larsen-Freeman believes that communicative and proficiency-based teaching approaches may indeed limit grammar. Brown (2001) notes that there should be no question as to whether we should teach grammar to adults and offers the following grammar-focusing techniques:

- Grammar should be included in communicative contexts
- Grammar should play a positive role in communicative goals
- Grammar should attempt to encourage accuracy within a fluent communicative environment
- Grammar should not confuse learners with complex terminology
- Grammar should be intrinsically motivating and interesting
Marianne Celce-Murcia (1991) provided a number of variables which will assist in determining the role of grammar in language teaching. The first variable is age. Young children are seen to benefit from a focus on form if it is incidental and offered through indirect error treatment. Older children may benefit from simple generalisations and concrete illustrations. Adults, on the other hand, are able to improve their communicative abilities through grammar instruction as they have developed abstract thought. The second variable which concerns us is proficiency level. Too much focus on grammar at the beginner level will restrict acquisition of fluency skills. At the advanced level, it is suggested that grammar is less likely to interrupt communicative fluency. It is uncertain whether grammar is more important and is dependent on the level of accuracy already attained. The next variable concerns the learner’s educational background. Those learners with little or no formal educational background may struggle in understanding and grasping complex grammatical terminology. Educated students however are cognitively more receptive to grammar focus. The fourth variable refers to language skills and the idea that grammar focus is more effective in improving writing skills as opposed to the other skills. Another variable, as proposed by Celce-Murcia, is that of register. Informal contexts (writing an email) make fewer demands on grammatical accuracy as opposed to more formal contexts (talking to a teacher). The final variable relates to the learner’s needs and goals. Those learners who are learning a foreign language in order to pursue professional goals will need to focus on formal accuracy more so than those at survival level.

Brown (2001) emphasises that these variables should be viewed simply as general guidelines when deciding on whether grammatical focus is required in the classroom.

5. How to Teach Grammar

Many of the differences in the adoption of past methods and approaches to language teaching have stemmed from the importance and role of grammar within these contexts. Having firmly established the importance of form-focused instruction and the fact that most professionals would pay credence to this importance, it must be noted that differences in opinion surround the sort of instruction that should be available to learners. Brown (2001) refers to four important issues which are central to this debate. The first of these is whether there should be an inductive or deductive approach to presenting grammar. With the inductive approach, language forms are practiced and the learners induce the rules for themselves. The deductive approach, on the other hand, advocates the presentation of grammar rules by the teacher followed by practice of language examples to which the rules apply. Brown notes that the inductive approach is more appropriate in most cases for a number of reasons:
• It follows the process of natural language acquisition, with rules being grasped subconsciously

• It is consistent with the notion of interlanguage development with learners acquiring rules at different rates

• It provides learners with a communicative sense of the language before being confronted with complicated grammatical explanations

• It creates intrinsic motivation with learners attempting to discover the rules for themselves

In the previous section, we referred to Celce-Murcia’s (1991) suggestion that young children seem to benefit from an inductive approach to grammar. Brown (2001) however proposed that sometimes a deductive approach or a blend of the two is required. This is evident when teaching adults as a deductive approach may serve to improve their communicative abilities since they have already developed abstract thought.

The next question is whether we should focus on grammatical explanations in the CLT classroom. We should avoid confusing learners with reference to complex grammatical explanations and terminology. Brown (2001) offers a few simple guidelines when providing grammatical explanations to learners:

• Explanations should be short and simple

• Use visual stimuli and graphical depictions

• Illustrate by using clear and unambiguous examples

• Consider the cognitive styles of your learners, remembering that analytical learners find it easier dealing with grammatical explanations compared to holistic learners

• Do not concern your learners with ‘exceptions’ to rules

• If a student asks about a grammar point that you are unsure of, tell them that you will get further clarification and ‘shed some light’ on the language item during your next meeting. This will give you an opportunity to do some relevant research. The teacher’s books are often extremely useful in helping the teacher explain and understand certain grammar points.

This brings us to the question of whether grammar should be taught independently and in separate classes. Research and CLT practice would suggest that grammar be included in a general language course and as a component of
communicative competence instead of approaching it as a separate skill. Teaching grammar separately may prove useful when teaching intermediate to advanced learners, where a certain degree of fluency is already apparent. The conditions for such grammar teaching are outlined by Brown (2001) as follows:

• The grammar course should be integrated into the overall curriculum
• The curriculum determines the content of the grammar course
• Grammar is contextualised in meaningful language use
• The grammar course is designed to deal with specific problems the learners may have encountered in the curriculum
• Assessing the success of such grammar courses should be evident from the learners’ performance outside of the grammar class and not by grammar tests

The final question, relevant to the issue of what kind of instruction should be available to learners, is whether teachers should in fact correct grammatical errors. Although evidence shows that overt correction of grammar does little to improve language, there is evidence which demonstrates that certain attention and treatment of grammar errors does have an effect. Vigil and Oller’s (1976) feedback model implies that cognitive feedback should be optimal in order to prove effective. An excess of negative cognitive feedback (interruptions and corrections) may stifle a learner’s attempts at communication. At the other end of the scale, an excess of positive feedback (little correction) may reinforce errors and could eventually lead to the fossilisation of such errors. It is important therefore to evaluate when and how to deal with errors in the classroom environment. Hendrickson (1980) suggests that teachers attempt to differentiate between global and local errors. A local error does not usually have to be corrected as the message is clear and correction may impede communication flow. Global errors, on the other hand, need to be corrected as the message is incomprehensible as it is. The crux of this issue is that teachers should avoid overcorrecting learners’ attempts at productive communication, even though students generally expect errors to be corrected in the classroom. The language teacher should attempt to find an optimum medium between overt correction and ignoring errors.

6. Relevance of Grammar

During our examination of where grammar lies in the context of the communicative approach, it is reasonable to conclude that grammar is certainly not irrelevant and is indeed important within a CLT framework. Our discussion of the two approaches to form-focused instruction would support the universally held view that some
form-focused instruction is necessary. Although it is difficult to generalise the diverse findings promulgated by research on form-focused instruction, it may however be fair to make a number of deductions as illustrated by Brown (2001). Research suggests that form-focused instruction may in fact improve a learner’s level of attainment, but that the practices followed by earlier methods such as the Grammar Translation Method are not justified. The treatment of grammar errors and attention to language forms are clearly most effective when integrated into a communicative, learner-centred curriculum and least effective when the error correction takes central dominance in the classroom.

Few research studies enable us to determine at what stages learners are more disposed than others to internalise form-focused instruction. In our preceding discussion on the role of grammar in language teaching, Celce-Murcia (1991) determined that young children gain from a focus on form especially if it is incidental. Adults, however, are able to benefit from grammar instruction. Furthermore, it is suggested in the course of this chapter and a study by Lightbrown and Spada (1990) that a teacher should refrain from interrupting learners while they are in the process of attempting to communicate. In line with this finding, Tomasello and Herron (1989) have found evidence which supports the notion that it is best to offer corrective feedback after a communicative task.

Our in depth discussion of the implicit and explicit references to form provided us with some interesting arguments which highlighted the advantages of both approaches when considering a variety of potential contexts. DeKeyser’s (1995) findings suggest that explicit instruction was more suited to the easier stated grammar rules and implicit instruction was best suited to conveying the more complex rules. The extensive research on learner characteristics, styles and strategies clearly reinforces the conclusion that some learners benefit more than others from form-focused instruction. These variables include: age, proficiency level, educational background, language skills, register, and the needs and goals of the learner (Celce-Murcia 1991). In addition, analytical learners find it easier to process grammatical explanations compared to holistic learners.

It could be said that ‘they’ do have to learn grammar in the communicative context, although this focus on form may be realised either implicitly or explicitly. Even though there is ongoing discussion and differences in opinion on the sort of instruction to be employed in teaching grammar, most professionals would agree on the importance of teaching grammar in the communicative context. Larsen-Freeman (1997) aptly sums it up by saying that, ‘if the goals of language instruction include teaching students to use grammar accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately, then a compelling case can be made for teaching grammar. Instead of viewing grammar as a static system of arbitrary rules, it should be seen as a rational, dynamic system that is comprised of structures characterised by the three dimensions of form, meaning and use.’
Further Reading

• Methodology


1. Grammar / Syntax

Many lesson types may be integrated including more than one segment and held together by a unifying topic. These may include skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and systems (grammar, vocabulary, phonology). School syllabuses and course books typically reflect this notion.

In the past, research suggested that a large proportion of the grammar taught in a grammar lesson was not in fact learnt. It was further suggested that students’ grammar seemed to improve during a skills lesson. Many teachers decided to abandon the grammar lesson in favour of an integrated skills approach.
However, more recently there has been an acknowledgement that focusing on language systems (grammar, vocabulary, phonology) will indeed benefit the learner even if the learning of certain discrete items may not occur. We will therefore consider how one analyses (Language Analysis) a piece of language and then the most effective way of presenting the language (Language Presentation).

2. Language Analysis

Here is a Checklist for analysing a piece of language for teaching purposes. Keep in mind that not all the categories mentioned will have relevance for all items. Certain categories, however, will be more relevant. But, always consider all of them.

- **NAME:** Firstly, does the structure have a name? (e.g. present simple, comparatives, embedded questions, etc.)

- **MEANING / CONCEPT:** What brief (but accurate) answer could you give to a student who says, ‘When can I say ‘………..’?’ Again, it is a good idea to attempt to predict any problems with meaning that the learner may encounter. This may be much easier in a monolingual class where you compare it with the mother tongue. In some cases you may be able to present meaning with the use of pictures as shown below:

  ![Picture Example]

  *We were going to go hiking in the mountains but…….*

- **FORM:** How is it formed (put together)? Keep this as simple and as clear as possible. Use boxes, tables and simple grammatical terms suitable for your students’ level. If you foresee any problems for the learners at this stage, then it is a good idea to list them and to try and find solutions at the planning stage.
**Present Continuous: analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full Form</th>
<th>Negative Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am running</td>
<td>I am (‘m) not running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he is (‘s) running</td>
<td>he is (‘s) not (isn’t) running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she is (‘s) running</td>
<td>she is (‘s) not (isn’t) running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it are (‘re) running</td>
<td>it are (‘re) not (aren’t) running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you are (‘re) running</td>
<td>you are (‘re) not (aren’t) running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we are (‘re) running</td>
<td>we are (‘re) not (aren’t) running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they are (‘re) running</td>
<td>they are (‘re) not (aren’t) running</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig.2.1:** An example of a Grammar table

- **PRONUNCIATION:** If you say a sentence using this form at a neutral speed, are there any words that students may have difficulty hearing? Are the words perhaps squashed up (weakened), linked with other words, are any sounds lost? Are there any sounds or clusters of sounds your students might have problems with? (e.g. /p/ and /b/ for speakers of Arabic). Which words are stressed? Are there any special features of intonation that will need teaching?

- **FUNCTION:** One particular form may have different functions in different contexts. ‘That’s John’s car’ could function as a request (to go and open the door to a visitor) – or a warning – (to avoid crashing into it). Sometimes the language doesn’t change, but the context and therefore the function does.

- **APPROPRIACY:** Would you say the register of the sentence is formal / informal / neutral? Is it language normally found in the written or spoken mode?

- **TEACHING IDEAS:** After you have gone through this process you then need to think of the most effective way of presenting the language, bearing in mind that if you have anticipated particular problems (of form, meaning, pronunciation, appropriacy) then you will need to plan in ways of helping your students with these aspects.
Here is an example of how each of the categories mentioned above can be applied to the analysis of an item of language.

‘If I were you, I wouldn’t touch it.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEANING</th>
<th>A hypothetical statement referring to present or future time. Speaker implies a certain distancing from him/herself. N.B. ‘touch it’ – meaning?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FORM</td>
<td>IF + simple past, + WOULD + infinitive Conditional sentence: Type 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRONUNCIATION</td>
<td>“If I were you, I wouldn’t touch it.’ /wə/wouldentouch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUNCTION</td>
<td>Giving advice. Warning is also implied here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROPRIACY</td>
<td>“If I were you…” suggests a more formal situation. However, “I wouldn’t touch it” adds an informality – which indicates the situation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2.2: Analysing an item of grammar

3. Language Presentation

After you have gone through the above process of analysing a piece of language you then need to think of the most effective way of presenting the language, bearing in mind that if you have anticipated particular problems (of form, meaning, pronunciation, appropriacy) then you will need to plan in ways of helping your students with these aspects.

Here are three different ways as suggested by Scrivener in ‘Learning Teaching’ (1994) in which you may consider the staging of presentation and practice in the classroom.

Lesson Option 1

1. The teacher sets up a context, perhaps using a little story, which will illustrate the meaning of an item of language.

2. The teacher checks understanding, highlights form and pronunciation and gives controlled practice (drilling).
3. The students work together to practise the specific item either orally or written.

4. The students are given the opportunity to use these items, along with other language they know, in communicative activities.

**Lesson Option 2**

1. The teacher selects an activity which requires students to understand or use a specific language point or vocabulary.

2. The teacher monitors carefully and notices problems students have.

3. The teacher clarifies any difficulties with meaning, form or pronunciation and/or teaches any potentially useful language items which were avoided or unknown.

4. The teacher follows on with a similar activity to the first one. The students now have better resources to deal with some of the problems they may have faced.

**Lesson Option 3**

1. The students read a text or listen to a tape. The teacher sets appropriate tasks to develop their receptive skills.

2. The teacher directs their attention to specific language points and clarifies meaning, form and pronunciation.

3. The students do a follow on exercise or communicative activity.

### 4. Grammatical Terminology

Grammar is generally taught as part of a skills-based lesson but if you are considering teaching grammar structures in a grammar lesson, it may be advisable to be familiar with a number of common terms. The largest unit of language is referred to as discourse; but for practical purposes we will consider the basic sentence and the smaller units which make up the sentence as considered by Penny Ur (1997, CUP).

Every complete **sentence** contains two parts: a **subject** and a **predicate**. The subject is what (or whom) the sentence is about, while the predicate tells something about the subject e.g.

\[
\text{subject} \ + \ \text{predicate} = \text{sentence} \\
\text{The man} \ + \ \text{is very shy} = \text{The man is very shy.}
\]
It is the ability of learners to recognise subjects and predicates that will help them to avoid one of the most common writing errors -- the sentence fragment. The complement refers to the subject although it looks like an object e.g. *He is a good teacher*. The phrase ‘a good teacher is’ the complement and refers to the subject. The adverbial is a word or phrase which provides further information e.g. *tomorrow, at work*.

The basis of the English sentence is the subject – verb relationship. This relationship consists of a number of patterns as shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S-V</td>
<td>The teacher is talking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-V-O</td>
<td>The teacher loves her job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-V-Adj</td>
<td>The teacher is tired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-V-Adv</td>
<td>The teacher is here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-V-N</td>
<td>The teacher is a woman.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.2.3: Subject-verb relationships

The clause may be thought of as a mini-sentence consisting of a subject and a tensed verb. It is possible for a sentence to consist of two or more clauses e.g. *I felt sorry for her, and I tried to help her*. On the other hand, the phrase is a smaller unit within a clause yet lacking the subject and/or the tensed verb. It functions in the same way as a single word e.g. *a tall building* (a noun phrase functioning as a single noun word).

Parts of speech are considered as the basis of grammar and it is essential that teachers and students have a grasp of parts of speech. The essential parts of speech (terminology) are briefly outlined below:

**Nouns** are words used to name a person, animal, place, thing and abstract idea. There are many different types of nouns, some of which you capitalise (Proper nouns) and some which you don’t (common nouns). There is also the concrete noun, the abstract noun, the countable noun, the non-countable noun and the collective noun. A noun will belong to more than one type: it will be proper or common, abstract or concrete, and countable or non-countable or collective.
**Pronouns** take the place of a noun e.g. Nicolas went to Buenos Aires and then he met Martin for a coffee. Repetition of Nicolas is unnecessary as the referent is already known. There are different types of pronouns: demonstrative, personal, indefinite, interrogative, relative, reciprocal and reflexive.

**Verbs** express an action or a state (walk, run, kick). Verbs can be used in different tenses as shown in the next section on teaching tenses. They may also be used in the passive and active forms. Transitive verbs take on a direct object (kick, pay). Intransitive verbs on the other hand do not take on direct verbs (cry, smile). A number of subcategories exist for verbs in the English language, for example, modal verbs and auxiliary verbs. Modal verbs (such as can, may, might, will) add certain kinds of meaning connected with certainty and obligation. Auxiliary verbs are usually attached to the main verb e.g. is talking.

**Adjectives** describe nouns e.g. the teacher is creative.

**Adverbs** describe verbs e.g. he walked quickly.

**Prepositions** in English have several different functions. Nouns, verbs and adjectives are used with particular prepositions: sorry for, on a train. Prepositions relate to time and space. They may also appear at the end of certain clauses e.g. I don’t like being stared at. It is not always clear which preposition to use after a particular noun, verb or adjective. These cannot often be guessed and students will have to learn the expression as a whole.

Conjunctions are simply words used to join clauses in order to make sentences. e.g.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{clause} & \quad \text{conjunction} & \quad \text{clause} \\
I \text{ went to town} & \quad \text{because} & \quad I \text{ wanted to buy something}.
\end{align*}
\]

5. Teaching Tenses: Time Lines

Time lines are a useful way to graphically represent the different verb tenses to your students. We go about showing the flow of time on a line with time flowing from the left (Past), through the present and into the future. On this line we depict actions that took place and which will take place either side of the present (Now). Time markers (word or phrase) distinguish the future from the past and make the time reference very clear. A visual representation is often clearer than a verbal description of a tense, especially when students do not have similar tense systems in their mother tongue.
Here is an example of a time line used as a visual aid to make the language more accessible to your students:

![Diagram of Present Continuous Tense]

Fig. 2.4: An example of a time line

Here we view the present continuous. This particular example deals with a temporary action which began before the time of speaking, is continuing across it and is not yet complete. I’m running.

Do keep in mind that time lines may appear confusing to certain students. A useful activity may be to encourage students to create their own time lines when dealing with new tenses. An excellent book for further reference is Rosemary Aitken’s *Teaching Tenses* (1995, Longman Group Limited). A list of English verb tenses, together with an example and form has been included below for further reference. This may be copied and referred to in your earlier days of teaching until you become more familiar with them.
### 6. Verb Tenses in English

#### ACTIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB TENSE</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>FORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>I eat.</td>
<td>Base form (add -s for 3PS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>I ate.</td>
<td>Simple past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Continuous</td>
<td>I am eating.</td>
<td>Present form of ‘be’ + [base form + -ing]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Continuous</td>
<td>I was eating.</td>
<td>Past form of ‘be’ + [base form + -ing]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>I have eaten.</td>
<td>Present form of ‘have’ + past participle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>I had eaten.</td>
<td>Past form of ‘have’ + past participle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect Continuous</td>
<td>I have been eating.</td>
<td>Present form of ‘have’ + been + [base form + -ing]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect Continuous</td>
<td>I had been eating.</td>
<td>Past form of ‘have’ + been + [base form + -ing]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal + Base Form</td>
<td>I will eat.</td>
<td>Modal + base form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal Continuous</td>
<td>I will be eating.</td>
<td>Modal + be + [base form + -ing]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal Perfect</td>
<td>I will have eaten.</td>
<td>Modal + have + past participle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal Perfect Continuous</td>
<td>I will have been eating.</td>
<td>Modal + have + been + past participle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig.2.5:** English Verb Tenses
7. Problems Teaching Grammar

Many new teachers are daunted by the prospect of having to teach grammar to a class as they feel that their knowledge in this area is extremely limited. Many students who have studied some English are often aware of the various tenses and related terminology.

If a student asks you about a grammar point that you are unsure of, tell them that you will get further clarification and shed some light on the language item during your next meeting. This will give you an opportunity to do some relevant research – but make sure you do get back to your student! It may be comforting to know that you do not have to know all the English Grammar in order to teach it. You will learn as you attempt to teach it so always ensure that you plan your lessons adequately. The teacher’s books which often accompany course books are extremely useful in helping you to understand and explain certain grammar points.

8. Ideas and Techniques for the Classroom

Here are a few grammar activities and techniques that you could use in the language classroom.

• **Troublesome Grammar**

  For practice with troublesome grammatical structures, have an assortment of dittoed multiple choice and filling-the-blank exercises on the following areas:

  • Verb tenses
  • Prepositions
  • Question formation
  • Adjective placement
  • Modals

  Prepare an answer key for self checking.

• **Sentence Structuring**

  On index cards, write a sentence or question, with each word on a separate card. On the back, number each word card in sequence. The students must put the cards in the correct word order. They can check themselves by looking at the numbers on the back. Keep each set of cards in a rubber band or in an envelope.
• **Memory Games**

In this activity you may divide the students into two groups. Give each group a copy of the same picture. Tell them to look at it but do not tell them that they are expected to memorise the items in the picture. Give them a minute or two. Then take the pictures away from the groups. Each group nominates a spokesperson for their group. *In this activity, the material is utilised to work on the present continuous tense (is/am/are + ing).* The teacher reads out some true/false statements about the picture, using the present continuous tense (*e.g. The man is…; The boys are…*). After each group has discussed the statement, their spokesperson relays their answer to you. Points are awarded for correct answers.

![Fig.2.6: Picture for memory game](image)

• **Miming an Action**

Create two piles of cards. One pile should consist of cards with an adverb written on each and the other pile with a verb each. Divide the learners into two groups (Group A / Group B). Group A sends one of its members up to the front of the class. This student selects one card from each pile on the teacher’s desk which are face down. The student must then mime the action to Group A who then have 45 seconds to guess the action correctly (You’re walking quickly – present continuous). This can be used to practise a variety of tenses. If the students in Group A guess the correct action within the allocated time, then Group A is awarded a point. It is now Group B’s turn to send a student up to the front of the class.
Creating Time Lines

A useful activity may be to encourage students to create their own time lines when dealing with new tenses. Write a sentence on the board and ask the students to either come up to the board and create a timeline on the board or ask them to complete a time line in their books.

Example: Write the following sentence (past perfect) on the board and ask students to create their own time lines – I arrived when the train had left.

Answer:

Split Sentences

In this activity, you may wish to use the first conditional for example or a variety of tenses. Once you have written a number of sentences on a piece of paper, proceed to cut each sentence in two. Distribute these various pieces to the students in the class. The students must then read their half of the sentence to the class and attempt to find the missing half of their sentence.

Example: (first conditional)

If you don’t look you’ll be hit by a car.
If you don’t wash the apple you’ll get sick.
If you play with the cat it’ll scratch you.
If you buy it now you’ll save yourself a lot of money.
If you study hard you’ll pass the test.
If you don’t practise you’ll not be selected for the team.
• **Grammar Quiz**

You could initiate a grammar quiz for two teams. Write a verb infinitive on the board and the first team to write the correct past participle on the board is awarded a point. You could create a number of variations of your own; for example, ask each team to prepare their own questions to present to the other team.

• **Growing Stories**

Growing story activities are excellent practice for work on the past simple tense. Students are given the first sentence of a story. They then have to add another sentence to the story in order to continue the storyline. The students then pass their stories to the person next to them who in turn adds another sentence. Alternatively, this activity may be done in a computer laboratory with students adding to a Word document. This can be a timed exercise with students changing computer workstations when you tell them to. The stories can then be printed at the end of the lesson and read. This makes for some interesting stories and variations. Many follow-up exercises can be initiated such as correcting the mistakes etc.

Example: (first sentence)

**I had just climbed into bed when there was a flash of bright light outside.**

• **Questionnaires**

Ask the students to write a questionnaire by utilising recent grammar items which have been covered in class. Alternatively, you could assist the students by presenting them with basic structures (e.g. **What/Do/tonight?**). Once the questionnaires have been completed, ask the students to survey one another.

• **Objects and Things**

By bringing certain objects and things (e.g. wallet, handbag, money, glasses) into your classroom, you add a hands-on feel to your teaching. In order to teach beginning level students the use of the possessive form, you could encourage the students to bring a few items to class. Ask them to place the items on their desks. Gather the objects and place them on different desks around the classroom. Students then work in pairs. They walk around the classroom and by using the target language (placed on the board) and the embedded politeness forms (‘Excuse me’) and discourse ellipsis rules (‘No it’s Justine’s’, rather than ‘No, it’s Justine’s purse’).
Example: (target language)

Student A: Excuse me. Is this your purse?

Student B: No, it’s Justine’s. / Yes, it is. Thank you.

Student A: Excuse me. Are these your glasses?

Student B: No, they’re Ron’s. / Yes, they are. Thank you.

- Maps and Drawings

Maps are practical and simple visual aids for the classroom and can serve to illustrate certain grammatical structures such as the use of:

- Prepositional phrases (down the street, across the road, etc.)
- Question forms (where is, how do I find, is this, etc.)
- Imperatives (go, walk, turn, keep an eye out for, etc.)
- Appropriate discourse when asking for directions, attracting someone’s attention, clarifying information and ending the conversation.

Fig.2.8: A simple road map
**Drawings** are an excellent way in which to provide practice in stating locations and giving directions (with the use of prepositional phrases). You may wish to begin by using the simple drawing which follows. After introducing the relevant terms (next to, in the bottom left-hand corner, in the centre, below etc.) divide the students into pairs. Give one student a copy of the picture and the other student a piece of paper and a pencil. The student with the picture describes what is in the picture and where these things are (without showing the other student) whilst the other student draws what is described on their piece of paper.

![Fig. 2.9: An example drawing for this activity](image)

• **Charts and Graphs**

Charts and graphs are extremely useful when practising various patterns and clarifying certain grammatical relationships. In the graph which follows, four types of crime in the town of Tillingsbury are described over a period of four years. This kind of exercise will offer students some simple practice in understanding and interpreting graphical information. Students are also introduced to the idea of trends. Alternatively, you could ask students to locate a statistical chart in a local newspaper and share it with the class. A related activity is to create posters on the various ways of displaying graphical information.
A syllabus for each proficiency level should be designed to incorporate all the skills and systems necessary to provide a sense of moving forward, of growing achievement and progress.

**ELEMENTARY LEVEL**

In the Elementary programme, students should aim to:

- be aware of word order, e.g. by re-ordering sentences, predicting words from previous text, grouping a range of words that might ‘fit’;
- be aware of the need for grammatical agreement in speech and writing, matching verbs to nouns/pronouns correctly, e.g. I am; the children are;
- use verb tenses with increasing accuracy in speaking and writing;
- use simpler gender forms, e.g. his/her correctly;
- use verb tenses with increasing accuracy in speaking and writing, e.g. cook/cooked, look/looked.
On completion of the Elementary course the student should be able to:

STAGE 1  Identify himself/herself
        Identify common objects, colours and body parts
        Use present tense for everyday activities and habits using common basic verbs
        Use regular plurals/adjectives
        Understand and follow simple instructions
        Use present continuous tense to describe everyday actions

STAGE 2  Identify family, peer group, and familiar items and objects
        Be familiar with the days of the week, months and dates
        Understand and use numbers correctly
        Understand and use irregular plurals and negatives
        Understand and use question forms
        Express him/herself using simple past and future tenses

STAGE 3  Identify and use a wider variety of vocabulary items
        Understand and use time correctly
        Understand and use possessives and pronouns correctly
        Understand and use prepositions of place
        Understand and use comparisons
        Understand simple stories and be able to re-tell them
        Express him/herself using appropriate language including contractions

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

The objectives of this level are to allow the student to:

• revise and extend work from the previous level;
• use comparative and superlative adjectives;
• use possessive apostrophes;
• apostrophise singular nouns;
• understand the significance of word order and its effect on meaning;
• use connectives, e.g. adverbs, adverbial phrases.

On completion of the Intermediate programme the student should be able to:

STAGE 1  Identify and use a wider variety of vocabulary items
        Use opposites of key words
        Understand and use prefixes and suffixes
        Use reflexive pronouns correctly
        Use conditionals correctly
        Understand and predict outcomes of longer stories
        Use a variety of written modes correctly and appropriately
STAGE 2  Use a wider and more selective vocabulary
    Understand and use synonyms
    Use past tenses correctly (simple; perfect; progressive, used to)
    Use perfect tenses (present)
    Use the future tenses correctly (present progressive, going to, will)
    Be aware of the difference between written and spoken forms
    Begin to recognise and correct mistakes in own written work

STAGE 3  Guess understanding of new vocabulary from context
    Use comparatives and superlatives
    Requests using modals
    Understand the use of imperatives to offer solutions and advice
    Use more selective vocabulary appropriate to specific subject area
    Use compound sentences correctly
    Understand and predict texts (mood and tone)
    Develop reading for pleasure as well as for study
    Develop a wide range of writing skills, e.g. reports, summaries, notes, descriptions.

ADVANCED LEVEL

On completion of the Advanced programme the student should be able to:

- revise all grammar from the two previous levels;
- be familiar with and understand: past progressive; present perfect progressive; past perfect;
- revise earlier work on verbs and understand the terms active and passive; be able to transform a sentence from active to passive, and vice versa;
- note and discuss how changes from active to passive affect word order in a sentence
- revise work on complex sentences: identify main clauses; ways of connecting clauses; constructing complex sentences;
- use appropriate punctuation;
- revise work on contracting sentences: summary; note making; editing
- use reading to: investigate conditionals, e.g. using if…then, might, could, would and their uses, e.g. in deduction, speculation, supposition; use these forms to construct sentences which express, e.g. possibilities, hypotheses; explore use of conditionals in past and future, experimenting with transformations, discussing effect, e.g. speculation about possible causes (past) reviewing a range of options and their outcomes (future)

At the end of the Advanced level the students will have a level of language skills to enable them to use language correctly, coherently and appropriately.
10. Using a Course Book

Communicative Language Teaching, with its focus on the use of authentic texts in the classroom brought about a dilemma for language teachers and syllabus designers. Communicative Language Teaching required a re-evaluation of the learning processes. A syllabus could no longer be designed as a convenient list of structures or lexical items, but had to now consist of functions and notions. Initially, teachers did not want to make use of the text book and many wanted to discard it altogether, with its focus on structures and lexical lists. Often these text books were seen as boring, general and restricting. Non-native teachers however still found comfort and security in the use of a textbook. Another challenging issue was the different views often shared by teachers and students on how often the text book should be used. In Taiwan, learners, parents and educational institutions expect teachers to use the text book and adhere to the sequence of structures as depicted in the list of contents. Many non-native teachers find it difficult to break with traditional teacher-centred approaches to language learning and strict adherence to the textbook. David Nunan (2004) considers the dilemma of the syllabus designer and suggests that the curriculum should incorporate both content and process. Nunan cites a preference for an ‘analytical’ approach to syllabus design which presents the target language in whole chunks at a time, without linguistic interference or control.

A course book can be a good source of exploitable and usable material. Activities are sequenced and carefully thought out. Unfortunately, not all course books are that helpful although they are a useful starting point. Students will probably expect the teacher to use a course book, so this may be a sensible idea. Furthermore, a course book provides a useful syllabus for students to follow and a devised course to help them learn. It must however be remembered that a teacher does not necessarily need to be a slave to the book. Material can be reordered, adapted, varied and omitted. Carefully select that which is appropriate for the students. That which is not appropriate should be rejected. Teachers may vary and adapt activities in order to give students the practice that they need. Teachers should use supplementary materials when needed.

In the School environment, it is important to select course books and supplementary resources that are aimed at the correct target audience (young children, teenagers or adults). There are many good course books on the market that are inappropriate for children but which are aimed at an adult audience. There are some excellent course books available that are aimed at children, covering interesting and relevant topics. There are also many course books aimed at preparing students for the Oxford and Cambridge Examinations. These are an excellent starting point and can be supplemented using a tremendous range of resources available in the bookstores and on the Internet.
Further Reading

• Grammar


Two of the most widely used of grammar books are Michael Swan’s Practical English Usage (1995, OUP) and R. Murphy (1994) English Grammar in Use which is hugely popular because of its mixture of simple rules and exercises.

• Syllabus


• Using a Coursebook

See A. Cunningsworth (1984 and 1985) for further insights into effectively evaluating coursebooks for teaching.
Chapter 3
Assessing and Testing Grammar

1. Using a Checklist
2. Progress Testing
3. Proficiency Testing
4. Test Items
5. Writing and Marking Grammar Tests

1. Using a Checklist

Refer to the checklist, which is designed to assist you in keeping track of an individual student’s progress in grammar. This form of assessment may be done throughout the year or course and will help you assess whether the student is in fact moving forward. This list may of course be added to and changed to suit your particular needs and circumstances. Simply tick √ the relevant box from weak to good!
A progress test may be administered either at the end of a particular unit, week, month, term or year. This type of test is usually prepared or set by the class teacher or someone else in the school in order to take account of the overall syllabus of the school. Progress tests are important for students as they assist students and teachers in measuring progress in a specific text book series. Teachers usually prepare their own progress tests, although many text book series present a number of progress or Unit tests.
A good test is one which appears to be both fair and appropriate to the students. It should also be not too difficult to mark and should provide clear results. A progress test may include one or more of the following question types:

- Gap-fill
- Multiple choice
- Matching pictures with words
- Matching words with definitions
- Sentence correction
- Changing the form of a given word
- True / False questions

### 3. Proficiency Testing

Proficiency tests are used to measure overall language proficiency and include reading and the other language skills.

Proficiency testing can help students in at least two ways. Firstly, such tests can help create positive attitudes and motivation within the ESL classroom. Students experience a sense of accomplishment and this contributes to a positive tone. Secondly, these tests assist students in mastering the language. They are helped when they study for exams and when these exams are returned to them and discussed. They also confirm areas that each student has mastered and those that need further attention. The Oxford and Cambridge Proficiency tests are the most widely used of all types of commercial ESL exams. These tests reveal overall ability in the language as well as capabilities in a specific area (such as reading). Proficiency tests can also show if a person is ready for certain kinds of schooling work. Furthermore, the Oxford and Cambridge Proficiency tests are both valid and reliable. Validity is normally taken to be the extent to which a test can be shown to produce scores which are an accurate reflection of the candidate’s true level of language skills. Reliability concerns the extent to which test results are stable, consistent and accurate and therefore the extent to which they can be depended on for making decisions about the student. More importantly, the commercial proficiency tests provide legitimacy to the levels instituted by the school.

### 4. Test Items

Irrespective of the kind of test and what it aims to accomplish, the effectiveness and success of a test will ultimately be determined by the various types of items in it. These include either direct or indirect test items. **Direct test items** test communicative skills, attempting to use real-life language where possible. **Indirect test items** attempt to ascertain a learner’s language knowledge by utilising controlled items such as
multiple choice questions or cloze procedures. These are easier and quicker to design and mark. They also produce better scorer reliability. At this juncture it is necessary to make a distinction between discrete-point testing and integrative testing. Discrete item questions test specific individual language points. **Discrete items** are usually marked objectively, where there is clearly a correct answer and the same marks would be awarded by whoever was marking the question. **Integrative tests** may test a number of items or skills in the same question and tend to be marked more subjectively. Proficiency tests usually include a mixture of direct and indirect items as well as discrete-point and integrative testing. We will now look at a number of the most commonly used indirect test items.

**Indirect test items**

- **Multiple choice**
  E.g. decide which word (A, B, C or D) best fits each space.
  The elephant has some ........ relatives called mammoths, which lived in the Stone Age.
  A. far  B. distant  C. remote  D. distinct
  Answer: B. distant

Multiple choice questions have been historically considered as ideal test items, especially for testing both grammar and vocabulary as they are easy to mark. They are however difficult to write when one considers the incorrect choices which may distract students. This then raises the issue of whether multiple choice questions in fact improve a learner’s English as students may be well versed in applying successful answering techniques. Harmer (2001) notes that although multiple choice questions may be practical, they score low in terms of validity and reliability.

- **Matching Pictures and Words**
  E.g. write the correct word under each picture.
  [Pictures of various forms of transport]
  car  taxi  train  aeroplane  ship

- **Matching Definitions**
  e.g. Match the word in A with the definition in B (draw a line to join them as shown in the example).

- **Cloze procedures**
  e.g. Fill in the space with one word only.
  People have been diving without mechanical aids.............ancient times.
  Answer: since

  Cloze is the deletion of say the fifth or tenth word in a text. These procedures can be designed quickly and are a cheap way of testing a learner’s overall
knowledge. One of the failings of this seemingly random procedure, as research has shown, is that a learner’s score depends on the word deleted and not the learner’s actual English Knowledge. Harmer (2001) adds that cloze procedures may suffer from problems of reliability but that a learner who applies the correct word shows an understanding of context. It has been suggested by Alderson (1996) that ‘modified’ cloze procedures be used ensuring that those words that have been deleted can in fact be recovered from the context.

- **Changing form and keeping meaning / Transformation and paraphrase**
  e.g. For each question, complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given. You must use between two and five words, including the word given.

You must do exactly what the manager tells you.

**carry**
You must ....................................................instructions exactly.
Answer: carry out the manager’s

To be able to complete the above item successfully, the learner will have to be able to understand the initial sentence and then be able to complete an equivalent sentence.

- **Sentence Correction**
  e.g. Read the lines below. Some of the lines are correct and some have a word which should not be there. If a line is correct, put a tick by the number on the answer sheet. If a line has a word which should not be there, write the word on the answer sheet.

1. When I was young, I lived in a place called Durban in
2. South Africa. I had taken there by my parents when I was young.

Answer: 1. √
2. been

- **Changing a given word**
  e.g. Read the text. Use the word given in capitals at the end of each line to form a word that fits in the space in the same line.

I’m a great (1)........of bread. Whenever I smell freshly baked LOVE bread, it reminds me of my early (2)....... when I used to visit CHILD the little bakery that my grandfather owned.

Answer: 1. lover
2. childhood
• True or False
  e.g. This kind of question may be incorporated in a reading exercise. Jason left the building on Wednesday evening? True / false?

Direct test items

In order for direct test items to be considered as being both valid and reliable, a number of requirements will need to be satisfied by the test designers. These include the following:

• Creating a fair environment

  A test which unfairly favours learners with a particular specialist knowledge base would not be seen as fair as all the learners should be ensured of equal success. A test which aims at testing a learner’s reading ability, but at the same time requires that learner to perform well in writing is clearly not only measuring reading ability.

• Creating true-to-life interaction

  As already mentioned, direct test items test communicative skills, attempting to use real-life language and interaction where possible. Tests should aim to be as realistic as possible, replicating those situations which may be encountered in true-to-life interaction.

5. Writing and Marking Grammar Tests

So far, we have looked at the two different kinds of tests, namely, progress tests and proficiency tests as well as the different types of test items. As we will no doubt be involved in writing and marking tests for our students at some point in our careers, it is important that we review a number of pertinent requirements in the test preparation process. These will help us design an effective TESOL test for our learners.

Firstly, when designing a test we should take into consideration how much time should be allocated for the learners to take the test, where the test will in fact take place and how much time is required for marking it. Secondly, it is important to decide what items or skill sets we are going to include in our test, as well as learner appropriate topics. By including a representative sample of what has been taught over a particular time period, the results will be a good indicator of the language the students have learned. Ensure that the language used in the test is as natural and authentic as possible and that the students have practised and encountered these language items. It is not a good idea to introduce new language tasks in the test. Furthermore, we should balance the various items we wish to include in our test such
as direct and indirect test items and how much time and space we should assign in terms of their relative importance. Moreover, the success of our students will be determined to a certain degree by how many marks are allocated to the different sections of the test. Lastly, it is vital that we administer our test to our colleagues before administering it to our learners. This will ensure that we have time to deal with any possible problems that we have not anticipated and therefore avoid any potentially disastrous situations. At this stage it is important to work through the test asking a number of important questions. Brown (2001) offers the following test revision list:

1. Are the instructions both clear and unambiguous?
2. Does each section provide an example item for the students?
3. Are the questions asked in clear and simple language?
4. Do the multiple choice questions have appropriate distracters?
5. Does the test as a whole reflect the learning objectives?
6. Is the difficulty of the various items appropriate for your students?
7. Does each item attempt to measure a certain objective?

One of the major problems associated with the marking of tests by different markers is scorer subjectivity. Harmer (2001) suggests a number of solutions to overcome scorer subjectivity. To begin with, scorers could attend training sessions or courses involving discussion of the scripts and the allocation of marks. This would ensure that scorers have a clear idea of what is expected of them. In addition to adequate training, reliability can be further improved if more than one scorer looks at each script to ensure consistency.

Further Reading

- **Testing**

  Harold. S. Madsen. 1983, Techniques in Testing offers an in depth look at testing language sub-skills and communication skills.

  The best and most accessible books on testing in general are A. Hughes (1989) and C. Weir (1993).

  Visit [http://www.cambridgeesol.org](http://www.cambridgeesol.org). This is the Cambridge ESOL site which contains information about the Cambridge ESOL exams.

  Visit [http://www.oup.com/elt](http://www.oup.com/elt) This is the Oxford University Press site which has useful information on ESL resources and the Quick Placement Test.
1. Course Books and Publishers
2. Internet Resources
3. Lesson Plan Form

1. Course Books and Publishers

Your school may or may not prescribe a text book for the ESL course you are to deliver. If the school does prescribe a text book you can still be flexible in your choice of supplementary class activities in order to deliver an exciting and varied curriculum. For an exciting range of ELT books, visit August Publishing at http://www.augustpub.com

A huge range of course books, practice tests and learning resources are produced by independent publishers in the UK and overseas to help prepare students for the Oxford and Cambridge exams. For a list of publishers offering materials related to the Oxford and Cambridge exams, visit http://www.cambridgeesol.org/support/publishers.htm. or www.oup.com/

Catalogues can be requested from the various publishers and orders placed directly with them. Most book stores keep a wide range of ESOL related resources on their
shelves and there are many online bookstores which sell ESL books. Visit http://www.eflbooks.co.uk for an online catalogue of ESL titles.

2. Internet Resources

http://www.webguidesforteachers.com/Subjects/TESL.htm
This is a web guide for teachers and covers computers, resources, lesson plans, grammar, listening, poetry, drama, reading, writing and much more. It gives the addresses of relevant web pages that you can visit.

This is the Cambridge ESOL site which contains information about the Cambridge ESOL exams. You may also check for accredited examination centres throughout the world.

http://www.oup.com/elt
This is the Oxford University Press site which has useful information on ESL resources and the Quick Placement Test.

Cambridge University Press’s on-line International dictionaries, including a useful dictionary of idioms: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/

The Guardian newspaper’s educational pages. Useful for teachers, parents and students: http://www.educationunlimited.co.uk/netclass/o,5477,67364,00.html

A very useful resource for teachers in particular, which has a large number of links to specific language and literature pages: http://www.english1.org.uk/language.htm

A specialist grammar and writing site – particularly good for ESL professionals and advanced level students: http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/index.htm

Learn English through the British Council web pages. There is a useful summary of the various ESL ability levels, and links to good interactive learning sites also: http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/welcome_english.html

The Learning English homepage of the BBC’s World Service department. This site is updated with new activities regularly and is particularly useful for extended vocabulary: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/index.shtml

NATE’s homepage – The National Association of Teaching English – will keep you up-to-date with UK curricular developments. It contains some useful resources too: http://www.nate.org.uk
The ESL web-ring is a good place to start a search for specific ESL sites. There’s a regularly updated ring of over 100 ESL sites which are generally useful and reliable: http://nav.webring.org/cgi-bin/navcgi?ring=esloop;list

An ESL site for students and teachers containing useful resources and relevant links – The On-line Writing Lab at: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/eslstudent.html

The following sites are extremely useful for the ESL teacher. They include lesson plans and activities for classroom use:
http://www.englishteaching.co.uk
http://www.teachit.co.uk
http://www.englishzone.com

The following selection of sites may be useful for CALL related issues:
http://www.athel.com
http://www.cti.hull.ac.uk/eurocall/ecabout.htm

Center for Applied Linguistics
http://www.cal.org
Better known as “CAL,” this site sponsors on-line chats with ESL experts on a variety of topics. It also provides articles on bilingual education, refugee concerns, and reviews of new teaching materials.

CNN Newsroom and Worldview for ESL
http://lc.byuh.edu/CNN_N/CNN-N.html
Real reports aired on CNN are formatted as cloze exercises on this Web page. Students may fill in answers and obtain immediate results. Most of these exercises are suitable for students who are working at an intermediate to advanced level.

Dave’s ESL Cafe
http://www.eslcafe.com
Arguably one of the most user friendly sites online, Dave’s ESL Cafe offers a chat room for students and teachers, a graffiti wall for students, and a message exchange board. The Cafe also includes pages on phrasal verbs, current slang, idioms, and quizzes on a variety of topics. For teachers there are idea pages, job boards, a bookstore, and links to other ESL Web sites.

The ESL Loop
http://www.linguistic-funland.com/esloop
The ESL Loop is a list of sites relevant to English language teaching and learning on the World Wide Web.
ESL/EFL Lessons, Games, Songs
http://www.eslgames.com/
While the makers of this site are intent upon having you purchase their book, they nevertheless offer a few worthwhile ideas on how to incorporate music, songs and games into the classroom.

Internet TESL Journal
http://iteslj.org/
The Internet TESL Journal is a user-friendly site for teachers. This electronic journal includes scholarly articles and research papers on ESL/EFL. There are lists of teacher tips, ideas on teaching techniques, sample lessons, lesson plans, handouts, project ideas, and links to other ESL sites.

NCLE
http://www.cal.org/ncle
The National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education features ERIC Digests online. These materials cover a wide range of topics on ESL literacy education.
### 3. Lesson Plan Form

Here is a lesson plan form which may be adapted and used to plan your lessons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LESSON PLAN:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Problems:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE &amp; AIMS:</th>
<th>PROCEDURES:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
References


Ur, Penny. 1997. *A Course in Language Teaching* (CUP)


Index

A
adjectives 19-21, 29, 34
adverbial 18, 29
age 8, 11, 36
analytical learners 9, 11
appropriacy 15-16

C
checklist 14, 33
clause 18-19, 30
communicative competence 2, 10
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) 1, 2, 5, 7, 32, 46
complement 18
consciousness raising 2, 4-5
corrective feedback 11
course books 13, 22, 31, 40
curriculum 2, 5, 10-11, 31, 40

D
deductive approach 8-9
direct approach 8-9
direct test items 35, 38
discovering language 2, 5
discrete items 14, 36

E
educational background 8, 11
explicit reference to form 1, 3, 5

F
form 1-8, 11, 14-21, 25-26, 28-30, 33, 35-37, 40, 44
form-focused instruction (FFI) 2-5, 7-8, 10-11
function 4, 6, 15-16, 18-19, 31

G
grammar syllabus 13, 28
grammar tests 2, 10, 33, 38
Grammar Translation Method 2, 11
grammatical errors 7, 10
grammatical explanations 9, 11

H
holistic learners 9, 11

I
immersion classrooms 7
implicit reference to form 1-5
indirect approach 3, 6
indirect test items 35-36, 39
inductive approach 8-9
integrative tests 36

L
language analysis 13-14
language presentation 13-14, 16
language skills 6, 8, 11, 30, 35
legitimacy 35

M
Meaning 2-3, 5, 11, 14-17, 19, 29, 37

N
needs and goals 8, 11
noticing 2, 4-5
nouns 18-19, 28-29, 34

O
organisational competence 2
P
phrase 18-19, 26-27, 29, 34
pragmatics 2
predicate 17-18
prepositions 19, 22, 29, 34
proficiency level 8, 11, 28
pronouns 19, 28-29
pronunciation 15-17

R
register 8, 11, 15
reliability 35-37, 39

S
semantics 2
separate classes 9
subject 3, 6, 17-18, 30, 34, 41
supplementary materials 31

T
tenses 13, 19, 20-24, 28-30, 32, 34
time lines 13, 19-20, 24

V
validity 35-36
verbs 19, 28-30, 34, 42