

## GENERAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING GRAMMAR FOR EXAMS

**Summary.** The article is dedicated to make some general points about the way that grammar is treated in an exam, to look at some different sorts of tasks that can be used to test knowledge of grammar and to suggest some principles for teaching grammar. It points out that knowledge of grammar can be enhanced by study of its use in context, as well as in formal exercises and practice tasks and highlights the need for students to develop good independent study habits. The necessity of such interpretation is caused by the great scientific exploration of different techniques for teaching grammar which cover practicing, testing, error correction and how to integrate grammar with various methodologies.

**Key words:** grammatical accuracy, language exams, knowledge of grammar, language structures, sentence transformation.

There are some important teaching principles to bear in mind when helping students prepare for tests of grammar. For grammar to be understood, teachers should draw attention to the use of language in context. Exams tend to focus minds on the importance of grammatical accuracy. Within the context of exam preparation, therefore, teachers and learners will probably give plenty of attention to consolidating knowledge of grammatical structures and how to use them.

A period of exam preparation is not the time to start presenting large amounts of new language; it is the time for reviewing and consolidating what has already been learned, with a view to achieving complete mastery of it. Practice tasks should therefore be designed to reveal possible gaps in that knowledge. Learners should also be encouraged to explore and expand the range of grammar phenomena to be activated in speech. Practice tasks should motivate learners to find things out for themselves by using of reference materials such as grammar books and dictionaries.

Teachers should generally avoid starting grammar lessons with a formal presentation – as if it were being taught for the first time. On the other hand, students beginning an exam course need to understand that correct use of grammar is an important element in the assessment of their language ability and even if they have previously

been taught something, this is no guarantee that they have learnt to use it correctly. A good starting point is to ask students how they think they learn grammar best, what they find most difficult, and what they think it is most important to learn. The information that the teacher gathers from this about students' own approaches to learning grammar will help to plan future work, both for the classroom and for individual study. These consultations may well highlight ideas that we were already intending to use and make us aware of activities that the students dislike, and differences between our own preferred approach and theirs.

Grammar is easier (and more enjoyable) to learn if it is treated as something to be investigated and discovered. Students should already be familiar with the main terminology of grammar – the articles, the parts of speech, the names of the different tenses, the modals, the passive voice, the conditionals, the reported speech etc. – and they should also be able to recognize examples of the various forms and structures they denote. Grammar practice tasks should involve the students themselves in explaining why and how particular forms are used, what meaning such forms convey, and how certain pairs of sentences differ in their content.

In many English language exams the candidate's knowledge of grammar is tested in tasks which are skills-focused (reading, writing, speaking, or listening). However there are some exams which include tasks to control the language structures and grammar [1, 67].

A multiple choice gap-fill task offers the candidate a choice of possible answers to fill each of the gaps in a sentence or text. The right answer must not only make sense but must also fit grammatically. Learners need to be trained to examine the gapped sentence and to predict the sort of answer that is needed to complete the sentence, before they look at the three or four choices offered. Only one of the choices will fit the sentence correctly, and it is easier to make the right choice if you already have an idea of what you are looking for [2, 244]. Here are some examples testing a grammatical structure:

1. *The cattle on this farm .....always so well looked after.*

- A. are C. be  
B. is D. am

2. ....me to get you some water?

- A. Would you like C. Shall you like  
B. Should you like D. Will you like

3. *When I saw the vase in the shop window, I knew it was exactly what I.....*

- A. looked for C. had been looking for  
B. look for D. have looked for

More complex gap-fill tasks involve inserting whole phrases, rather than single words, into a gap.

1. *Political debates .....in this country nowadays.*

- A. were paid much attention to  
B. were being paid much attention to  
C. are being paid much attention to  
D. will be paid much attention to

2. *Martha.....she would be late for the meeting. She .....she was feeling ill.*

- A. told that.....said that  
B. told that.....said me that  
C. told me that.....said that  
D. told me that.....said me that

3. *The never-ending care and devotion of the nurses in the hospital helped.....*

- A. to overcome cancer my father  
B. my father overcome cancer  
C. my father to overcome cancer

A close test is a kind of gap-fill task. The task is to think of a suitable word to fill each of the gaps. While in many gap-fill tasks the candidate is given a set of possible answers, in a close text they must find their own word which will fit grammatically and with the right meaning. Occasionally, a gap will allow more than one correct answer [3, 226].

*Here in August the final day of the US Golf Masters (1).....begin, and we could be (2).....a historic win. Tiger Woods, who (3).....start his bid for a place in the history books in forty minutes, could complete the grand slam – winning all four golf masters tournaments in one year. Woods starts today in the lead and he is (4).....give up that lead easily. This is going to be an exciting day, folks, so be (5).....book your place in front of the TV and settle down for a thrilling day's viewing!*

Word formation tasks test the candidate's knowledge of word families, groups of words deriving from the same root. An example would be *change, changeable, changed, changeless, unchanged*. Knowledge of prefixes and suffixes is tested and changes in the structure of the words.

1. He raised his opened hands toward her in a gesture of.....before lowering them listlessly.

A. help C. helpful

B. helpless D. helplessness

2. *It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the ..... saw Wilson's body a little away off in the grass.*

- A. garden C. gardens  
B. gardener D. gardening

Students can prepare for this sort of task by looking for the different forms of words in the dictionaries and developing their awareness of word variation. They can write them on a grid. It may be possible to post such a grid on the classroom wall.

*Noun Verb Adjective Adverb*

*success succeed successful successfully  
decision decide decisive decisively*

Sentence transformation tasks introduce a "key" word that is to be used in the given form to transform the sentence into a new grammatical form without changing its meaning. Common types of transformation include comparison, constructions with modal verbs direct speech to reported speech, from a sentence using the past simple tense to one using the present perfect. There are between six and ten sentence transformations in a typical exam paper [4, 83].

1. *Although she has to cope with three small children.....*

*In spite of having to cope with three small children, she is taking a part-time MBA course.*

*Despite the fact that she has to cope with three small children, she is taking a part-time MBA course.*

2. *It is necessary to do all of this photocopying before lunchtime.*

*All of this photocopying has got to be done/ has to be done before lunchtime.*

3. *Could I possibly borrow your mobile phone? Would you mind me your mobile phone?*

Some exam tasks focus on identifying incorrect uses of English. Error correction activities can be used to develop students' attention to detail, and sensitivity to incorrect and inappropriate uses of language. Students preparing for an exam will do a lot of written work, so it is important to train them to check their own work for mistakes in grammar. They should learn to expect the teacher not to correct the work, but to mark it with an indication of the type of errors made.

1. *San Francisco, that is a beautiful city, has a population of six million.*

A B C D

2. *One singer who's voice I like a lot is Madonna.*

A B C D

Students may have to check each line of a text to find and correct the mistake in it.

*The main character, Molly Smith, is a university professor. She is trying to find her dead grandparents' first home in Scotland. It may be in a nearby town. The villagers there seem scared. They could be have a secret or they must just hate strangers. Molly has some old letters that might lead her to the place. They are in Gaelic but one of her students might translate them for her. They got to be important because the author mentions them at the beginning of the novel. The letter must contain family secrets. Who is the bad guy? It couldn't be the student because he wants to help. It might be the newspaper editor in the town [5, 314].*

It can be constructive for teachers to mark written work using a correction code which encourages the learners to notice and correct their own errors, rather than depending on the teacher to do this for them. Students' own errors should also be a focus of individual study on those areas of grammar that are presenting particular difficulty for the student. Teachers should provide guidance on what those areas are.

There are many different ways in which learners' errors can be used to design classroom activities. Students can work in pairs or groups on exercises which test their knowledge about the language. If the teacher is following an exam course book they will probably find that there many grammar tasks which lend themselves to pair work encouraging learning through personal discovery and shared knowledge. While working together students can deepen their knowledge of grammar. Another effective approach to reviewing language is to get learners to create their own exercises to test themselves and each other.

The teacher can prepare a collection of some sentences reflecting frequent student errors. The collection should be prepared with half of the sentences written correctly and half written incorrectly. In pairs the students read out their versions of each sentence and decide which is correct.

The teacher can make a collection of sentences containing errors from students' work and write them on the board. The teacher allows the students to get up and correct the sentences. The teacher can resist making any comment until the students have corrected everything. This gives an opportunity to observe the classroom interaction, while the students discuss the sentences advise each other on where and what the errors are and how they should be corrected.

The teacher can organize a language quiz. This takes quite a lot of preparation in order to provide several sets of questions, testing different areas of grammar such as tenses, verbs, time expressions, uses of the articles etc. There should be about ten questions in each category. Students are arranged

in teams. Each team picks a category and team members answer the questions. If they cannot give an answer, the question passes to the next team and may be answered by the first person to raise a hand. Questions can be of various kinds:

- provide an example of a sentence which includes the Objective with the Infinitive construction;
- explain the difference between the Past Simple tense and the Present Perfect tense;
- when is it possible to use the Past tense to refer to the Future time sphere;
- correct the following sentence:.....
- join these two sentences together into one sentence:...

The teacher can ask the students to look through a text and find examples of a particular grammar point. Having done it a few times in class, students can look for suitable texts themselves and prepare exercises with these particular grammar points. They can exchange their exercises with classmates.

As the students move through the grammar exercises they will become more comfortable in speaking the English language. Working on English grammar will help students improve their skills. The more the students work on their English grammar the more accurate they will become.

Teachers need to give students sufficient practice of exam-type questions, so that they know exactly what to expect on the day of the exam and are not surprised by anything unfamiliar. Students need to be familiar with the types of tasks. Students need to recognize what the examiner is looking for in a particular question, they need to recognize which language point is being tested. Students should understand that they may answer the questions in any order. It is a good idea to advise students to begin with a question they know well, because by the time they have completed that they will have settled into the exam and be able to cope with the more difficult ones.

While teachers want to train students to become independent learners, they can make sure that they have the right exam techniques, so that they can approach any tests of grammar with confidence.

#### *Literature*

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**Бокарева Г.В. Загальні підходи до навчання граматики для іспитів. — Стаття.**

**Анотація.** Стаття присвячена зробити кілька загальних зауважень на тему викладання граматики англійської мови під час підготовки до іспитів, щоб випробувати різного роду завдання, які можуть бути використані для перевірки знання граматики і запропонувати деякі принципи викладання граматики. Стаття зазначає, що викладання граматики може бути підвищено за рахунок використання граматичних явищ в контексті, а також у формальних вправах і практичних завданнях і підкреслює необхідність для студентів розвивати навички незалежного дослідження. Необхідність такого тлумачення обумовлена великою кількістю наукових досліджень різних методів викладання граматики, які охоплюють практику, тестування, виправлення помилок і можливість інтегрувати граматику з різними методологіями.

**Ключові слова:** граматична точність, мова іспитів, знання граматики, мовні структури, граматичні трансформації.

**Бокарева Г.В. Основные методы преподавания грамматики при подготовке к экзаменам. — Статья.**

**Аннотация.** Статья нацелена сделать несколько общих замечаний на тему преподавания грамматики при подготовке к экзаменам, для исследования разного типа упражнений, которые могут быть использованы для проверки знания грамматики и предложить некоторые принципы преподавания грамматики. В статье подчеркивается, что знание грамматики может быть повышено за счет изучения использования грамматических явлений в контексте, а также в формальных упражнениях и практических заданиях и указывается на необходимость для студентов развивать навыки независимого исследования. Необходимость такого толкования обусловлена большим количеством научных исследований различных методов преподавания грамматики, которые охватывают практику, тестирование, исправление ошибок и возможность интегрирования грамматики с различными методологиями.

**Ключевые слова:** грамматическая точность, язык экзаменов, знание грамматики, языковые структуры, грамматические трансформации.