



INTERACTIVE GRAMMAR TEACHING AS A MEANS OF PROMOTING LEARNER ENGAGEMENT AND AUTONOMY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines interactive grammar teaching as a means of promoting learner engagement and autonomy in EFL classrooms. Drawing on Communicative Language Teaching, Constructivist Learning and Sociocultural theories, it argues that grammar is acquired more effectively through meaningful interaction than through mechanical practice. The study discusses five activity types—information-gap tasks, guided discovery, role-plays, collaborative production, and game-based activities—which enable learners to apply grammar in context while developing communicative competence and independent learning skills.

In recent decades, the role of grammar instruction in foreign language education has undergone significant reconsideration. Traditional approaches to grammar teaching, often characterized by rule explanation, memorization, and mechanical exercises, have been criticized for producing learners who possess declarative knowledge of grammatical forms but experience difficulty applying this knowledge in real communicative situations. Such instruction tends to position students as passive recipients of information rather than active participants in the learning process, which may limit both engagement and long-term retention (Ellis, 2006).

Contemporary language pedagogy, influenced by communicative and

learner-centered paradigms, emphasizes that grammatical competence should develop through meaningful language use rather than through isolated analysis of forms (Zakirova, 2025). Within this perspective, grammar is not viewed as an end in itself but as a resource that enables learners to construct and interpret messages effectively in spoken and written discourse (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). As a result, there has been growing interest in instructional practices that integrate form, meaning, and use while actively involving learners in the process of discovery and application.

Interactive classroom activities represent one such pedagogical direction. By engaging learners in pair work, group problem-solving, role-play,



and communicative tasks, these activities transform grammar learning into a dynamic process of negotiation, collaboration, and contextualized practice. Research suggests that when students actively manipulate language structures in meaningful contexts, they are more likely to internalize grammatical patterns and transfer them to real communication (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Moreover, interactive learning environments foster motivation, autonomy, and deeper cognitive processing—factors that are particularly important in higher education settings preparing students for professional language use.

The relevance of interactive grammar instruction is also supported by pedagogical traditions within Uzbek and post-Soviet educational scholarship, which have long emphasized activity-based learning, conscious language use, and the development of communicative competence through purposeful practice (Jalolov, 2012; Passov, 1991). These perspectives align with modern international research, suggesting a convergence of theoretical foundations across educational contexts.

The aim of this article is to examine the theoretical foundations and pedagogical value of teaching grammar through interactive activities and to demonstrate how such practices enhance grammatical competence, learner engagement, and communicative ability in EFL classrooms.

Theoretical Background

The use of interactive activities in grammar instruction is supported by contemporary language pedagogy, which views language learning as an active,

communicative, and socially mediated process. Rather than treating grammar as a set of abstract rules to be memorized, modern approaches emphasize its development through meaningful use and learner engagement. Two theoretical perspectives particularly relevant to this shift are Communicative Language Teaching and Constructivist (sociocultural) learning theory.

Communicative Language Teaching and the Functional Nature of Grammar

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as a response to form-focused instructional models that prioritized accuracy over meaningful communication. CLT redefined the goal of language education as the development of communicative competence—the ability to use language appropriately in real-life situations—rather than the mere mastery of grammatical rules (Richards, 2006).

Within this framework, grammar is not abandoned but reconceptualized as a functional resource that enables learners to express meanings, intentions, and relationships. Instruction, therefore, must create opportunities for learners to apply grammatical structures in purposeful interaction. Mechanical drills alone are considered insufficient because they do not prepare students to use language spontaneously.

Larsen-Freeman (2003) introduced the concept of “grammaring,” which views grammar as a dynamic process rather than static knowledge. According to this perspective, grammatical competence involves three interconnected dimensions:



- **Form** (accuracy of structure),
- **Meaning** (semantic content),
- **Use** (appropriateness in context).

Interactive classroom activities—such as *information-gap tasks, role-plays, and collaborative problem-solving*—allow learners to integrate these three dimensions simultaneously. By using grammar to achieve communicative goals, students develop procedural knowledge that is more transferable to authentic discourse than knowledge acquired through explanation alone.

Thus, CLT provides a pedagogical rationale for interactive grammar teaching: grammatical structures are most effectively learned when they are embedded in communication rather than isolated from it.

Constructivist Perspectives and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Constructivist learning theory supports interactive approaches by emphasizing that knowledge is actively constructed by learners rather than passively received from teachers. From this perspective, learning occurs when students engage in *exploration, problem-solving, and reflection*, **gradually building** their own **understanding of concepts** through experience.

A closely related framework is Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which represents a socially oriented interpretation of constructivism. Vygotsky highlighted the fundamentally social nature of learning, arguing that cognitive development takes place through interaction with others and participation in meaningful activities. Through dialogue, collaboration, and guided support, learners internalize new knowledge and skills, moving from

assisted performance to independent use.

From a constructivist viewpoint, learning grammar is not the accumulation of rules but the development of understanding through *use, reflection, and feedback*. *Pair and group work* encourage learners to test hypotheses about language, notice gaps in their knowledge, and refine their understanding through communicative practice. Such engagement promotes deeper cognitive processing and longer retention compared to passive reception of information.

Moreover, interactive learning environments foster learner autonomy by shifting responsibility from teacher explanation to learner participation. This aligns with higher education goals, where students are expected to become active constructors of knowledge and capable users of language in academic and professional contexts.

Interactive Activities as a means to foster learner engagement and independence

Interactive activities have been increasingly recognized as an effective means of promoting meaningful grammatical development. Interactive grammar teaching shifts the focus from explanation to engagement, enabling learners to acquire grammatical competence through participation in communicative tasks. Rather than treating grammar as an object of study, this approach positions it as a resource that learners actively use to achieve specific communicative purposes.

Interactive activities are characterized by learner *involvement, collaboration, and contextualized*



language use. They require students to *exchange information, solve problems, or express ideas while employing target grammatical structures*. Such tasks create conditions in which learners must attend simultaneously to **form, meaning, and communicative intention**—an integration considered essential for language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Research on task-based and communicative instruction similarly demonstrates that grammar develops more effectively when learners use language to accomplish meaningful outcomes rather than merely manipulate forms (Ellis, 2003).

One important feature of interactive grammar instruction is the transformation of learners from passive recipients into active participants in the learning process. When students work in pairs or groups, they negotiate meaning, test linguistic hypotheses, and receive immediate feedback from peers and teachers. This interaction promotes deeper cognitive processing, which has been shown to enhance retention and facilitate the proceduralization of grammatical knowledge (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

Language learning becomes effective when students engage cognitively with linguistic material through analysis, comparison, and application in communicative situations, rather than through memorization alone (Zakirova, 2022). Her work highlights the importance of a cognitive-communicative approach in which learners actively construct understanding and develop independence in language use, principles

that are directly realized through interactive classroom activities.

Another key advantage lies in the contextualization of grammar. Interactive activities embed structures within realistic communicative situations, allowing learners to understand how grammar functions in discourse rather than as isolated patterns. By situating grammar within meaningful contexts, instruction helps bridge the gap between knowing grammatical rules and being able to apply them appropriately in real communication (Richards, 2006).

Interactive grammar teaching also supports learner motivation and autonomy. Active participation encourages learners to take responsibility for expressing meaning and monitoring their own language use, thereby fostering independence and sustained engagement in learning. Such environments reflect broader educational goals of learner-centered instruction and professional communicative competence.

Thus, interactive activities do not eliminate attention to grammatical accuracy; rather, they provide meaningful conditions in which accuracy develops through purposeful use. Grammar becomes internalized as part of communicative action, enabling learners to use language more confidently and effectively.

Types of Interactive Grammar Activities

Interactive grammar instruction can be implemented through a variety of classroom activities that engage learners in meaningful language use while



focusing on specific grammatical structures. These activities differ from traditional exercises in that they require communication, collaboration, and decision-making, allowing grammar to emerge as a functional component of discourse rather than an isolated object of study.

Information-Gap Activities

Information-gap tasks involve situations in which learners possess different pieces of information and must communicate to complete a task. Because successful completion depends on accurate language use, students are naturally encouraged to apply grammatical structures in meaningful exchanges.

For example, students may describe pictures to one another using target tenses, ask questions to complete a schedule, or exchange details in order to solve a problem. Such tasks promote authentic interaction and require learners to process both meaning and form simultaneously (Ellis, 2003).

Guided Discovery and Problem-Solving Tasks

In guided discovery activities, learners analyze language examples and collaboratively identify grammatical patterns or rules. Instead of receiving explanations directly, students are encouraged to hypothesize, compare forms, and articulate their understanding.

Problem-solving tasks—such as correcting errors in a text, reconstructing sentences, or participating in a “grammar auction”—stimulate analytical thinking and increase cognitive engagement. This process reflects constructivist principles by allowing learners to actively construct

grammatical knowledge (Richards, 2006).

Role-Plays and Situational Practice

Role-plays provide contextualized environments in which grammar is used to express communicative intentions. Learners adopt roles in realistic scenarios—such as giving advice, making requests, or discussing plans—where the use of specific grammatical forms becomes necessary to achieve interactional goals.

Through situational practice, grammar is linked to pragmatic meaning, helping students understand not only how structures are formed but also when and why they are used (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

Collaborative Writing and Speaking Tasks

Group-based productive activities encourage learners to jointly construct sentences, dialogues, or short texts using target grammar. Collaborative writing, for instance, requires students to negotiate language choices, monitor accuracy, and revise their output together. This shared responsibility promotes reflection and reinforces grammatical awareness.

Similarly, structured speaking tasks—such as discussions, storytelling, or project presentations—provide opportunities for repeated use of forms in extended discourse, supporting the development of fluency alongside accuracy.

Game-Based Grammar Activities

Games introduce an element of challenge and motivation while maintaining a focus on linguistic objectives. Activities such as competitions, board games, or timed



challenges encourage repeated use of grammatical structures in a low-anxiety environment. When designed carefully, such tasks combine enjoyment with purposeful practice, increasing learners' willingness to participate and experiment with language.

Interactive grammar activities, therefore, vary in format but share a common pedagogical principle: they integrate grammatical form with meaningful communication and learner engagement. By diversifying instructional techniques, teachers can create dynamic learning environments that support both accuracy and communicative competence.

Pedagogical Benefits of Interactive Grammar Teaching

The integration of interactive activities into grammar instruction offers several pedagogical advantages that address both linguistic development and broader educational goals. By engaging learners in meaningful communication, interactive approaches contribute to a more balanced development of accuracy, fluency, and functional language use.

One significant benefit is the transformation of grammatical knowledge from declarative to procedural. When learners repeatedly apply grammatical structures in communicative contexts, they gradually develop the ability to use them automatically and appropriately. This process enables students to move beyond knowing rules to using them effectively in real-time interaction (Ellis, 2003). As a result, grammar becomes an operational skill rather than an abstract body of information.

Interactive grammar teaching also enhances learner engagement and motivation. Activities that require collaboration, discussion, and problem-solving create a participatory classroom environment in which students are actively involved in constructing meaning. Such engagement has been shown to increase attention, retention, and willingness to communicate, all of which are essential for successful language acquisition (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

Another important advantage lies in the development of higher-order thinking skills. Interactive tasks encourage learners to analyze language, make hypotheses, evaluate correctness, and adjust their usage based on feedback. These processes foster critical thinking and metalinguistic awareness, enabling students to understand not only how grammar works but also how it functions in different communicative situations.

Furthermore, interactive approaches support the growth of learner autonomy. As students participate in pair and group work, they assume greater responsibility for expressing meaning, monitoring their language use, and assisting peers. This shift from teacher-centered instruction to shared learning aligns with contemporary higher education objectives, particularly in preparing students for professional communication and lifelong learning.

Finally, interactive grammar instruction promotes the integration of language skills. Because grammatical structures are practiced within speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities, learners experience grammar as part of



holistic language use rather than as a separate component. This integration strengthens communicative competence and better reflects authentic language practice.

In sum, interactive grammar teaching not only improves the

acquisition of grammatical structures but also contributes to motivation, cognitive development, and independent learning—outcomes that are central to modern EFL pedagogy.

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