

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPOKEN GRAMMAR IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract. Developing grammar in spontaneous and prepared speaking process may seem to be challenging in a language classroom. The main obstacle for the language acquirer is the difference between the grammatical features of unplanned conversation and standard written English. The present article outlines specific features of spoken language and shows the importance of teaching grammar for communicative classes where grammar is usually underrated.

Keywords: spoken grammar, ellipsis, dislocation, vague language, discourse markers, spontaneous communication.

Introduction

Grammar is often considered as a set of rules and norms that govern the structure and accuracy of written language. However, spoken language, especially in everyday, unplanned conversation, has its own grammatical features that differ from those of written language. These features reflect the spontaneity, interactivity, and context-dependence of spoken communication, and they are essential for achieving fluency and naturalness in speaking. Therefore, teaching spoken grammar is important for English language learners who want to improve their speaking skills and communicate effectively in various situations.

What is spoken grammar?

Spoken grammar refers to the patterns and structures that are commonly used in spoken language, but not necessarily in written language. Spoken grammar is influenced by the fact that speakers have to produce language in real time, without the opportunity to edit or revise their utterances. As a result, spoken grammar tends to be more flexible, dynamic, and adaptive than written grammar. Some of the features of spoken grammar are:

- Ellipsis: the omission of words or phrases that are not essential for the meaning or that can be inferred from the context. For example, "Didn't know you used boiling water." instead of "I didn't know that you used boiling water."
- Dislocation: the placement of a noun phrase at the beginning or the end of a clause, separated by a pause or a filler word, to highlight or comment on it. For example, "My little brother, he is a really good student." or "She always gets good grades, my little sister."
- Heads and tails: the addition of a word or phrase at the beginning or the end of a clause, usually to link it to the previous or the following discourse. For example, "You know, he is really smart." or "Maybe he studies hard, that's why."
- Vague language: the use of words or expressions that are imprecise or general, often to avoid commitment, hedge, or show politeness. For example, "They reckon it's um, quicker." or "It's kind of expensive."
- Discourse markers: the use of words or phrases that signal the relationship between different parts of the discourse, such as topic change, contrast, agreement, etc. For example, "Well, he is really smart, so he always gets good grades." or "But maybe he gets good grades because he studies hard."

- Response tokens: the use of short words or sounds that indicate the listener's attention, interest, or attitude, such as "yeah", "mm", "oh", etc. For example, "A: Didn't know you used boiling water. B: Pardon? A: Didn't know you used boiling water. B: Don't have to but it's um ... they reckon it's um, quicker. A: Oh, I see."

Why is spoken grammar important?

Spoken grammar is important for several reasons. First, it reflects the reality and diversity of spoken language, which is often neglected or simplified in traditional grammar books and teaching materials. By exposing learners to authentic examples of spoken grammar, teachers can help them develop a more balanced and comprehensive view of the English language and its varieties. Second, spoken grammar is relevant for communicative language teaching, which aims to develop learners' ability to use language for meaningful and purposeful interaction. By teaching learners how to use spoken grammar features appropriately and effectively, teachers can enhance their communicative competence and fluency. Third, spoken grammar is important for learners' identity and confidence, as it allows them to express themselves more naturally and personally in speaking. By teaching learners how to use spoken grammar features creatively and strategically, teachers can empower them to find their own voice and style in speaking.

How can we teach spoken grammar?

There are different ways and methods to teach spoken grammar, depending on the level, needs, and interests of the learners. However, some general principles and guidelines are:- Use authentic and varied sources of spoken language, such as recordings, videos, podcasts, etc., to expose learners to real examples of spoken grammar in context. Avoid using artificial or scripted dialogues that do not reflect the features of natural conversation.

- Raise learners' awareness and understanding of spoken grammar features, by explaining their functions, meanings, and effects, and by comparing and contrasting them with written grammar features. Use questions, tasks, and activities that encourage learners to notice, analyze, and reflect on spoken grammar features in the input.

- Provide learners with opportunities and support to practice and produce spoken grammar features, by designing speaking tasks and activities that are relevant, engaging, and meaningful for the learners. Provide feedback, correction, and guidance on the use of spoken grammar features, and encourage learners to self-monitor and self-correct their own speech.

- Adopt an inductive and discovery-based approach to teaching spoken grammar, rather than a deductive and prescriptive one. Instead of presenting and explaining the rules and norms of spoken grammar, let learners discover and infer them from the input and the output. Instead of drilling and testing learners on spoken grammar, let them experiment and explore with spoken grammar in different situations and contexts.

Conclusion

Spoken grammar is an essential aspect of spoken language that deserves more attention and recognition in the English language classroom. By teaching spoken grammar, teachers can help learners improve their speaking skills and communicate more effectively, authentically, and confidently in spoken English.

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