AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT LEARNING STRATEGIES FROM ESP PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: In the present article we aim to make an overview of learning strategies that have received little attention in ESP learning context but play a key role applied to grammar teaching in ESP context in order to have better learning outcomes. It is acknowledged that grammar teaching has been the most distinctive feature in the history of teaching methodology with most teaching controversies that have always existed. There are pros and cons as far as the role of grammar in teaching is concerned.
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The redefining of the competencies and the various skills to be developed within the framework of the educational reform of the Moldovan educational system has led us to reflect on the notion of grammar and its place and role in the process of learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) which is becoming increasingly important in the modern world.

It is acknowledged that one of the main benefits of learning ESP is that it provides learners with the necessary language skills to communicate effectively in their specific field or profession. The key role of learning ESP in the modern world is that it can increase career opportunities and employability. As English has become the global language of business, learning English for specific purposes can help individuals to communicate with clients, colleagues, and partners from around the world, giving them advantage in the job market.

Furthermore, learning ESP can also help learners to engage with international research and academic communities. Many scientific journals and academic publications are written in English;

consequently, being able to understand and communicate in English can help to access a wider range of research and collaborate with colleagues from different countries. Besides, learning English for specific purposes plays a critical role in the modern world, as it provides learners with the necessary language skills, increases career opportunities, and facilitates international communication and collaboration.

According to Dudley-Evans &St. John, (1998, p.4-5), one of the main features of ESP is that it is revolving around the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, vocabulary, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

Yet, such linguists like Alderson, (2000), argued that EFL learners do not need grammar knowledge for effective learning.

There are some other clamorous voices belonging to scholars who also assumed that learning grammar was not important claiming the following reasons:

✓ **Natural language acquisition**: They argue that language is acquired naturally through exposure and immersion in the language, rather than through explicit grammar instruction. Therefore, they believe that learners can develop their language skills through communication and practice without necessarily studying grammar. However, to unveil any criticism, we should make clear that Noam Chomsky (1965) does not believe that learning grammar is not a primary goal. In fact, his theory of natural language acquisition suggests that grammar is an innate part of the human language acquisition process. According to Chomsky, the LAD (language acquisition device) enables children to learn the rules of grammar without explicit instruction. He argues that children are born with a universal grammar, which contains the fundamental principles and rules that underlie all human languages. As children are exposed to language, their innate language faculty helps them to infer the grammar of the language and to create mental representations of the language they hear. Therefore, grammar is a crucial aspect of language acquisition according to Chomsky's theory.

✓ **Focus on communication:** A number of well-known linguists prioritize communication and the ability to convey meaning over the rules of grammar. They believe that language learners should focus on developing their ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations rather than on memorizing rules and structures.

✓ **Changing language use:** Some argue that language is constantly changing and that formal grammar rules may not reflect the current usage of a language. Therefore, they believe that it is more important to focus on current language use rather than outdated rules.

✓ **Task-based learning:** Some linguists such as David Nunan (1998), believe that learners can develop their language skills by engaging in tasks that require communication rather than through traditional grammar instruction. This approach emphasizes the use of language in real-life situations and the development of practical language skills.

It's worth noting, however, that while some scholars may downplay the importance of grammar, others believe that grammar instruction is a necessary component of language learning. Moreover, with the advent of the **post-method pedagogy**, new dimensions have been added to grammar that is not just a plain amalgamation of the previous concepts. Hence, post-method condition refers to the qualities of the modern age in English language teaching in which previously well-trusted methods are seriously scrutinized and in which a body of methods and techniques collected from all previous methods and approaches are used pragmatically with a belief that such an eclectic practice leads to success.

In the post-method era, many voices claim that grammar teaching should be student-centered and focus on meaningful communication. This means that grammar instruction should be meaningful and contextualized, with activities that help learners identify and use grammar in real-world communication. This can be done through activities such as using authentic texts, role-playing, problem-solving, and simulations to help learners understand and use grammar in context.

Among the most prominent researchers who considered teaching grammar in the post-method are through language acquisition are Stephen Krashen, 2003, David Nunan 1998, Marysia Johnson (2011), Robert O'Neill and Rebecca Oxford 2017 etc. They focused on the use of communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching, and content-based instruction in the post-method era, and have explored the ways in which these approaches can be used to help learners understand and use grammar in meaningful contexts.

Another cohort of scholars such as John Truscott, Diane Larsen-Freeman and Suresh Canagarajah (2003) have studied the effects of grammar instruction on language learning, as well as pedagogies for effective teaching of grammar. The list could be continued by experts in language teaching such as Jim Cummins, Robert De Keyser and Rod Ellis(2015). They have done extensive research on the various ways of teaching grammar and have highlighted the importance of grammar in language learning.

To begin with, Stephen Krashen believes that grammar should be taught as part of a larger approach to language instruction. He suggests that grammar should be taught in a communicative context, in a meaningful and interactive way. He also recommends the use of error correction and real-world examples in order to help the student better understand the language. By interactive way, Stephen Krashen means teaching grammar in a way that encourages the active participation of the student.

Above and beyond, in his books, "Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use" (2003) and "Second Language Acquisition and Language Learning" Stephen Krashen (1986) covers a range of topics related to the teaching of grammar. He also suggests that grammar should be taught in a communicative context and that activities should be designed to promote meaningful communication. He recommends that teachers incorporate pair and group work into their lessons to help students interact with one another while learning grammar. Furthermore, he advises teachers to focus on form-focused instruction, which entails explicitly teaching the rules of language. According to

Krashen, form-focused instruction is a method in which teachers explicitly teach and explain the rules of the language. This method involves visuals and explicit explanations; as well as drills and exercises to help students internalize the rules.

Another renowned scholar, David Nunan (1998), who also believes that grammar should be taught in a meaningful and interactive way, suggests activities such as problem-solving tasks, role plays, discussion groups, and conversation circles to help students understand the material better. He as well recommends using visuals such as diagrams, charts, and tables to explain grammar rules, as well as providing real-world examples. His overall approach promotes communication and encourages active participation from students.

Furthermore, the well-known researcher Diane Larsen-Freeman (2003) believes that grammar should be taught in a communicative, interactive, and meaningful way. She suggests using activities such as role plays, student-led discussions, and problem-solving tasks to help students better understand the material. She also encourages teachers to use visuals such as diagrams, charts, and tables to explain grammar rules.

While David Nunan and Diane Larsen-Freeman both advocate for a communicative and interactive approach to teaching grammar, they have slightly different views on how this should be carried out. For example, while David Nunan recommends problem-solving tasks and conversation circles, Diane Larsen-Freeman suggests role plays and student-led discussions. Additionally, David Nunan recommends visuals such as diagrams, charts, and tables, while Diane Larsen-Freeman recommends visuals such as photos, videos, and illustrations. Yet, there are a few more differences between the teaching philosophies of David Nunan and Diane Larsen-Freeman. For example, while Nunan emphasizes the importance of visuals to explain grammar rules, Diane Larsen-Freeman suggests using real-world examples as teaching aids. Additionally, Nunan suggests that teachers focus on form-focused instruction, while Diane Larsen-Freeman advocates for

an integrated approach of grammar instruction that also includes meaning and use.

In Marysia Johnson's book (2011), "Grammar in the Second Language Classroom: Integrating Form, Meaning, and Use" we find useful insights into second language grammar instruction and issues such as integrating form, meaning, and use in the language classroom.

Additionally, the author dwells on designing effective **grammar instruction**, which involves selecting appropriate tasks and activities that focus on meaningful communication. Also, she claims that grammar instruction should be tailored to the learners' level of proficiency and focus on communication. Finally, she emphasizes that teachers should provide meaningful feedback and encourages learners to use grammar in communicative activities.

It is agreed that grammar knowledge plays a principal role in cultivating grammar competence. Though, learning grammar, especially in English for specific purposes (ESP) context, can be very challenging due to learners' low grammatical competence, as many would say. However, this is not the only reason. Below, a list of major triggers in learning grammar in ESP context is provided:

Specificity: In ESP, learners must learn and use specific terminology and language structures that are specific to their field or profession. This can make learning grammar more challenging as the language structures may be more complex and less commonly used in everyday English.

Technicality: Grammar in ESP may also be more technical, with complex rules and structures that require a higher level of understanding. This can make it more difficult for learners to grasp and apply the grammar rules.

Contextualization: Another challenge is that grammar in ESP must be learned in context. Learners need to understand how grammar structures are used in different situations, such as in academic writing, business communication, or medical reports. This requires a deep understanding of the context in which the grammar is being used.

Time Constraints: In ESP, learners often have limited time to learn the necessary grammar structures, as they need to focus on the practical skills and language required for their field. This can make it challenging for learners to fully master the grammar rules and structures in the limited time available.

Motivation: Finally, learners may also lack motivation to learn grammar in ESP, as they may see it as a tedious or irrelevant aspect of their language learning. This can make it more challenging for them to engage with the grammar structures and learn them effectively.

Furthermore, we will reveal the strong connection between **grammar** and **learning strategies**. Below we are making a diachronic overview of learning strategies, as well as various classifications so as to associate them to grammar learning.

O'Malley and Chamot's model of cognitive strategies for second language learning (1990) identifies three categories of strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective. Within these categories, there are more than a few strategies that can be used to learn grammar.

1. **Metacognitive strategies:** These are strategies that involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process. Within the metacognitive category, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) emphasize the following strategies for learning grammar:

− Setting goals: This involves setting specific goals for learning grammar, such as mastering a particular grammar rule or improving overall grammar proficiency.

− Planning: This involves developing a plan for learning grammar, such as choosing appropriate materials and resources and scheduling time for practice.

− Self-monitoring: This involves monitoring one's own progress in learning grammar, such as keeping track of errors and areas of weakness.

− Self-evaluation: This involves evaluating one's own performance in learning grammar, such as reflecting on progress made and areas for improvement.

2. **Cognitive strategies:** These are strategies that involve manipulating the language to enhance learning. Within the cognitive category, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) emphasize the following strategies for learning grammar:

– Practicing: This involves practicing using grammar in context, such as through exercises or writing activities.

– Receiving and sending messages: This involves receiving and sending messages that use the target grammar, such as through listening or speaking activities.

– Analyzing and reasoning: This involves analyzing the rules of grammar and reasoning through how they apply in different contexts.

3. **Social/affective strategies:** These are strategies that involve interacting with others to enhance learning. Within the social/affective category, O'Malley and Chamot emphasize the following strategies for learning grammar:

– Asking for clarification: This involves asking others for help in understanding grammar rules or concepts.

– Cooperating: This involves working with others to practice using grammar in context, such as through group discussions or peer review activities.

– Lowering anxiety: This involves reducing anxiety related to learning grammar, such as through relaxation techniques or positive self-talk.

Largely, O'Malley and Chamot's model emphasizes the importance of metacognitive strategies, such as setting goals and monitoring progress, for effective grammar learning. Additionally, the model emphasizes the importance of cognitive strategies, such as practicing and analyzing grammar rules, and social/affective strategies, such as interacting with others and reducing anxiety, in promoting successful grammar learning.

Vicenta's classification (2003) is based on three main categories: planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Planning strategies focus on setting goals and creating a plan to achieve those goals, monitoring strategies involve keeping track of progress and making adjustments as

needed, and evaluation strategies involve assessing one's own performance and making changes to improve learning outcomes.

In contrast, Rebecca Oxford (2017) suggests a classification which includes five categories: ***metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive control, cognitive strategy use, social/affective strategy use,*** and ***resource management.*** Metacognitive knowledge involves understanding one's own cognitive processes and learning strategies, metacognitive control involves using that knowledge to plan, monitor, and evaluate learning, cognitive strategy use involves using specific cognitive strategies to learn, social/affective strategy use involves using social and emotional strategies to learn, and resource management involves managing resources such as time, materials, and support.

While both classifications focus on metacognitive strategies, Vicenta's classification (2003) is more focused on the specific strategies that learners can use to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning, while Oxford's classification is broader and includes a wider range of strategies related to different aspects of the learning process. Additionally, Oxford's classification includes more emphasis on social and affective strategies.

Social and affective strategies can likewise be applied to ESP (English for Specific Purposes) grammar learning to improve learning outcomes. Some of the social and affective strategies that can we singled out with the suggestion to be applied to ESP grammar learning are:

1. **Cooperation:** This involves working with others to practice using grammar in context, such as through group discussions or peer review activities. In an ESP context, learners can work in groups to analyze and discuss grammar rules and their application in specific situations related to their field of study.

2. **Questioning:** Asking questions of others or oneself to clarify understanding can help learners to identify areas of confusion and seek further explanation or examples. In an ESP context, learners can ask questions related to their field of study, such as asking for clarification

on a specific grammar rule used in a technical report or academic paper.

3. **Using support systems**: Seeking help from others, such as tutors or classmates, when needed can help learners to overcome challenges and improve their understanding of grammar. In an ESP context, learners can seek support from language tutors or subject matter experts to gain a deeper understanding of technical grammar concepts.

4. **Managing emotions:** Regulating emotions to create a positive learning environment can help learners to reduce stress and anxiety related to grammar learning. In an ESP context, learners can engage in relaxation techniques, positive self-talk, and other stress management strategies to create a more positive learning environment.

Nonetheless, studies on metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies show that the effectiveness of strategy training for new tasks can be enhanced only by combining appropriate cognitive strategies with metacognitive strategies (Brown et al., 1983). Learners who lack metacognitive approaches cannot plan, monitor their progress, review their achievements or set future learning goals. Yet, the question of whether the combination of these strategies can be successfully transferred to other contexts is still a matter of discussion, which will be further explored.

On the other hand, social and affective strategies can help learners to improve their motivation, engagement, and understanding of grammar concepts in an ESP context. By working collaboratively, seeking support, and managing emotions, learners can enhance their grammar learning outcomes and achieve greater success in their field of study.

To conclude, language instructors should provide strategy-based learning and help learners select most appropriate learning strategies in order to become proficient in using these strategies.

We also put forward the following pedagogical recommendations for using learning strategies in grammar instruction in the ESP context:

- ***Teachers should raise awareness of learning strategies:*** They

should introduce learners to various learning strategies and raise their awareness of the benefits of using them. This can be done through explicit instruction, modeling, and guided practice.

- *Teachers should provide strategy instruction:* Teachers should provide explicit instruction on how to use specific learning strategies, and provide opportunities for learners to practice using them in context. This can involve teaching learners how to plan their learning, monitor their progress, and reflect on their learning achievements.

- *Teachers should foster autonomy:* Teachers should encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning by providing opportunities for them to use learning strategies independently. This can involve encouraging learners to set goals, plan their learning, and seek feedback on their progress.

- *Teachers themselves should use a variety of didactic strategies* to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of their learners. This can involve using visual aids, mnemonic devices, peer teaching, and other strategies that are appropriate for the learners' level and learning style.

- *Teachers should provide feedback:* Teachers should provide learners with feedback on their use of learning strategies to help them improve their effectiveness. Feedback can be provided through self-reflection, peer review, or teacher feedback

Ultimately, we reiterate that learning grammar in ESP context can be more challenging than learning EFL grammar due to the specificity, technicality, contextualization, time constraints, and motivation issues that learners may face. However, with effective teaching methods, contextualized materials, and a focus on practical language skills, learners can overcome these challenges and master the grammar structures needed for their field or profession.

As a final touch, we should admit that grammar is essential for communicating effectively in any language. It helps to build a strong foundation in each language, as it focuses on the structure and rules of the language. Without having a solid understanding of grammar, it is

difficult to be able to confidently converse in a language. Therefore, it should not be overlooked when learning the language.

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