

**Discussion of possible grammatical pedagogy
for a group of L2 learners**

When you hear a foreigner says ‘me want you go restaurant tonight’, you can understand that he would like to invite you to a dinner. This sentence can communicate the speaker’s message, even though he uses broken English and does not follow correct grammatical rules. However, the ungrammatical sentence can cause misunderstanding, confusion, or even embarrassment. As a result, it has negative effect on communication.

If you would like to have equal status as native speaker in a foreign country, it is important that you use the target language accurately. To do this, you must have knowledge of grammatical structure of that language. Thus, grammar is very important, especially, when you would like to pass the examination, or to live, work, or study in another country (Purcell, 1997, pp. 1-2).

According to Ur (1988, p. 4), grammar may be roughly described as ‘the way a language manipulates and combine words (or bit of words) in order to form longer units of meaning. There is a set of rules which govern how units of meaning may be constructed in any language.’

It means that if learners have grammatical knowledge, they can apply it in order to produce acceptable language. Thus, grammatical knowledge – implicit or explicit – is essential for learning a language; learners cannot produce language if they do not know how to put words together. They should be able to perceive and recognize form of the structure and comprehend its meaning in context as well as to be able to produce well-formed structure that conveys meanings (Ur, 1988, pp. 5 – 6).

When children learn a first language in natural environment, careful plan of learning process may not be necessary. They have plenty of time and motivation in learning a language. So they can learn a language unconsciously. However, learners who learn a language in formal study have less time and motivation. Thus, preparing classroom teaching and learning a language – spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar – is necessary for mastering a target language (Ur, 1988, p.5).

According to Larsen-Freeman (2001, p. 39), structural and communicative approaches are utilized by teachers to teach grammar. The purpose of these two approaches is identical, i.e. to teach students to communicate, though there is argument about the process of learning and teaching to achieve the goal.

Applying structural approach to grammar teaching, first, teacher presents explicit description of grammatical structure rules. Then, students practices form of the structure and later how to use it in communicative way. This approach is often called present, practice, produce (PPP) approach to grammar teaching. Hedge (2000, p. 164) suggested that the role of teacher is important for this approach. In presentation and practice stages, teacher is the corrector. In the production stage, teacher doesn't interrupt students when they speak or write, but feedback is provided later.

Employing communicative approach, the lesson might begin with students' understanding content or completing a task. If students have grammatical problems, attention will be paid to form of the language by encouraging students to notice it. Later, activities that deal with the problem might be introduced (Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1993 cited in Larsen-Freeman 2001, p. 39).

Implementing structural approach to grammar teaching, Ur (1998, pp. 6 – 10) suggested general framework to organize grammar teaching. She proposed four stages: presentation, isolation and explanation, practice, and test. Comparing to present, practice, produce (PPP) approach, I think it is similar, Ur's presentation and isolation and explanation is similar to present stage in PPP approach, though the terminology used is quite different.

a) Presentation

Teachers should present students a text in which a grammatical structure can be found. The purpose is to enable students realise the form and meaning of grammatical structure in both spoken and written form and it will bring it into students' short-term memory. Ur (1996, p 82) also suggested that example of the structure should be presented in meaningful context and visual material may be helpful.

b) Isolation and explanation

Grammatical structure is isolated from its context. The teacher temporarily discusses the rules govern the structures: form, meaning and function of the structure. If the structure is complicated, it may take some time for explanation. But teacher may spend less time to explain simple structure, or the one that is close to students'

native language. The purpose is to ensure students understand the rules of the structure.

According to Ur (1996, p.82), teachers should make the decision if grammatical terminology should be used and which language – student's native language or target language – should be adopted to explain the grammatical structure. Moreover, they should provide the explanation of the structure at the right level – maintain balance between accuracy and details of grammatical structure. Then, they have to consider whether grammatical rule is necessary; then, to select method for explanation – inductive or deductive.

c) Practice

A series of various exercises which is done as classroom exercise and for homework should be provided to students. Its purpose is to enable students to understand the structure fully and transfer the knowledge of structure from short-term memory to long-term memory. Three types of practices are suggested.

First, form-based practice in spoken or written form helps students focus mainly on form and formal rules. When students do a series of this type of exercise, they will have clear understanding of the rules of the structure. Eventually, students will be able to produce correctly pattern. Examples of this type of practice include slot-fillers (student supplies appropriate item into a blank), and transformation (student changes the structure according to the instruction, e.g. change a structure into the plural). However, lacking practice the meaning of the structure is the limitation of this exercise.

Second, when students understand rules of the structure and its application, meaning-based exercises should be given to them. This type of exercise encourages students to produce and perceive both correct forms and meaning of the structure. Some examples include translation a language to or from the native language, slot-filling or multiple exercise which is based on meaning, slot-filling in which alternative of answer not provided, and matching words to make correct sentence that convey meaning.

The third type of exercise emphasises the production and comprehension of meanings for non-linguistic purpose. The exercises use information-gap communication techniques or expressing ideas activities. Students may discuss situations or make up stories using language structure provided.

d) Test

The tests are provided in order to get feedback from students, i.e. to check how well students understand the structure that they have studied.

Considering four grammar teaching stages, Ur suggested that practice stage is the most important since it helps students learn the structure thoroughly and permanently.

She also recommended that good language-practice activities should have a clear objective and encourage active language use.

Two types of objectives in language practice are common. The first one is language-based objective. The focus of the practice is to produce correct form of language. For example, students might do exercise that ask them to transform sentences into past tense. However, it is sometimes rather boring and meaningless. Another type is non-linguistic objective which is more interesting. The students have to use the grammar studied to achieve the objective of the task. For example, students may be asked to solve problems or ask someone to do something. In some cases, two types of objectives are integrated. The non-linguistic objective is the main focus; at the same time students and teacher are aware of linguistic form that should be use in order to achieve the task. It is suggested the objective of a language task should be simple, for example, to narrate the story or find out the solution of the puzzle. It helps students have clear idea what they are going to do.

The teacher should ensure that the tasks are language base; students do not have to spend too much time on making gesture or imagination. It is noticed that students who enjoys doing activities do not always learn the language. Thus, the teacher should ensure that the tasks maximize the use of language during the process of accomplishing the task.

Ur (1996, pp. 83 – 84) advised a variety of grammar practice activities that enable students become familiar with the form and communicative meaning of structure in context so that they are able to produce the structures correctly and communicatively. The activities vary from controlled and accuracy-oriented exercise at the beginning of learning to the ones focusing on fluency in the use of grammar in context.

A series of grammar practice activities varied from form-oriented to meaning-oriented are as follows:

1. Awareness

After teachers introduce the structure, the students should have opportunities to notice that structure which appears in the discourse level and focus on form and/or meaning of the structure.

For example, students are asked to underline examples of past tense in the extracts from newspaper article.

2. Controlled drills

Students are asked to produce examples of the structure using cues arranged by the teacher or text book.

For example

Use the given cues and make statement about John. You should use the model structure provided.

‘John drinks tea but he doesn’t drink coffee.’

a) like: ice cream / cake

3. Meaningful drills

Students are provided of limited choices of vocabulary to produce controlled structure which is meaningful.

For example

Write true statements about person you know well and using the model provided.

He/She likes ice cream; or He/She doesn’t like ice cream.

a) enjoy: playing tennis

4. Guided, meaningful practice

Students use a set pattern to produce their own sentences, but they have opportunities to use their own vocabulary.

For example, students are given the cue ‘if you had a million dollars,’ and suggest what they would like to do.

5. (Structure-based) free sentence composition

Teacher provides visual or situational cues and asks students to make their own sentences to describe them. However, teacher still directs students to use the structure.

For example, students are asked to use appropriate tense to describe a picture of people doing different things.

6. (Structure-based) discourse composition

Students are given chance to run discussion or write passage on a given tasks. They are also instructed to use some structure in their spoken or written discourse.

For example, teacher gives a class a situation ‘your good friend cheated in an important exam.’ Students are instructed to use modals (e.g. might, should, must, can, could) to discuss solution.

7. Free discourse

The students do activity which is similar in structure-based discourse composition but specific direction to use structure is not provided. However, the task itself is likely to enable students use the structure required.

For example, the task is similar to 6 but the instruction to use modals is not given.

The grammatical pedagogy that I have discussed is useful for teacher who would like to teach students English structure and how to use that structure for communication. To illustrate its applications in classroom teaching, I selected section 13.8 from Quirk and Greenbaum (pp. 380 – 381) in which usage of choices of relative pronouns (who, whom, which, that, and zero relative pronoun) in restrictive relative clauses is discussed. However, I do not focus on zero relative pronoun as I think should master the use of relative pronoun before they move on to this rule. The reason that I chose this small section that discusses one of many types of postmodifiers of noun is that I believe students learn best when one grammatical structure is presented at a time. Also, I would like to demonstrate samples of material discussing relative clause from the beginning until the end of the lesson on relative clause.

Samples of teaching material presented below, I believe, are appropriate for a fundamental English course for first-year Thai University students. The samples materials of teaching restrictive relative clause follow the teaching stages suggested by Ur (1998), including presentation, isolation and explanation, and practice. However, I did not illustrate samples of material in test stage. Also, in practice stage, I illustrate many types of classroom activities suggested by Ur (1996) which is helpful for students to understand the structure, meaning and how to use this structure in communication.

Samples of teaching materials

Presentation Stage

Students listen to a conversation about a party (the tape script is below), then they have to answer the comprehension questions as follows:

1. Where are Alice and Sukanya?
2. What kind of food do students bring to the party?
3. What is the prize for the winner?
4. Who organizes the party?

Next students may be asked to look at the tape script and practice the conversation with their partner.

To help students perceive the structure of relative clause, they will be asked to underline nouns and its modification which is found in this tape script. After that, teacher will ask them to focus on nouns followed by relative clause.

Tape script

Alice: Wow, the party is wonderful and there are a lot of people here.

Sukanya: Right. Many students wear traditional Thai dress too.

Alice: Clothes are unique and beautiful. Sukanya, I think I smell some foods.

Sukanya: Oh, it's the smell of Thai food over there.

Alice: Let's have a look.

Sukanya: Sure. Have I told you that we have a food contest too?

Alice: No, you didn't tell me.

Sukanya: Oh, really? Thai students bring Thai food that they cooked by themselves and share with other students.

Alice: And do you bring anything?

Sukanya: Yes, it's in this box. And everyone here tastes the foods and vote which one is the best.

Alice: Including me?

Sukanya: Yes, sure. You're welcome to taste them too.

Alice: That would be great. I will taste all of them.

Sukanya: There is a prize for the winner too.

- Alice: Which one is it?
- Sukanya: Do you see the big green box which is on the table?
That's the one for the winner.
- Alice: Oh, I see.
- Sukanya: Come on, Alice. I'd like to introduce you to the man
who organizes this party.
- Alice: Which one is he?
- Sukanya: Let me see. Oh, he is the one who wears red shirt.
- Alice: Oh, I see.
- Sukanya: Alice, this is Somphop, the president of Thai Society
Club.
- Alice: Hi, nice to meet you.
- Somphop: Hi, nice to meet you here too. I hope you'll enjoy the
party. ...

(Author's material)

Isolation and Explanation Stage

Teacher gives two sets of sentences to students and asks them to work in group of three to four. They have study the samples of the sentences and discuss rules of relative pronouns. Then, discuss their conclusion with the class.

Data set 1

1. at this stage. The police also say they found the body of a white man **who** is believed to have been shot dead in a lorry on a highway, east of
2. didn't seem too perturbed about Brand's missing wallet. He was a man **who** didn't wear his worries lightly. And a missing wallet which would
3. He was drunk all right," Schrader replied. Raoul's one of those people **who** just never show it. The only telltale sign is his aggressive-ness,
4. [M01] Course you can. [F07] Er I echo the sentiments of the lady **who** said about your calling people flower and girl. I think it's fantastic.
Source: <http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>
(selected samples from entering query: 'who' with American sources de-selected)
5. covered in mud and her shirt in grease. In fact some Italian engineers **whom** we had met had referred to her as 'Fred the mechanic'. Earlier in the
6. Louis Althusser, one of the most influential of the French Marxists **whom** Professor West admires. In an interview that he gave in 1968, this

7. that I've known and worked with, as well as to the many UMPA supporters **whom** I don't know personally, but who have shared their time and generous

Source: <http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>
(selected samples from entering query: 'whom' with American sources de-selected)

Data set 2

1. is an extra bonus. The Straits of Gibraltar act as a funnel for whales **which** migrate between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean. Because the
2. in amber from the Jurassic period, scientists extract the D.N.A. **which** proves to be dinosaur, and create a Jurassic theme park on a remote
3. local priest to back it up. We were asked for our bank account details **which** I would not give out. We asked for a banker's draft to be sent, but
4. [ZF1] as [ZF0] as such [FOX] Mm. Mm [M01] But we've got the next step **which** then introduces something called er value for money or competitiveness

Source: <http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>
(selected samples from entering query: 'which' with American sources de-selected)

5. the runway lights also failed. The general view of passengers and staff **that** I met was of absolute chaos, both in the airports and on the roads

Source: <http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>
(selected sample from entering query: 'that' with American sources de-selected)

6. ways. We need large amounts if we are to carry out all the vital work **that** we aim to do. [p] Headquarters can supply reading lists and make
7. We do in R E. [F01] [tc text=coughs] But erm I just the sort of books **that** you look at in English are they all written by English people or [F02]

Source: <http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>
(selected samples from entering query: 'that+PPS' with American sources de-selected)

After discussion, teacher gives summary of structural rules to ensure that every student understand the rules of the structure. The sample of summary of the structure is as follows:

Relative Pronouns

relative pronoun	use	example
who	Subject of object pronoun for people	I told you about the woman <i>who</i> lives next door.
which	subject or object pronoun for animals and things	Do you see the cat <i>which</i> is lying on the roof?
Whom	object pronoun for people, especially in non-defining relative clauses (in defining relative clauses we colloquially prefer <i>who</i>)	I was invited by the professor <i>whom</i> I met at the conference.
that	subject or object pronoun for people, animals and things in defining relative clauses (<i>who</i> or <i>which</i> are also possible)	I don't like the table <i>that</i> stands in the kitchen.

Subject Pronoun or Object Pronoun?

Subject and object pronouns cannot be distinguished by their forms - who, which, that are used for subject and object pronouns. You can, however, distinguish them as follows:

If the relative pronoun is followed by a verb, the relative pronoun is a *subject pronoun*. Subject pronouns must always be used.

the apple **which** *is* lying on the table

If the relative pronoun is not followed by a verb (but by a noun or pronoun), the relative pronoun is an *object pronoun*. Object pronouns can be dropped in defining relative clauses, which are then called *Contact Clauses*.

the apple (**which**) *George* lay on the table

Defining Relative Clauses

Defining relative clauses (also called *identifying relative clauses* or *restrictive relative clauses*) give detailed information defining a general term or expression. Defining relative clauses are not put in commas.

Imagine, Tom is in a room with five girls. One girl is talking to Tom and you ask somebody whether he knows this girl. Here the relative clause defines which of the five girls you mean.

Do you know the girl who is talking to Tom?

Defining relative clauses are often used in definitions.

A seaman is someone who works on a ship.

Object pronouns in defining relative clauses can be dropped. (Sentences with a relative clause without the relative pronoun are called *Contact Clauses*.)

The boy (**who/whom**) we met yesterday is very nice.

Source: <http://www.ego4u.com/en/cram-up/grammar/relative-clauses#h01>

Practice Stage

1. Awareness

a) Read the passage, then complete the sentence

Stonehenge

Stonehenge is a mystical place. Its stone circles are probably more than 4,000 years old. The huge stones come from an area about 30 km north of Stonehenge. The smaller stones possibly are from the Preseli Mountains in Wales, almost 400 km away from Stonehenge.



Nobody knows for sure what the function of Stonehenge was. Maybe it was a druid temple. Maybe it was a sacrificial altar. Maybe it was some kind of observatory.



Grammar on the Text

Use *who* for people; for everything else use *which*.

Decide whether to use *who* or *which*.

1. The people _____ built Stonehenge lived several thousand years ago.
2. The huge stones _____ are more than 6 metres high weigh about 45 tons.
3. The smaller stones weigh about 4 tons and are from an area in Wales _____ is 400 kilometres away from Stonehenge.
4. As Stonehenge lies in a large field, tourists _____ come to this place can already see the stones from a distance.
5. Everybody _____ has visited Stonehenge says that it is very impressive.

Source: <http://www.ego4u.com/en/read-on/countries/uk/tour/stonehenge#exercises>

b) Choose the correct definition.

1	A library is _____.	<u>an animal which lives on meat.</u>
2	A butterfly is _____.	<u>a word which has the same meaning as another word.</u>
3	A waiter is _____.	<u>the season of the year when plants begin to grow.</u>
4	A night is _____.	<u>a person who steals purses from pockets and bags</u>
5	A bricklayer is _____.	<u>a person who builds houses.</u>
6	A dictionary is _____.	<u>a building where you can borrow books.</u>
7	A pickpocket is _____.	<u>a book where you can look up words in another language.</u>
8	A carnivore is _____.	<u>an insect which has colourful wings.</u>
9	A synonym is _____.	<u>a man who serves drinks and food in a restaurant.</u>
10	Spring is _____.	<u>the time of a day when it is dark outside.</u>

Source: <http://www.ego4u.com/en/cram-up/grammar/relative-clauses/exercises>

c) Decide whether the relative pronoun is a subject pronoun or an object pronoun.

1. Do you know the girl **who** I danced with?
2. Do you know the girl **who** danced with me?
3. The apples **that** are lying on the table are bad.
4. The apples **that** we bought in the shop are bad.
5. We will stay at a hotel **which** is not far from the beach.
6. We will stay at a hotel **which** my friend has recommended to us.
7. That is a museum **which** I like very much.
8. That is a museum **which** lies in the heart of the town.
9. This is the man **who** Barbara visited in Scotland.
10. This is the man **who** lives in Scotland.

Source: <http://www.ego4u.com/en/cram-up/grammar/relative-clauses/exercises>

2. Controlled drills

Write or say statements about Paul, use the model on the following examples:

Paul likes the teacher who doesn't assign too much homework.

Paul doesn't like cheese and onion potato chips that he bought from ASDA.

- a) like: girl / plays the piano
- b) doesn't like: man / lives next door
- c) like: novel / is written by Susan Cooper

- d) doesn't like: standard lamp / is painted in red
(Author's material)

3. Meaningful drills

Talk to your classmates and write down their name. Then, compose true statements about them according to the following model.

Example: like: girl / wears her hair in plaits

Henry likes the girl who wears her hair in plaits. OR

Henry doesn't like the girl who wears her hair in plaits.

- a) like: teacher / generous
b) like: singer / wears baggy jeans
c) like: film / is about history
d) buy: new cell phone / send and receive emails
e) live: city / is too crowded

(Author's material)

4. Guided, meaningful practice

Use the given cues and your own ideas to complete the sentence.

For example: I'd like to buy a new cell phone

I'd like to buy a new mobile phone which can take photos.

- a) I'd like to buy a new laptop
- b) I'd love to watch movie
- c) I like the actor
- d) I read a book
- e) Last night, I rang my friend

(Author's material)

5. (Structure based) free sentence composition

During Christmas vacation, you and your classmate shopped for clothes at a store in West Quay. However, you are unhappy with the quality of the products and the service provided by sales representatives. Thus, you complained about the problems with your friend.

Use noun followed by a relative clause when complaining about the problems.

(Author's material)

6. (Structure based) discourse composition

During Christmas vacation, you shopped for clothes at a store in West Quay. However, you are unhappy with the quality of the products and the service provided by sales representatives. Thus, you decided to write a letter of complaint to the store manager.

The problem you are going to complain about should be expressed by noun followed by a relative clause.

(Author's material)

7. Free discourse

During Christmas vacation, you shopped for clothes at a store in West Quay. However, you are unhappy with the quality of the products and the service provided by sales representatives. Thus, you decided to write a letter of complaint to the store manager.

(Author's material)

I think the stages of teaching grammar that I presented is practical for language classroom. Particularly, a series of activities suggested by Ur (1996) are useful for students to master the language structure. Doing a series of activities enables students to understand rule, meaning, and usage of structure and to be able to use the structure in communication which is the goal of language teaching.

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