Teaching Grammar to a Grammar-Free Generation

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By

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PREFACE

EFL teaching is an interesting and at the same time very responsible issue. As teachers we not only have to perform in front of our learners but also have to deal with a huge number of various responsibilities, selection of material and application of appropriate methodology being in the front line. During the last few years I have often heard from my students, and not only from them, that their main target in learning English is just communication, either personal or formal. While considering communication to be a detached function of language learning, many students refuse to learn its grammar, claiming it to be useless and boring. Of course, no one will blame learners for these ideas since they are training to get a "ready-made meal", rather than to be "kitchen chefs". Yet we, language specialists, clearly understand that no profound knowledge of any language is possible without knowing its grammar. Thus the main goal of this book is to present to EFL teachers, English language instructors, textbook writers and other specialists directly and indirectly dealing with the teaching of English language, new ways of presenting and practising grammar. The tasks and activities presented in this book will give a clear understanding of grammar teaching techniques that we can use in our EFL classes. By this means we can also reconsider our general teaching methodology, as well as make our classes more interesting and interactive. I could not miss the chance to touch upon creative grammar teaching activities, including both paper-based and technology-based ones. Moreover, the research conducted within the last three years has made it possible to elicit new grammar presentation methods which will turn EFL classes into fascinating and productive affairs. Finally, the book emphasises the importance of material evaluation, suggesting its types, reasons and functions.

INTRODUCTION

Over recent decades, language teaching, particularly English language teaching, has become one of the central issues in curriculum design for obligatory education (primary and secondary schools), as well as at non-obligatory levels (universities, international language schools, etc.). Alongside the four main language skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking, grammar has always played an important role in the teaching of English. However, due to some innovations in general language teaching, the approach to grammar and its teaching today has become far less homogeneous than in the past. One of the most pressing issues, requiring very attentive investigation, is that of the role of textbooks as the main teaching and learning materials in language learning. As we know, most textbooks nowadays are produced not only in print formats but also as CDs and DVDs to be used on smartboards. Such texts typically reformulate instructions for students, so instead of asking learners to "put the correct word into the gap", they are asked to "click on the correct answer". This implies a radical change in the terms of classroom management, from a traditional one (student and a paper book) to a more technological one (student and a smartboard or computer). Consequently, these aspects of textbooks have changed, and we might have expected that the approaches and techniques adopted in the textbooks themselves would also have changed. However, there would be little dissent among specialists to the claim that in our EFL departments just a small number of teachers follow these innovative trends, most of us to a large extent avoiding the use of new technological tools in our classrooms.

Hence, in turning to the literature on this issue, some related questions emerge, such as the essence of evaluation and the role of new innovations in language teaching. Moreover, in dealing with textbooks and the methods and techniques of grammar presentation therein, I found that few of the works evaluated met my expectations; most notably, a communicative approach to grammar teaching was often absent or very much marginalized. Therefore, it seemed feasible that, by taking into account an analysis of the presence of grammar and its pedagogical treatment in textbooks, we might achieve the main goal of creating the most suitable and successful methods of grammar teaching to be used in future EFL textbooks.

Bearing all these questions in mind, the present study will provide an overview of the main approaches to the teaching of grammar, including activities used for presentation, practice and production. For this purpose, I will make a distinction between traditional and modern approaches. By traditional approaches to grammar teaching, I mean the methods that were used before the 21st century and which continue to be very influential today (including methods such as grammar-translation, rule-learning and error correction, and teaching grammar in context). In terms of the most recent approaches, these began to appear towards the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, as a response to a new wave of contemporary language teaching, one orientated towards communicative approaches to language in general (including consciousness-raising and the communicative approach, as well as task-based approaches and those involving comprehension and ungrammaticality judgements).

In addition, I will also analyse a sample of the most common English textbooks used worldwide with particular reference to the teaching of grammar, in an attempt to establish what methods and techniques of grammar presentation, practice and production are currently used in textbooks. The study, then, will be innovative in that it will aim to make a significant contribution to the teaching of English and its grammar. It will provide such important information as: the importance of evaluation; methods of and approaches to grammar presentation, practice and production; and, mainly, the analysis of twenty mainstream textbooks, using a qualitative approach to the study.

CHAPTER ONE

TEXTBOOKS, EFL MATERIALS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN EFL CLASSES

1.1. General overview

Teaching a foreign language to a group of students can be compared to a performance on stage. In other words, the EFL teacher is not only a person who tries to make his/her students learn a language, but s/he is also, before that, someone who acts in front of an audience. However, like an actor who has to wear different costumes, prepare speeches and use different artistic techniques to persuade the spectators, a teacher should also use some tools and techniques to persuade the students. Definitely, teaching materials are the main sources in each class, sometimes saving learners from teachers' deficiencies (Allwright, 1975:8).

The question then is: what do we mean when we say materials? Is it just a book which helps teachers to follow the programme, or is it a pile of books and resources that are concerned with language delivery? Obviously, all of us know that the word "materials" carries a very broad notion. So, if I started counting all the existing language teaching materials, or at least some of them, I would need ages to complete this book. At the same time, if every teacher uses the materials in his/her own way, without any goal or purpose, the teaching process will be chaotic. Thus, according to Rossner and Bolotho (1995:133), "materials may contribute in some way, but they cannot determine goals." Textbooks can then be regarded as a superior form of language teaching material, which aim to regulate the language teaching process.

Similarly, many researchers (Ur 1988; Hutchinson and Waters 1993; Cunningsworth 1995) agree that a "textbook" or a "coursebook" is one of the most essential and important components of the language teaching materials. Cunningsworth (1995:7) also defines the multiple roles of a textbook. In this respect, he claims that it is:

- A resource for the presentation of material (spoken and written);
- A resource of activities for learner practice and communicative interaction;
- A reference source for learners on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.;
- A source of stimulation and ideas for classroom language activities;
- A syllabus including learning objectives which have already been determined;
- A resource for self-directed learning or self-access work; and, finally;
- A support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence.

Harmer (1991:257) also maintains that the use of textbooks is of great benefit for teachers and students. Consequently, if the textbook is good, it covers most of the above-mentioned aspects and it will serve a good purpose for a teacher – but if not, the teacher will need to make use of other language teaching materials. According to Richards (2006:3), textbooks constitute the basis for much of the language input learners receive and they are central for the language practice that occurs in the classroom. Textbooks are also an effective way of providing the learner with security, systems, progress and revision, whilst at the same time saving precious time and offering teachers the resources they need to base their lessons on (Tomlinson, 2012:158). However, in order to be appealing to teachers and students, textbooks should frequently be reconsidered; i.e. the authors should incorporate some new information (in terms of language and its components), update the language teaching methods and the general content, etc. In other words, being the major instrument of a language teaching process, textbooks are more likely to introduce changes that may lead to innovations. Thus every year publishing houses produce thousands of textbooks, adding to their general titles expressions such as "New", "Modern", etc. (*New Headway*, *New Cutting Edge*, *A Modern Course of English*). The main questions here are: Are these textbooks really new and modern? Do they meet present-day requirements? Has the author done any cardinal changes in presenting the grammar, the vocabulary or any other aspect of the language? Sheldon (1988:239) writes that textbooks merely grow from and imitate other textbooks, and do not admit the winds of change from research, methodological experimentation, or classroom feedback. A few years later, Tomlinson (2012:152) adds that most of the writers rely heavily on a retrieval form – a repertoire, cloning successful publications and spontaneous "inspiration". In brief, some of the writers rely mostly on a new cover and

vivid pictures rather than on the actual content of their textbooks. This comes from the common fears of both authors and publishers who believe that innovations might not be accepted by their customers. Thus, almost no changes can be observed in annual textbook publications and, unfortunately, teachers have to imitate the methods of the best-sellers.

Conversely, it would be wrong to blame the authors for their repetitions. We can never improve anything unless we experiment with it; and one way of experimenting with textbooks is to evaluate them.

1.1.1. Textbooks and learners' needs

One of the most significant characteristics of any textbook is to meet the learners' needs. Yet, we should clearly know what these learners' needs are and "how the textbooks relate to the needs of the learners" (Tomlinson, 2003:47). According to Tomlinson (2003:134), the basic structure of any textbook is a transition from the simplest content to a more difficult one, i.e. the learners need to learn "simple" structures first and then systematically move on to the more "complex" ones. In other words, most textbooks are based on a linear model of language learning, leading from the simple to the more complex grammatical structures and vocabulary (Mares, 2003:130). This kind of structure allows students not to lose motivation and to reach some definite levels in the target language. At the same time, learners expect the textbooks to make learning easier and more enjoyable (Cunningsworth, 1995), i.e. the content of the textbooks, the activities and the language presented in them should be interesting and challenging. Thus, following the common principles of textbook construction and considering learners' needs, Cunningsworth (1995) proposes some general requirements for writing a textbook:

- There should be a controlled presentation of language;
- Rules need to be learned, either inductively or deductively;
- There should be a balance of accuracy and fluency;
- Skills need to be learned both separately and in an integrated way;
- Communicative practice should resemble real-life language use;
- Learning and acquisition each have their place;
- Learners should be actively and fully involved in the lessons;
- Learners should use language creatively and activities should be personalized, where possible; and, finally,
- Learning activities should be varied.

Moreover, by focusing on "learners' needs", we clearly understand that all learners are different, and what works for one learner will not work for another. Thus, the main difficulty for a textbook writer might be the equilibrium between theory and practice, and the selection of a universal content that would fit most of the learners. In the light of this, textbooks should form a general conception about the country of the target language, its culture and traditions. While writing a textbook, the author should bear in mind that the learners may come from different countries and possess different backgrounds, traditions, customs, views, visions, etc. Consequently, it will be of great importance to take the learner's culture, age, and even sex into account, i.e. to ensure that the textbook sets its material in the right kind of social and cultural mores, age-group, etc. (Cunningsworth, 1995:90). Hence, the author should keep a balance between the presentation of the values in the country of a target language and the learners' own values. Moreover, Karavas-Doukas (1998:25) maintains that, apart from the development of students' linguistic repertoire and sociolinguistic skills, textbooks should strive to have students discover new knowledge about the language, make choices and actively participate in the learning process rather than passively accept and digest new information. Due to this, textbooks are designed to give cohesion to the language teaching and learning process by providing direction, support, and specific language-based activities aimed at offering classroom practice for students (Mares, 2003:130). According to Rea-Dickins (1992), a particular view of culture has become influential within the field of Applied Linguistics in its interest in the teaching of culture along with the teaching of the language. Thus, the perception of culture is paralleled with the perception of language, and the concept of the target language teaching (L2) is transferred to the target culture teaching (C2).

Thus, one of the main questions is how to achieve the balance between language and culture (context). Cunningsworth (1995:90) suggests that, in addition to the physical context, the relationship, modes of behaviour and intentions of the characters should be interpretable by students, so that they can relate the language used to its purpose in the social context. I believe that some people will agree with the idea that it would be more practical to do writing on the process of cooking puddings than on the cooking of Spanish "tortilla", or Azerbaijani "dolma". The learners of English should first be acquainted with the culture and cuisine of the target language and then enlarge their knowledge by learning about other countries and their cultures from afar. Another example of this can be the presentation of the political system in Africa at an earlier stage of language learning, followed by the presentation of the political systems of Great Britain or the United

States. This means, for sure, that such nuances should be treated deeply. For this reason, Rea-Dickens (1992:19) considers the evaluation of context to be of fundamental importance. However, it is not only cultural values that are important in the textbooks; social, psychological and pedagogical validity is of great relevance as well. We cannot disregard such important factors as teachers' abilities, skills, beliefs and views. It is not a secret that there are countries where the notion of independence does not carry the same concept as it does in the US or in any other developed country. At the same time, there are still some countries where topics like sex, abortion, or even those related to love relationships are regarded as taboos. Therefore, in order not to puzzle the learners and teachers, the writer of a textbook should treat these topics in a very delicate way.

Besides cultural perspectives, textbooks should also consider the teaching and learning approaches as such. A book overloaded with grammar explanations will definitely be too boring, whereas a lot of drilling exercises will exhaust the learner and may bring about negative attitudes towards the learning of a language. Many of the learners, young and old, quickly become disillusioned because of inappropriate or stultifying methods and materials (Rossner & Bolotho, 1995:5). Apart from all this, another important purpose of the evaluation process is to see to what extent there is a good balance in the treatment of reading, writing, speaking and listening; otherwise a unilateral approach to the language teaching may exhaust most of the students. Moreover, we should provide grammar and vocabulary activities inside these four language skills, since one can hardly imagine the grammar/vocabulary pattern not being included in any discourse, say, in a written text, a listening exercise, a speaking pattern or in a piece of writing. Thus, we need to check if the course adequately treats all four skills, taking the level and overall aims into account, and also if there is a suitable balance between them (Cunningsworth, 1995:64), i.e. if all these four skills are equally distributed in terms of number of pages, exercises and sub-units devoted to each of them.

However, according to Richards (2001:3), no commercial textbook will ever make a perfect fit for learners' needs. This scholar distinguishes between two factors that are involved in the development of commercial textbooks: those representing the interests of the author and those representing the interests of the publisher. In most cases these two factors never coincide. That is why those textbooks that are externally attractive often may not correspond to the course needs, whereas the books with simple unattractive colours and few pictures are usually not appealing for the users.

All in all, in order to write a new textbook that will fit the learners' needs and meet all the previously noted requirements, old textbooks should first be carefully studied and evaluated.

1.2. Evaluation and its importance in EFL teaching

Evaluation means different things to different people (Anderson, 1998:164). A large number of researchers (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Weir and Roberts, 1994; Lynch, 1996; Ellis, 1998; Kiely and Rea-Dickins, 2005) define evaluation as a form of enquiry which starts from research and systematic approaches and terminates with decision-making; others postulate it as a process of systematically collecting and analysing information in order to form value judgments based on firm evidence. Kiely (2005:5) states that evaluation is a part of the novice teacher's checklist to guide the development of initial lesson plans and teaching practice, a process of determining learning achievements or student satisfaction, and a dimension of the analysis of data in a formal evaluation or a research study. "Evaluation" being used somewhat ambiguously in relation to other terms such as assessment and testing (Lynch, 1996:2), in this book I will strictly refer to textbook evaluation, which I find to be of great importance in English language teaching.

Thus, the process of evaluation is not as simple as it may seem at first sight. Before asking – "what is the purpose of evaluation?" – we should understand what we mean by evaluation. In general, evaluation, like selection, is a matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose (Rubdy, 2003:37), thus being an intrinsic part of teaching and learning (Rea-Dickins, 2000:3). Evaluation is about making judgment calls: *yes* or *no*, *in* or *out*, *buy it* or *do not buy it*, *thumbs up*, *thumbs down* (Bird and Schemann, 2012:284). In fact, evaluation is not restricted to the context of education; it is a part of our everyday life (Rea-Dickins, 2000:3), formal and informal.

Moreover, evaluation can often bring about positive effects because when we consider the strengths and weaknesses of materials, we can filter the best out and achieve perfect results. Thus, evaluation can be considered as a very important step towards the improvement of many processes, classroom innovations and teaching development being in the forefront. Before applying any evaluation, we should clearly understand what its reasons and purposes are.

1.2.1. Reasons for evaluation: its aims, purposes and functions

Evaluations are requested for a variety of reasons; in fact, the most important question that has to be addressed at this stage is: Why is this evaluation required? (Alderson, 1992:275). Depending on who is going to evaluate what, the scope of the reasons may vary from several to dozens. One reason may be explaining and confirming existing procedures (Rea-Dickins, 1998:8), where the purpose of the evaluator is to learn why something is working well; another reason may be obtaining the information that can bring about innovation or change.

Brown and Rodgers (2002:247) consider that one of the reasons for undertaking an evaluation process is of general importance in education studies in terms of the money and energy invested in them over the years. For instance, very often, in order to introduce some kind of innovation in English language teaching, universities spend a lot of money buying new textbooks. However, due to some reasons, teachers cannot work with these textbooks, which simply do not suit the curriculum of the institution. Students invest substantial sums of money in tuition and materials for learning English (Rossner and Bolotho, 1995:5) and then it happens that they should put the textbooks aside because of their inappropriateness. Such cases seem to be very frequent in many institutions, and, in order to prevent them, textbook evaluation is crucial.

Unlike the reasons for evaluation which should be precise, the purposes of evaluation can be carried out in a variety of ways (Rubdy, 2003:41). One of the general purposes, however, is to collect information systematically in order to indicate the worth or merit of a programme or project (Weir & Roberts, 1994). There is a need to implement an evaluation which yields results (Rea-Dickins, 1998); otherwise the evaluation will serve for nothing. Since language is pragmatic by its very nature (Rea-Dickins, 1998), evaluation should be, first of all, of practical use to teachers, learners, course leaders, etc. Evaluation feeds directly into policy-making or action directed at course improvement; it is an inherently practical affair (Ellis, 1998:9) and, naturally, its purpose could be expanded to include an evaluation of the teacher's performance, classroom dynamics, the student's performance, the available resources (Brown and Rodgers, 2002), and other variables.

Generally speaking, researchers differentiate between two main evaluation purposes, *general purposes,* which include evaluation for the purpose of accountability, evaluation for the purpose of curriculum development, and evaluation for the purpose of self-development; and *specific purposes*, i.e. evaluation of the classroom learning materials (textbooks) (Rea-Dickins, 2000:27). Hence it is not only the old printed

textbooks but also the new textbooks that should be judged, to see what they might be good for and in what situations they could be expected to be successful (Cunningsworth, 1995).

Finally, before starting any evaluation, we should consider the types of evaluation, the criteria of each type, and the ways we can use each type for our analysis.

1.2.2. Types of evaluation

Evaluation differs in purpose, in personnel, in formality and in timing (Tomlinson, 2003:23). So, all these parameters bring about different types of evaluation. With reference to this matter, some scholars (Sheldon, 1988; Cunningsworth, 1995; Lynch, 1996; Tomlinson, 2003) divide the evaluation process into three stages (i.e. into two types): *pre-use, in-use,* and *post-use*. They mostly bring examples from the domain of evaluating textbooks; however, these types of evaluation may occur in other cases as well (for example, evaluation of language teaching methods, material evaluation, etc.).

Defining the *pre-use* evaluation, Cunningsworth (1995:15) supports the idea that "evaluation can take place before a textbook is used, during its use and after its use, depending on the circumstances and the purposes for which the evaluation is being undertaken". The scholar adds that the most common type of evaluation – *pre-use* evaluation is also the most difficult one, as there is no actual experience of using the book for us to draw on. In this case we are observing the future/potential performance of the textbook. As for Tomlinson (2003:23), the *pre-use* evaluation is about predictions for the potential value of materials for their users.

The second type of evaluation is *in-use* evaluation, which refers to material evaluation whilst the material is in use (Cunningsworth, 1995:14); for instance, when a newly introduced textbook is being monitored or when a well-established but ageing textbook is being assessed to see whether it should be considered for a replacement. Tomlinson (2003) terms this type of evaluation a *whilst-use* evaluation and claims that this type of evaluation involves measuring the value of materials whilst using them or whilst observing them being used. This type of evaluation can perfectly fit textbook writers (if they have access to EFL classes) and, of course, teachers who can organize their evaluation process in a planned and structured way. Thus, Tomlinson (2003:25) suggests the following list of points that can be measured during the whilst-use/in-use evaluation:

- Clarity of instructions;
- Clarity of layout;
- Comprehensibility of texts;
- Credibility of tasks;
- Achievability of performance objectives;
- Potential for localization;
- Practicality of the materials;
- Teachability of the materials;
- Flexibility of the materials;
- Appeal of the materials;
- Motivating power of the materials;
- Impact of the materials; and, finally,
- Effectiveness in facilitating short-term learning.

At first sight, the above list may seem to be too broad and somewhat unrelated to the evaluation of textbooks. However, if we remember that up to now a textbook has played the roles of a curriculum instructor, a teacher guide, and a most commonly used EFL material, all the doubts will dispel. Finally, *post-use* evaluation provides retrospective assessment of a textbook's performance and can be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses which emerge over a period of continuous use (Cunningsworth, 1995:14). It should be considered as the most valuable type of evaluation as it can measure the actual effects of materials on the users (Tomlinson, 2003:25). This type of evaluation can help to decide whether to use the textbook in the future or not. It is particularly important with respect to the short self-contained courses that repeat from time to time.

According to Sheldon (1988:245), when a textbook is selected its success or failure can only be meaningfully determined during and after its period of classroom use by ignoring the *pre-use* evaluation. Additionally, Lynch (1996:5) distinguishes *external* and *internal* evaluation: by external evaluation he understands evaluation that can be fulfilled by an external person who is not involved in the language teaching process, whereas internal evaluation involves programme staff, teachers, administrators, etc. As to Lynch (1996:5), external evaluation is carried out for the sake of revealing the programme's success and its greater productivity, whereas internal evaluation is useful for taking advantage of the close understanding of the programme context by teachers, programme staff, and others involved in the teaching process. However, we may not agree with external evaluation because someone not involved in the teaching and learning process can hardly give any sensible appraisal of any of its components. As

regards the evaluation of textbooks, nothing can be evaluated or assessed until it is fully used.

Another important type of evaluation is a teacher-led evaluation which emphasises the active and purposeful participation of teachers in this process (Rea-Dickins and Germaine, 1992; Weir and Roberts, 1994, Kiely, 2001). Thus, today, evaluation has reached the point when not so much the authors or the stakeholders or the principals of educational institutions should do the evaluation but mainly the teachers should do it themselves… (Tomlinson, 2003:73). Moreover, emphasising the importance of a teacher-led evaluation, Rea-Dickins (2000:67) states:

> *"It is important for users of an innovation to be involved in its evaluation. Firstly, the ELT practitioners know their context well, in many cases better than an external evaluator. The expert may know what questions to ask and how to obtain the relevant information, but teachers with experience gained over long periods of time have the advantage of being better able to explain and offer different and relevant interpretations of various classroom phenomena".*

In the textbook selection process, teachers need to consider the equilibrium between the curriculum, the textbook and the practical issue of its usability by teachers and the students. Once a textbook has been selected, teachers need to analyse the resources in the textbook, to create a plan for daily lessons and for the whole course. This will help them both to adapt and to supplement what is already in the textbook in the most efficient way (Bird and Schemann, 1991:391). In other words, prior to using a textbook, a teacher needs to read the whole book from start to finish, including any appendices (Bird and Schemann, 1991:385). This is quite obvious because no published textbook will perfectly fit a particular teacher and a particular class of students in a particular setting. Teachers should expect to both adapt and supplement textbooks using principled approaches (Bird and Schemann, 1991:387). All in all, "… evaluation is important for the teachers because it can provide a wealth of information to use for the future direction of classroom practice, for the planning of courses, and for the management of learning tasks and students" (Rea-Dickens, 2000:3).

Thus, teacher-led evaluation has an unprecedented role in effective EFL teaching, since the teacher is a key classroom player who deals with in-class interaction and language teaching. A teacher-led evaluation takes aspects of a planned or intended curriculum as a focal point. The reasons for a particular focus may derive from concerns about effectiveness or efficiency, that is, the extent to which aspects of the programme promote learning as

intended, or represent a good use of resources (Kiely and Rea-Dickins, 2005).

1.3. Why do we evaluate textbooks?

A number of scholars have recently started writing textbooks for EFL classes and today we have a huge variety of textbooks in the marketplace. However, not all of these textbooks fit the standards of auspicious language learning and often they do not bring about the expected results. Thus, awareness of evaluation as a dimension of English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL) curriculum has increased substantially (Kiely, 1998:79). Factors contributing to the enhanced role of evaluation include a shift from rigidly defined programmes to more pedagogical approaches (Kiely, 1998:79). Even if nowadays a few books have appeared on language teaching programmes, still the comparison with the textbook production is very unfavourable as dozens of titles appear annually (Beretta, 1992:5). In one word, scholars working on textbook evaluation cannot catch up with the huge mass of annually produced textbooks.

So, why do we need to evaluate textbooks? Presently, among the plethora of EFL materials and textbooks in the marketplace, one of the main concerns of language instructors and stakeholders is to select a textbook that will meet the average requirements of EFL students. It often happens that the university selects a textbook but neither the students nor the teachers can use it. The major complaints might be that the level of the textbook does not fit the learners, that the content is boring, or, simply, that an inappropriate methodology is used for the presentation and practice of the language. Thus, to prevent such situations, the most popular international textbooks should undergo evaluation. Since the present book deals mainly with the teaching of grammar, our evaluation will focus on the teaching of grammar in the selected textbooks. Thus, the textbook evaluation may be conducted with different purposes in mind: in our case, the main objective is to assess the methods of grammar presentation, teaching and practice used in the contemporary textbooks. Moreover, we will evaluate the activities and techniques used for grammar practising purposes.

All in all, evaluating and selecting textbooks for language instruction is a complex process carried out in different ways in different settings (Bird and Schemann, 2012:381). The main goal of ours is to find out about those methods of grammar teaching that have already faded away and have no potential to assist in present-day grammar learning/teaching.

CHAPTER TWO

GRAMMAR TEACHING APPROACHES
AND TECHNIQUES

2.1. Definition of grammar and its role in the learning and teaching of a foreign language

Language has always been a matter of consideration, and today many scholars (Corder, 1988; Rutherford, 1988; Krashen 1992) agree that language is a rule-governed behaviour and not a matter of habit formation. According to Corder (1988:133), learning the grammar of the language is acquiring the ability to produce grammatically acceptable utterances in the language. Thus, even some recent approaches to language teaching which emphasise its communicative aspect do not ignore the relevance of grammar. Due to its indisputable essence, grammar should be considered as a highly important matter to be taught to the students.

However, before discussing this issue any further, we should explain what we mean by grammar. To answer this question, it is important to remember that the word grammar traces back to the ancient Greek *grammaticos,* which means the "art of letters", i.e. to draw or to write. Still, in the present-day interpretation, the word grammar has various meanings (Quirk *et al*, 1985:12) and everyone understands it in his/her own way. Therefore, Huddleston (1984:12) writes that the grammar of the language may be understood to be a full description of its form and meaning; whereas Batstone (1994:3) states that grammar is an immensely pervasive phenomenon and that language without any grammar would be chaotic. At the same time, grammar is sometimes considered to be an integral part of a language, and the more we learn it the better we acquire the language. According to Ur (1988:4), grammar may be roughly defined as a way a language manipulates and combines words in order to form longer units. However, in my opinion there is no better definition of grammar than one that calls it a systematic description of a language. If we turn to grammar books or even textbooks, we will clearly see that grammar has acquired a systematic form of representation, beginning from elementary and going

through to advanced levels. When learning a foreign language, we realize that in our minds the knowledge of grammar represents a hierarchal system, from the simplest constructions to the most difficult ones. For instance, let us remember the grammatical tense forms which in our minds are presented in a scaled form starting from the "present simple tense" and terminating with the "perfect continuous tense", i.e. when one tense builds upon another. Thus, grammar is a complex system, the parts of which cannot be properly explained in abstraction from the whole, and in this sense all parts of grammar are mutually defining, and there is no simple linear path we can take in explaining one part in terms of another (Quirk *et al*, 1985:37). Consequently, grammar is not a fragment of any knowledge; it is a whole system that may give a complete picture of a language. Broughton (1990) compares grammar to a human body, a motorcar engine or any mechanism, saying that grammar is a major system of any language. No doubt, this comparison is very true, as one can hardly imagine learning a language or even speaking a language without knowing its grammar. Since the knowledge of grammar is essential for competent users of a language, it is clearly necessary for our students (Harmer, 1991:22). According to Widdowson (1988:147), grammar is the name we give to the knowledge of words that are adapted and arranged to form sentences. Thus, being a system or an engine of any language, grammar is vital, and our purpose as teachers is not only to show the students "what language means but to show them how it is used" (Harmer, 1991:22).

Conversely, there also exist other views towards grammar teaching. With the appearance of such approaches to language teaching as functional and communicative ones, today one of the biggest problems in the teaching of English is avoidance of its grammar. It is believed that substitution of grammar with four language skills, i.e. with reading, listening, speaking and writing, may be enough to acquire a language. In the light of this, many textbooks try to minimize the number of grammar occurrences in them. Moreover, some present-day scholars and teachers insist on a complete avoidance of grammar in the curriculum programmes. However, I can hardly believe that any learner of English can be accurate and fluent in the production and even in the perception of the language without knowing its grammar. Thus, the status of grammar teaching in English foreign language (EFL) classes has become a subject of debate: on the one hand, some scholars, teachers, language instructors and even textbook writers insist on its completely vanishing from the curriculum and the textbooks, whereas for others: "there is no doubt that languages contain grammatical elements which should be taught to students. The only question here is analyse up to what extent should these elements be learnt and taught overtly, and

independently of the various other features of a language" (Shepherd *et al*, 1984). In this respect, I can name a lot of reasons for not excluding grammar from the curriculum programmes or from the textbooks. One of them is teachers' unpreparedness for "grammar-free teaching". A complete disappearance of grammar from the teaching programmes may simply puzzle language instructors. Moreover, I can hardly believe that vocabulary acquisition, perception of pronunciation or understanding of the usage of the four language skills without any knowledge of grammar will enable accurate and fluent language use. Even less can I imagine the students being able to completely grasp the correct language structures found in written texts, listening tracks, exercises or even during in-class and out-class oral interaction. The greatest challenge will be the application of a "grammar-free" method to teenagers or university students who are the bearers of traditional language teaching/learning, where the teaching of grammar has always played a crucial role. In the very near future, the potential learners of a "grammar-free" method might be the kids, who have never been faced with traditional language learning. Yet there are still some doubts regarding the teachers, who will not be able to ignore grammar teaching for the sake of new trends. Moreover, textbook writers will have to refresh their textbooks, reformulating instructions and making them more content-oriented with the emphasis on a task-based approach. As a result, such a complete shift to a "grammar-free" method might seem attractive but is almost impossible in its accomplishment.

In the last few years there has been another tendency, to separate grammar from all other language elements and to give it a separate status. Even if some twenty years ago grammar in textbooks was presented within the sections of reading, listening, writing and even speaking, today it stands isolated and often, in some textbooks, does not interact with the language skills. On the one hand, such propensity might seem positive since more time and more attention is dedicated to grammar teaching; on the other hand, we understand that grammar should not be divorced from the context and must go hand-in-hand with the language skills. Thus, according to Shepherd *et al.* (1984), the separation of grammar from other language elements may be desirable during a particular phase in the learning cycle where formal systems are being focused on for introductory or remedial purposes. Corder (1988:133) considers that the teaching of grammar is intricately bound up with the teaching of meaning and that it is not sufficient merely to enable the learner to produce grammatical sentences, as students must know when and how to use them. Hence, being in connection with meaning which is present in all language skills, grammar should not be divorced from other language teaching elements. The same

idea is supported by Larsen-Freeman (2012:257) as she challenges conventional views of grammar. That is, instead of simply analysing grammatical forms, she includes grammatical meaning and usage. Then, building on what is known about the way grammar is learned, she offers ways to teach grammar in keeping with contemporary theories and the need to "focus on form" within a meaning-based or a communicative approach. This theory is illustrated by the author in the following figure:

Figure 2-1: A three-dimensional grammar framework by Larsen-Freeman (2012:251)
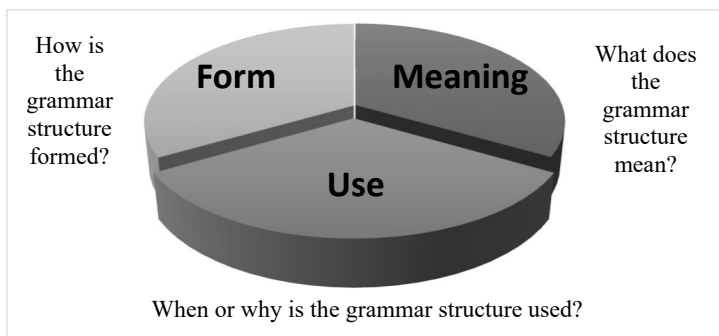
According to this three-dimensional grammar framework,

> *"...it is not helpful to think of grammar as a discrete set of meaningless, decontextualized, static structures. Nor is it helpful to think of grammar solely as prescriptive rules about linguistic form, such as injunctions against splitting infinitives or ending sentences with prepositions. Grammatical structures not only have (morphosyntactic) form, they are also used to express meaning (semantics) in context appropriate use (pragmatics)"* ... (Larsen-Freeman, 2012:252).

Thus, it is not enough to teach students the form; it is also necessary to explain the meaning of this form as well as its use. By applying such a grammatical framework to different grammatical patterns, we can totally achieve the communicative approach in the language teaching domain.

2.2. Approaches to the teaching of grammar

Over the years second language teaching has undergone many fluctuations and shifts (Celce-Murcia, 2012:2); yet the teaching of grammar has remained unchanged. Williams (2005:41) claims that the real question

is not why we teach grammar, but how we do it; that is, are we teaching it effectively? What constitutes best practice? To answer these questions, it is important to focus on the ways of grammar teaching. Despite the fact that some scholars (Antony, 1965; Celce-Murcia, 2012) differentiate such terms as approach, methods, ways and techniques (of grammar teaching), I will use the terms "method" and "approach" as synonyms for the concept of grammar presentation.

At present, with the appearance of in-class technology as well as the communicative approach to the teaching of grammar, we face new possibilities for its presentation and practice. Due to this, most of the traditional/old methods for the teaching of grammar should be cardinally revised. Moreover, today, many EFL teachers have become flexible and may easily modify grammatical tasks and activities making them more updated and target-oriented.

Ellis (2003:127) contends that any single task can be performed in a number of different ways, depending on how the speaker, i.e. teacher, orients to it, and the prior knowledge and skills they [students] can bring to bear. Hence, the availability of technology and communicative methods as well as the teacher's flexibility make it possible to refresh the approaches applied to the present-day teaching of grammar. Moreover, according to Ur (1988:6), any generalization about the "best" way to teach grammar – what kind of teaching procedures should be used, and in what order – will have to take into account a wide range of knowledge; skills that need to be taught, and the variety of different kinds of structures subsumed under the heading "grammar". Thus, considering the present-day grammar teaching, it would be more relevant to quit old and shabby traditions and to create new standards and possibilities for successful grammar teaching.

Celce-Murcia and Hills (1988:5) hesitate to recommend a single approach or method for the teaching of grammar, as students have different learning strategies and styles. Thus, these scholars differentiate between two strategies: analytical and holistic. When using the first one, students consciously or unconsciously extract paradigms from the examples, whereas holistic learners learn best by doing little or no analysis. On the one hand, this kind of flexible approach when based on the learners' needs, abilities and interests may cause successful teaching and learning of a language. On the other hand, it might be a pressing and fairly time-consuming issue for teachers to get to know each student individually and to find the right "key" to each of them. The analytical and holistic strategies are particularly difficult to apply to textbooks. Thus, the writers of textbooks should think of alternative methods and techniques for grammar presentation and practice which will fit both teachers and learners.

2.2.1. Explicit versus implicit grammar teaching

Ellis (2003:105) traditionally distinguishes between implicit and explicit knowledge in the following way: implicit knowledge refers to that knowledge of the language that a speaker manifests in performance but has no awareness of. Explicit knowledge refers to the knowledge of language that speakers are aware of and that can be verbalized.

So, what do we mean by an *explicit approach* to grammar teaching? If we go back to the nineteenth century, we will probably remember that Henry Sweet was a supporter of "complete grammar assimilation" and "learning grammar by heart". Sweet (1891) favoured the learning of the paradigms and syntactic rules which constitute part of the grammar-translation method. Later on, in the twentieth century, Sharwood-Smith (1988) refers to traditional grammar teaching in which grammatical constructions are explained by the use of grammar terminology. However, today, many teachers may witness that a greater part of the grammar rules are learnt in vain: students know the rules but these rules do not assist them in fulfilment of a communicative function. I believe many teachers will agree that students normally acquire those grammatical patterns that do correspond to the patterns found in their L1 (mother tongue). A good example of this might be the teaching of the past simple tense and the present perfect to Azerbaijani- or Russian-speaking students. I should point out that the perfect tense in these two languages carries a totally different grammatical meaning and would never correspond to the one that appears in English. Moreover, two sentences in English with the same lexical meaning but different in their grammatical tense form usage (simple and perfect) will have identical translations in both the Russian and Azerbaijani languages, corresponding only to the past simple.

> *E.g.* English: 1. *I did it.* vs. 2. *I have done it.*
> Russian: *Я это сделал.* for 1 & 2
> Azerbaijani: *Mən bunu etdim.* for 1 & 2

Both the past simple and the present perfect verbal forms are translated into these two languages in a similar way, i.e. by means of the same verbal construction which is used to express the action in the past. Thus, very often, students ignore the present perfect as they do not find any connection of this form with that of their mother tongue and at the same time the perfect construction (*have*/*has* + verb 3 (-*ed*)) seems to be much more complicated in comparison with the simple past. In this case, the present perfect remains in the students' mind as a mathematical formula, or simply disappears with