



TEACHING FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR FOR DEVELOPING ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF FIRST-YEAR ENGINEERING LEARNERS

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Abstract: Teaching-learning process of English may include structural or functional approach.

Structural approach is concerned with mastery of grammar as a paramount goal of teaching.

The Functional approach to English is concerned with teaching grammar with a purpose of effective communication

Teaching Functional approach is all about for what (communicative) purpose is the speaker using the language.

Functional English is just an approach, not a method. Hence, the approach may vary based on the language needs of a particular set of learners and the methods of teaching employed by the teachers. It is the ability to use language for effective communication.

The present article focuses on the importance of using English for different purposes.

Index Terms: Function of a language, accuracy, appropriacy, Collaboration, modal auxiliary verbs

The Functional approach to English language teaching emerged in 1970s. This approach is concerned with teaching grammar with a purpose of effective communication whereas the structural approach is concerned with mastery of grammar as a paramount goal of teaching.

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Functional approach is all about for what (communicative) purpose is the speaker using the language.

In 1972, David Wilkins proposed “Grammatical, situational and notional syllabuses”. The ‘Situational Syllabus’ is based on specific grammatical structures that can be used during a particular situation. Using this, the learners are equipped with effective communicative phrases, for a particular situation.

It is the appropriacy of using the language which matters, viz, what, where and when to speak rather than *how* (accuracy) to speak.

By using the term Notional Syllabus, Wilkins refers to the notions or ideas expressed for a particular situation and purpose.

This process, however, can be implemented at the tertiary level of language learning, where the learner has mastered a level of using the language. As Ellis (1992) opines, while looking explicitly at grammar may not lead immediately to learning. It will facilitate learning at a later stage when the learner is ready to internalize the new information about the language.

Functional grammar is a theory that focuses on how language is used to communicate meaning in specific contexts, and how it contributes to the structure of texts.

According to Halliday it is called functional grammar because the conceptual framework on which it is based is a functional one rather than a formal one.

. Functional Grammar is built upon a series of assumptions about the way language works in context:

- Language is a dynamic, complex system of resources for making meaning.
- Language reflects the culture in which it has evolved. It is not a neutral medium, but expresses certain world views, values, beliefs and attitudes.
- Our language choices change from situation to situation, depending on the social purpose for which language is being used, the subject matter, who is involved, and whether the language is spoken or written.
- The emphasis in language study is on how people use authentic language in various contexts in real life to achieve their purposes. The particular focus of this book will be on the language needed for successful participation in school contexts.
- A knowledge of grammar can help us to critically evaluate our own texts and those of others (e.g. identifying point of view; examining how language can be manipulated to achieve certain effects and position the reader in different ways; knowing how language can be used to construct various identities or a particular way of viewing the world).

In the era of Information Technology, language is not just form, nor is it the associated meanings (usage). This is because the usage depends on the context of communication.

For example, the word 'thank you' can take two different connotations based on the context, in the examples given below:

Thank you for your guidance throughout my project

Thank you for maintaining silence (at a library)

Thank you in sentence 1 is a means of expressing gratitude, where as it is a sort of prohibition in sentence 2.

Hence in a teaching-learning process of English language, emphasis is laid not only on accuracy and fluency, but also appropriacy. Appropriacy is more related to the functional aspect of English, i.e., the purposes for which we use the language.

Especially at tertiary level of teaching, where we need to equip students with effective communication skills, emphasis is on using appropriate expressions during a variety of communicative contexts.

As Widdowson (1984:59) opines, 'Fluency and accuracy are inter-dependent phenomena. The problem is to know how the dependency works in natural language use and how it can best be developed in the process of language learning'.

Grammar should be taught during the process of meaningful language learning. The focus is now from the *teacher covering grammar* to the *learners discovering grammar*. (Geoff Thompson ELT Journal Volume 50/1).

The learners are first exposed to various contexts of using the language, So as to enable them to understand its function and meaning. Later they are made aware of the grammatical forms used for those contexts. It is the learners who work out by participating, the teacher is a facilitator.

Grammar in Context

Nunan (1998) feels that this "strictly linear approach to language learning that focuses on a particular grammar point before moving on to another grammar [which entails acquiring] one grammatical item at a time... before moving on to the next," (p. 101). Instead, he advocates an organic approach that encourages students is an unrealistic view of how any student learns a second language come active explorers of language... [and of the] relationships between grammar

and discourse" (p. 104).

Some of the operational principles of Nunan's organic method of teaching grammar in 'context are the following: (1) expose learners to many examples of authentic language, (2) provide them with opportunities to use language that they have not been exposed laborating with other students and comparing their efforts; and (4) let them revise and to or have not practiced in any systematic way; (3) give them opportunities for col-

compare their final efforts with the

The practice in functional English can be given to the learners through various speaking activities like:

Role plays, picture perception, group discussions, presentations and mock-interviews etc.,

This article focuses on oral communication aspects through conversations in the form of role-plays.

Advantage of Pairing Students

- While conducting group discussions it becomes mandatory that the learners come to a consensus within the stipulated period of time. On the contrary, when the learners engage in conversations, the conversing time is not assigned. It increases the amount of speaking time and so more grammatical patterns can be practised.
- It accounts to learner independence as the teacher does not intervene during the conversations and so learners speak without any inhibitions of making mistakes.

- It allows the teacher to focus on individual learners, discuss the mistakes the learners have made in the remedial session.
- **Using Verb Patters**

The primary problem with oral communication in English is using the verbs and tenses. The verb should agree with the subject in number and person which is termed as Concord.

Hence students should be made aware of this aspect of using both auxiliary and main verbs in a sentence.

Form of Verb	First Person Pronoun (present and past tense)	Second Person Pronoun (present and past tense)	Third Person Pronoun (present and past tense)
'Be' Form	I am/was	You are/were	She/he is/was
'Have' Form	I have/had	You have/had	She/he/has/had
'Do' Form	I do / I did	You do / did	She does / did

Mistakes made by the learners in using the auxiliary verbs:

- Starting the sentence with 'myself' while introducing oneself

Ex: *Myself, I am Kalpana.

- The use of modal auxiliary verbs:

Modal auxiliary Verb	Use
Can	Capability, ability Ex. I can finish the work in time.
May	Possibility. Ex: I may or may not come. I am not sure.
Shall / will	Willingness, determination or a promise. Ex. I will complete the work in time.
Must	Certainty. Ex: This must be the right address.
Should	Obligation Ex. This work should be completed in time.

In the above context, *must* is stronger than *should*.

Ex: It is a good film. You should go and see it (it is just a suggestion).

It is a fantastic film. You must go and see it. (the speaker is sure that the listener will like the movie).

Should can also be used to give a piece of advice:

Ex: Hari shouldn't go to bed so late.

Difference between must and have to:

Must is used when the speaker thinks what he/she says is necessary. It is the speaker's opinion.

Ex: It is a fantastic film. You must go and see it.

If it is just not the speaker's opinion, *have to* is used:

Ex: Prasad won't be at work this afternoon. He has to go to the doctor.

The difference between using present continuous and modal auxiliary verb:

Ex: I am playing tennis tomorrow (the speaker is sure that he will play.

I might play tennis tomorrow (possible).

- Also, the learners should be made aware of using modal auxiliary verbs during formal conversations:

➤ May I come in? (seeking permission)

- *Would you like to have a cup of coffee?* (Offering)
The response for an offer should be “*I would like to have a cup of tea*”, not, “*I want a cup of tea*”.
- *Could you please connect me to...* (Request)
- *Shall I come with you* (Suggesting, Volunteering)

While exchanging pleasantries, an ambiguity can arise:

**How nice to see you after a long time.* (it may mean that the speaker is happy that he did not meet the other person for a long time)

✓ *How nice to see you again. We have met after a long time.*

Using Main Verbs

For situational dialogues, the conversation is may be in present or past tense.

Hence some aspects of present tense are discussed with the learners.

- Using simple present tense to denote a habit, nature and behaviour
To understand this aspect of using simple present tense, the learners are assigned an activity where they describe the nature, behaviour and habits of one of the peer-group members. For example:
 - This person always prefers to sit in the second row
 - This person is very interactive during the classroom discussions
 - This person completes the assignments in time
 - He is the tallest person of the class

The other members try to guess who the person is.

- The learners are given practice in using some verbs which are not used in continuous forms:
Ex: *I am liking sweets.
I like sweets.

The following is the list of verbs which are not used in ‘-ing’ form

- (a) Verbs of senses/perception: e.g. see, hear, smell, recognize, taste, feel, etc.
- (b) Verbs of possession: own, belong, possess, have.
- (c) Verbs of emotion: like, love, hate, desire, care, adore, abhor, detest.
- (d) Verbs of cognition (mental activity): know, understand, comprehend, realize, suppose, know, believe.

- Using the past tense with the verb ‘did’

Ex: *I didn’t went yesterday.

I didn’t go yesterday.

- Using imperative sentences

During conversations/connected speech, we tend to use imperative sentences and informal expressions

Function	Example
Giving instructions	First turn to the right and then to the second left.
Thanking	Thank you so very much.
Warning/Cautioning	Don’t eat so fast or you will be sick.
Wishing good for others	Have a nice weekend.

- Using ‘if’ Conditional:

When a conditional is used for an imaginary situation, or a wish which wouldn’t be possible to happen, the past tense form used is ‘were’.

Ex: *If I was good at Science, I could have become a doctor.

✓ If I were good at Science, I could have become a doctor.

- **Using conjunctions**

The conjunction because is used to give the reason for an action

Ex: *The accident occurred due to heavy rain.

The accident occurred because of heavy rain.

- **Using contractions**

During conversations, contracted forms are used

Ex: I'll attend the meeting tomorrow.

The learners should be informed about the contextual message while using the apostrophe for the past tense form of *had* or *would*

Ex: She'd – She would be coming tomorrow

She had a sumptuous meal.

There can be an ambiguity with the structure of the sentence, for example, because of misplaced modifiers:

Ex. *She went to her hometown to sell her land along with her son.

She went to her hometown along with her son to sell her land.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a balanced approach that incorporates accuracy, fluency, and appropriateness should be emphasized in the English language teaching-learning process. As the functional component of language use, appropriateness is essential in helping learners to communicate successfully in a variety of settings. At the UG level, where the emphasis is on giving learners useful communication skills, the capacity to select expressions that are appropriate for the context becomes critical. Fluency and accuracy are interdependent, as stated by Widdowson (1984) fostering natural language use may requires an understanding of this relationship. This changing approach is reflected in the way grammar is taught, which is shifting from teacher-centered instruction and rote learning to a more dynamic, learner-driven process. Finally it can be said that grammar is taught as a necessary component of effective communication, enabling students to learn rules through application.

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