An Organic Approach to the Teaching of Grammar

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Abstract

Despite the advances that have been made in discourse analysis and the development of functional grammars, a decontextualised view of grammar persists in the popular imagination, in many textbooks, and in a great deal of pedagogical practice. The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between grammar and discourse, and to explore the implications of this relationship for language education. In the paper, I shall argue that the linear approach to language acquisition, which has dominated pedagogy, is problematic, and does not reflect what is currently known about processes of acquisition. In place of the linear view, I shall argue for an ‘organic’ approach, and shall suggest that such an approach is more consistent with what we know about second language acquisition than the linear approach. In the second part of the paper, I shall explore the pedagogical implications of this alternative approach.

Approaches to the Teaching of Grammar

The linear approach

The linear approach to language learning is based on the premise that learners acquire one language item at a time, for example, that in learning English they master the simple present, move on to the present continuous, progress to the simple past, and so on. In this sense, learning another language is like constructing a wall. The language wall is erected one linguistic ‘brick’ at a time. The easy grammatical bricks are laid at the bottom of the wall, and they provide a foundation for the more difficult ones. The task for the learner is to get the linguistic bricks in the right order: first the word bricks, and then the sentence bricks. If the bricks are not in the correct order the wall will collapse under its own ungrammaticality.
There are some serious problems with this linear view. In the first place, the notions of ‘grammar’ and ‘grammaticality’ underpinning the view are taken as unproblematic. Secondly, the view is not supported by research into second language acquisition.

From a linear perspective, mastery of a language is essentially about getting the bits in the right order at the level of the sentence. The task for the second language learner is to learn how to get the ‘bricks’ in the same order as a native speaker. While this normative view of grammaticality has been questioned by numerous linguists, it seems to have been accepted by language teachers, curriculum developers and textbook writers. That the notion is problematic can be demonstrated by some simple introspective tests of grammaticality. Consider the following, which have been taken from a variety of sources, including (Langunoff 1992, cited in Celee-Murcia and Olshtain; Odlin, 1994; Nunan, 1993).

The gang were plotting a take-over.
Everybody is ready now, aren’t they?
Neither Fred nor Harry had to work late, did they?
Someone has deliberately made themselves homeless.
Anyone running a business should involve their spouse.
My hair needs washed.
What the cat did was ate the rat.

In a grammaticality judgement test, all but the last two of these were found to be acceptable by a group of native speakers despite the fact that they violate linguistic ‘facts’ relating to subject-verb and pronoun agreement. Most native speakers seem to find them unexceptional despite the violations. The penultimate sentence was deemed acceptable by some speakers of American and Scottish English despite violating the linguistic ‘fact’ that in verbal constructions of this kind, ‘need’ must be followed by the ‘-ing’ form of the verb. The last was considered acceptable when heard, although around half of the sample identified the rule ‘violation’ when they saw it written down.

Given this uncertainty among native speakers, the appropriate course of action might seem to be to turn to the experts for guidance. Linguists and language educators spend their professional lives sorting
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out and attempting to transmit ‘linguistic facts’, and it would therefore seem reasonable for them to adjudicate on questions of grammar and grammaticality. However, when it comes to judgements of grammaticality, even linguists would appear to be in dispute. In a study carried out by Ross (1979) there was considerable disagreement amongst linguists as to the grammaticality of the following question:

What will the grandfather clock stand between the bed and?

Among nine native English speaking linguists, two found the question completely acceptable, two found it marginally acceptable, and five found it to be completely unacceptable.

A similar picture emerges when the views of language educators are sought. Schmidt and McCreary (1977) presented ESL teachers with pairs of sentences such as the following:

There’s about five minutes left.
1. There are about five minutes left.
2. In a test of spontaneous usage, a large majority of the subjects used (a). However, in a later test, when asked which form they used, most reported using (b). In a subsequent test, the informants were asked to judge the correctness of the probes. Only a small minority considered (a) to be correct. One wonders what students might think, hearing their teachers using forms which they have been told are incorrect.

Odlin (1994), in an investigation of grammaticality and acceptability, concluded that there are important limitations on the ability of ‘experts’ to provide reliable judgements.

Few, if any, linguists or teachers have irrefutable intuitions about grammaticality, even though many of their judgements are reliable. Both competence and performance limitations affect expert judgements of grammaticality, and these limitations can likewise affect judgements of acceptability. In linguistics, there is a growing awareness of such limitations, even if some grammarians continue to dodge the epistemological question What is a linguistic fact? posed by Labov (1975). (Odlin 1994: 284).
These examples serve to underline the fact that it makes little sense to talk about linguistic facts at the level of the isolated sentence because, with few exceptions, these will be conditioned by the linguistic and experiential context in which they occur. I therefore take issue with those (see, for example Gregg (1989) who argue for the independence of grammar, and would, myself, argue for a reversal of the order of priority, that is, for the primacy of discourse in language. Here, I take discourse to be any naturally occurring stretch of language occurring in context (Carter, 1993: 22). Without reference to context, it makes little sense to speak of ‘facts’, ‘correctness’, or ‘propriety’.

The linear view is also betrayed by what we currently know about language acquisition. It is simply not the case that language learners acquire one target item, perfectly, one at a time. Kellerman (1983), for example, notes the ‘u-shaped behavior’ of certain linguistic items in learners’ interlanguage development. If we test a learner’s ability to use a particular grammatical form (for example, the simple present) several times over a period of time, we will find their accuracy rates varying. The accuracy will not increase in a linear fashion, from 20% to 40% through to 100%, but will at times actually decrease. (Rutherford, 1987).

How can we explain this phenomenon? It can be explained with reference to the ‘organic’ metaphor. Rather than being isolated ‘bricks’, the various elements of language interact with, and are affected by other elements to which they are closely related in a functional sense. A learner’s accuracy in using the simple present will deteriorate (temporarily) at the point when he or she is beginning to acquire the present continuous.

An ‘organic’ view of language development

I believe that the adoption of an ‘organic’ perspective is central to our understanding of language acquisition and use, and that without such a perspective, our understanding of other dimensions of language such as the notion of ‘grammaticality’ will be piecemeal and incomplete, as will any attempt at understanding and interpreting utterances in isolation from the contexts in which they occur. The organic metaphor would see second language acquisition more like
growing a garden than building a wall. From such a perspective, learners do not learn one thing perfectly one at a time, but learn numerous things simultaneously (and imperfectly). The linguistic flowers will not all appear at the same time, nor will they all grow at the same rate. Some will even appear to wilt, for a time, before renewing their growth. The rate and speed will be determined by a complex interplay of factors related to speech processing constraints (Pienemann and Johnston 1987); pedagogical factors (Pica 1985); acquisitional processes (Johnston, 1987); and the influence of the discoursal environment in which the item occurs (McCarthy, 1991; Nunan, 1993).

Johnston (1987), who has one of the largest computerised SLA databases ever compiled, provides an eloquent case for an organic view. (It is interesting to note his use of the word ‘seedbed’ in his description of the acquisition of negation.)

... the case of ‘don’t’ shows that formulaic language can serve as what we might call the seedbed of propositional language. While it may still be necessary to use terms like formula in some kinds of linguistic discussion, the way in which a chunk like ‘don’t’ is reanalysed by application of the rules for its production in a widening range of verbal environments makes it clear that the progression from formulaic language to productive language involves no hard and fast distinctions. (Johnston 1987: 24)

As Johnston, and others, have shown, it is particularly important to establish the correct pedagogical relationship between grammatical items and the discoursal contexts in which they occur. Grammar and discourse are tied together in a fundamentally hierarchical relationship with lower-order grammatical choices being driven by higher-order discoursal ones. This view has major implications for applied linguistic research as well as language pedagogy. From this perspective, ‘getting it right’ is not an unproblematic issue of sorting out linguistic facts. If we are to ‘get it right’, we need to recognise that effective communication involves achieving harmony between functional interpretation and formal appropriacy.
The problematicity of separating sentence level and discourse level analysis is not new. As far back as 1952, Harris pointed out that grammar and discourse are systematically related, although his claim that grammar provides the building blocks for creating discourse (Harris 1952) would seem to accord primacy to grammar. More recently, McCarthy (1991: 62) has argued that "...grammar is seen to have a direct role in welding clauses, turns and sentences into discourse ..."

The notion that grammar can be taught from a sentence-level, context-free approach has also been attacked from various quarters in recent years. Not surprisingly, this attack has come from those who view language as a tool for the creation of meaning. Advocates of context-sensitive analyses include specialists in pragmatics such as Levinson (1983) who argues that there are very few context-free rules, and who points out that the vast majority of rule-governed choices that a language user makes are context dependent. Language educators such as Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (forthcoming) also maintain that there are very few grammatical elements that are not sensitive to, and affected by, the discoursal contexts in which they occur. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain argue that the following represents a fairly comprehensive list of those grammatical features that are completely context-free. (They also point out that even sentence level rule 'violations' can be explained with reference to context.)

- subject-verb agreement
- determiner - noun agreement
- use of gerunds after prepositions
- reflexive pronominalization within the clause
- some - any suppletion in the environment of negation.

These examples point to the essential problematicity and complexity of grammatical 'rules' once actual use is taken into account. I believe that the implications of all this for pedagogy are fairly significant, and shall spell these out in the concluding section of the paper.

The primacy of discourse is evident in the many elements within a sentence that can only be interpreted with reference to other elements beyond the sentence. In the following extract, the underlined items are...
uninterpretable if one relies exclusively on the immediate sentence within which the elements occur.

A common criticism of the simple alternative-response type item is that a pupil may be able to recognize a false statement as incorrect but still not know what is correct. For example, when pupils answer the following item as false, it does not indicate that they know what negatively charged particles of electricity are called. All it tells us is that they know they are not called neutrons.

T / F Negatively charged particles of electricity are called neutrons.

This is a rather crude measure of knowledge, because there is an inestimable number of things that negatively charged particles of electricity are not called. To overcome such difficulties, some teachers prefer to have the pupils change all false statements to true. When this is done, the part of the statement it is permissible to change should be indicated. Unless the key words to be changed are indicated in the correction-type true-false item, pupils are liable to rewrite the entire statement. In addition to the increase in scoring difficulty, this frequently leads to true statements which deviate considerably from the original intent of the item. (Gronland 1981: 165).

The importance of context is also evident when considering the ordering of elements within the clause. Speakers of English have choices as to how they distribute information within the clause. In other words, they can convey the identical information using a variety of different sentence forms. Consider the following alternative ways of expressing the proposition: "The research committee opposed the funding cuts'.

The funding cuts were opposed by the research committee.
It was the research committee that opposed the funding cuts.
It was the funding cuts that the research committee opposed.
What the research committee did was oppose the funding cuts.
Opposed the funding cuts, the research committee did.
The research committee, it opposed the funding cuts.
From a discourse perspective, these items are not in free variation. The option that is actually selected by the speaker will depend on the context in which the utterance occurs and the status of the information within the discourse. One important consideration is whether the information has already been introduced into the discourse, or is assumed to be known to the reader or listener (that is, whether it is ‘given’ or ‘new’). It is important to bear in mind, when considering the issue of given and new information in discourse that it is the speaker/writer who decides on the status of the information. As a rough rule of thumb, the new information in a sentence or utterance in English generally comes last. In the statement "The research committee opposed the funding cuts" the assumed knowledge is that the research committee opposed something, and the new information is that it was funding cuts that were opposed.

The close hierarchical relationship between discourse considerations and grammatical structuring in relation to sentence internal elements can be seen if we provide questions to which the above statements might be appropriate responses.

Question: What did the research committee do?  
Response: It opposed the funding cuts?

Question: What happened about the funding cuts?  
Response: They were opposed by the research committee.

Question: Did the Deputy VC oppose the funding cuts?  
Response: No, it was the research committee that opposed the cuts.

Question: Did the research committee oppose the additional grant to the polytechnics?  
Response: No, it was the funding cuts that were opposed by the research committee.

It is worth noting in these contextualised utterances, the replacement of full noun phrases by pronominal forms. This illustrates the interaction between different discoursal phenomena in this instance, the distribution of given-new information and the use of cohesion to track various entities within the discourse.
Pedagogical Implications

What are the practical implications of this ‘organic’ approach to language acquisition? I believe that they are far reaching, and that they have particular pertinence within the context of current debates over language standards in Hong Kong. In the first place, they illustrate the naiveté of calls for a return to the grammar teaching methods of the past. When grammar is examined as it is actually acquired and used, the full complexity of language begins to emerge. The discussion serves to show that grammatical rules derived from sentence level analysis are almost certain to overgeneralise, and to lead learners into error when they attempt to deploy such rules in communication. The analysis also reveals the futility of the ‘building block’ approach to pedagogy which attempts to develop proficiency by teaching isolated sentence-level structures for subsequent deployment in the construction of discourse. There is enough evidence beginning to emerge from second language acquisition research to suggest that the process should be reversed, that we should teach from higher to lower level elements. Such research shows that acquisition occurs through active engagement in discoursal encounters, and that out of such encounters linguistic mastery at the level of the sentence emerges. In other words, it is out of discourse that grammar emerges, not vice versa.

A pedagogy exploiting this view would show learners how grammar enables them to make meanings of increasingly sophisticated kinds: how it enables them to escape from the tyranny of the here and now (Halliday, 1985). It would show them that without tenses and time adverbials, they would be unable to refer to things that happened last week or yesterday, that without conditionals, they would be unable to speculate or hypothesize, and that without modals, their ability to convey interpersonal meanings would be severely impaired.

Unfortunately, the sentence level, context-free view of grammar underpinning many coursebooks teaches grammar as form, without making clear the relationship between form and function. Learners are taught about the forms rather than how to use the forms to communicate meaning. For example, they are taught how to transform sentences from the active voice into the passive, and back into the active voice, without indicating the communicative ends for
which the passive voice in English is deployed: to enable the speaker or writer to place the communicative focus on the action rather than the performer of the action, to avoid referring to the performer of the action, and so on. If the communicative value of alternative grammatical forms is not made clear to learners, they come away from the classroom with the impression that the alternative forms exist largely to deny them entrance to the second language speaking club.

The assumption underlying most textbooks is that learning is a linear process, that grammatical knowledge is built up in the learner in much the same way as a building is constructed. Grammatical competence is acquired one grammatical ‘brick’ at a time. However, it is clear from SLA research that the process does not work like this at all (see, for example, Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991). As indicated earlier, learners do not learn one grammatical feature perfectly, one at a time, rather, they learn numerous features imperfectly at the same time. In addition, the development of their ability to use the language is ‘unstable’, and their accuracy rates will vary over time as one grammatical form is destabilised by others. This instability, and the interaction between closely related grammatical forms accounts for the so-called ‘u-shaped’ development of many forms identified by Kellerman (1983).

The reason why a great deal of grammatical instruction is relatively unsuccessful is that such pedagogy divorces grammatical form and communicative function. What is needed, is a pedagogy which makes transparent the relationships between form and function. It will then be easier for learners to appreciate the fact that alternative forms (for example, active and passive voice, subordination and co-ordination) do not exist simply to make things difficult for them, but to enable them to express different kinds of meanings.

In terms of the data that learners work with, and from which they will form working hypotheses about form and function, I believe that learners should, even at low proficiency levels, be exposed to a rich variety of authentic discourse, rather than the artificial models which have been specially written to lay out grammatical paradigms. Such artificial models misrepresent the nature of language as it actually exists, and ultimately make the task for the learner more difficult by removing the built-in redundancy that exists in authentic language. In
fact, in second (and even some foreign) language situations, there is value in encouraging learners to collect and analyse their own samples of authentic discourse so that in effect they become their own ethnographers of communication (Heath, 1992).

From the foregoing, I would suggest that in teaching grammar we should be guided by the following pedagogical principles:

1. Teach grammar as choice
2. Provide opportunities for learners to explore grammatical and discoursal relationships in authentic data
3. Teach grammar in ways that make transparent form/function relationships
4. Encourage learners to become active explorers of language
5. Encourage learners to explore relationships between grammar and discourse

In the rest of this section, I shall illustrate some of the ways in which the principles might be activated. It should be noted that the principles themselves are not discrete, but overlap.

**Teach grammar as choice**

One of the reasons why it is difficult to give hard-and-fast grammatical rules for learners to deploy is because, once grammar is pressed into communicative service, the choice, in many instances, will be determined by the meanings learners themselves wish to make. Ultimately, the answer to the question “Which form should I use here?” will be: “It depends on the message you wish to convey. For example, if learners wish to give equal weight to two pieces of information and an entity, or state of affairs, then they can present the information in a single sentence using co-ordination. If the wish to give one of these pieces of information greater weight, then they can use subordination.

In order to dramatise for learners the fact that alternative grammatical realisations exist in order to enable them to make different kinds of meanings, and that ultimately it is up to them to
decide exactly what they wish to convey, tasks such as the following can be used.

EXAMPLE

- In groups of 3 - 4, study the following pairs of sentences and decide whether there is any difference in meaning between the two pairs of sentences. Are any of these sentences ungrammatical?

1. a. In his 1925 study, Nunan asserts that grammar and discourse are closely linked.
   b. In his 1925 study, Nunan asserted that grammar and discourse are closely linked.
2. a. Mr. Patten, a former governor of Hong Kong was warmly greeted in Beijing.
   b. Mr. Patten, the former governor of Hong Kong was warmly greeted in Beijing.
3. a. You'll be late tonight, won't you?
   b. You'll be late tonight, will you?
4. a. For me, champagne says summer.
   b. Champagne says summer, for me.
5. a. The team are playing in Nagoya, tonight.
   b. The team is playing in Nagoya, tonight.
6. a. You should call your parents, tonight.
   b. You could call your parents, tonight.
7. a. The passive voice should be avoided in academic writing.
   b. Academic writers should use the passive voice.
8. a. I'm going to study for the exam tonight.
   b. I'll study for the exam tonight.
9. a. Alice saw a white rabbit.
   b. Alice saw the white rabbit.
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**Provide opportunities for learners to explore grammatical and discoursal relationships in authentic data**

Authentic language shows learners how grammatical forms operate in context to enable us to make communicative meanings. Another advantage of using authentic data is that learners encounter target language items (in this case, comparative adjectives and adverbs) in the kinds of contexts that they naturally occur, rather than in contexts that have been concocted by a textbook writer. Ultimately, this will assist the learner because he/she will experience the language item in interaction with other closely related grammatical and discoursal elements. By distorting the contexts of use within grammatical items occur, non-authentic language in some respects actually makes the task for the language learner more difficult. The disparity between contrived and authentic data can be seen in the following extracts which, themselves, have been turned into a classroom task.

**EXAMPLE**

Task 1: Study the following extracts. One is a piece of genuine conversation, the other is taken from a language teaching textbook. Which is which? What differences can you see between the two extracts? What language do you think the non-authentic conversation is trying to teach? What grammar would you need in order to take part in the authentic conversation?

*A: Excuse me, please. Do you know where the nearest bank is?*
*B: Well, the City Bank isn’t far from here. Do you know where the main post office is?*
*A: No, not really. I’m just passing through.*
*B: Well, first go down this street to the traffic light.*
*A: OK.*
*B: Then turn left and go west on Sunset Boulevard for about two blocks. The bank is on your right, just past the post office.*
*A: All right. Thanks!* 
*B: You’re welcome.*
A: How do I get to Kensington Road?
B: Well you go down Fullarton Road ...
A: ... what, down Old Belair, and around ...?
B: Yeah. And then you go straight ...
A: ... past the hospital?
B: Yeah, keep going straight, past the racecourse to the roundabout.
You know the big roundabout?
A: Yeah.
B: And Kensington Road's off to the right.
A: What, off the roundabout?
B: Yeah.
A: Right.
(Nunan. 1993.)

Teach grammar in ways that make transparent form/function relationships

This principle can be activated by creating pedagogical tasks in which learners structure and restructure their own understanding of form-function relationships through both inductive and deductive tasks of various kinds. The following task sequence, adapted from Hall and Shepheard (1991), illustrates how such an approach might be used to make salient different temporal relationships.

EXAMPLE

• Working with another student, match the uses of the present perfect with the following sentences by writing a letter in the column.

A. indefinite future period    B. indefinite past    C. definite future period
D. recent action              E. past-present period: unfinished

1. The rains have just brought .......... hope to the starving of Africa. .......... 
X

2. Giant swarms of locusts have .......... been reported in Cape Verde. ..........
3. Experts who have been in the FAO in Mali for years were amazed by the size of one swarm.

4. Other countries are waiting until international meetings have been held in two months time.

5. Government cannot wait until locust swarms have eaten their crops.

- Now draw timelines for sentences 2-5 similar to that for sentence 1.

- Complete the following questions.

1. a. The rains have just brought hope to the starving of Africa
   b. The rains just brought hope to the starving but no solution.
   Which adverbs can replace just in a and b?

2. a. Great swarms of locusts have been reported in Cape Verde.
   b. Great swarms of locusts were reported in Cape Verde.
   To which sentence can the words two days ago be added?

3. a. Experts who have been with the FAO for years were amazed.
   b. Experts who were with the FAO for years were amazed.

4. a. Other countries are waiting until international meetings have been held in two months time.
   b. Other countries are waiting until international meetings are held in two months time.
   Are these countries waiting until the meetings are over or until they begin in a), in b)?

5. a. Other countries are waiting until international meetings have finished.
   b. Other countries are waiting until international meetings finish.
   True/False: There is no objective difference between the two events. Which sentence emphasises the completion of the event?

[Adapted from Hall & Shepheard, (1991.)]
Encourage learners to become active explorers of language

By exploiting this principle, teachers can encourage their students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. Students can bring samples of language into class, and they can work together to formulate their own hypotheses about language structures and functions. Classrooms where this principle has been activated will be characterised by an inductive approach to learning in which learners are given access to data, and are provided with structured opportunities to work out rules, principles and so on for themselves. The idea here is that information will be more deeply processed and stored if learners are given an opportunity to work things out for themselves, rather than simply being given the principle or rule. (For excellent, practical examples, see Woods, 1995.)

The following example is taken from a unit of work in which learners have been involved in talking about actions in progress. Having worked through a linked sequence of tasks, they are then invited to see if they can come up with a ‘rule’ for spelling progressive forms.

EXAMPLE

**GRAMMAR WORKOUT**

Can you make a rule?
A. Look at these lists. Then write the rule for turning the ‘base’ form of the verb into the ‘-ing’ form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>base form</th>
<th>-ing form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>go</td>
<td>going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>having</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td>being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>live</td>
<td>living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come</td>
<td>coming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work</td>
<td>working</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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RULE:

........................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................

B. Are these rules true or false?

1. If the word ends in ‘o’ or ‘k’, just add ‘-ing’. But if it ends in ‘e’, drop the ‘e’ and add ‘-ing’.

2. Say the word out loud. If you can’t hear the last letter, throw it away and add ‘-ing’.

[ Source; Nunan. (forthcoming.)]

Encourage learners to explore relationships between grammar and discourse

The final principle activates in the classroom the notion that grammar and discourse are inextricably interlinked. Classroom tasks which exploit this principle will help learners to explore the functioning of grammar in context, and help them to deploy their developing grammatical competence in the creation of coherent discourse.

EXAMPLE:

Paragraphs are the “building block” of written texts. When we write a paragraph, we have to turn individual ‘bits’ of information (or ‘propositions’) into coherent, continuous prose. We use the grammatical resources of the language to do this. Consider the following ‘propositions’.

- The nursing process is a systematic method.
- The nursing process is a rational method.
- The method involves planning nursing care.
- The method involves providing nursing care.
These can be ‘packaged’ into a single sentence by using grammatical resources of various kinds.

“The nursing process is a systematic rational method of planning and providing nursing care.”

1. Using the above sentence as the first in a paragraph, produce a coherent paragraph incorporating the following information:
   - The goal of the nursing process is to identify a client’s health status.
   - The goal of the nursing process is to identify a client’s health care problems.
   - A client’s health care problems may be actual or potential.
   - The goal of the nursing process is to establish plans to meet a client’s health care needs.
   - The goal of the nursing process is to deliver specific nursing interventions.
   - Nursing interventions are designed to meet a client’s health care needs.
   - The nurse must collaborate with the client to carry out the nursing process effectively.
   - The nurse must collaborate with the client to individualise approaches to each person’s particular needs.
   - The nurse must collaborate with other members of the health care team to carry out the nursing process effectively.
   - The nurse must collaborate with other members of the health care team to individualise approaches to each person’s particular needs.

2. Compare your text with another student. Make a note of similarities and differences.

3. Now revise your text and compare it with the original [supplied separately.]

Adapted from Nunan, (1996.)
CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have made a case for developing an alternative to the 'building block' metaphor that has dominated language pedagogy for many years. This metaphor is based on the assumption that learning is a linear process and that grammatical knowledge is built up in the learner in much the same way as a building is constructed, that is, that grammatical competence is acquired one grammatical 'brick' at a time. However, it is now abundantly clear from SLA research that language is not acquired like this at all. Learners do not learn one grammatical feature perfectly, one at a time, rather, they learn numerous features imperfectly at the same time. Acquisition is characterised by backsliding and plateaux, as well as by progressions. In other words, it is an inherently 'unstable', organic process in which the learners' appos-developing interlanguage progresses through sequences of metamorphoses (Rutherford, 1987).

In the second part of the paper, I argued that classrooms underpinned by the functional, organic view of grammatical development described in the body of the paper will be characterised by the following features:

- learners will be exposed to authentic samples of language so that the grammatical features in question will be experienced in a range of different linguistic and experiential contexts
- it will not be assumed that once learners have been drilled in a particular form they will have acquired it
- there will be opportunities for recycling of language forms, and learners will be engaged in tasks designed to make transparent the inextricable links between form and function
- learners will be given opportunities to develop their own understandings of the grammatical principles of English by progressively structuring and restructuring the language through inductive learning experiences
- over time, learners will encounter target language items in an increasingly diverse and complex range of linguistic and experiential environments.

In applying this view of language to pedagogy, we need to acknowledge that words and sentences alone are not sufficient to enable us to communicate effectively with others. Particularly in inter-
cultural and multi-linguistic encounters there is also a need for pragmatic goodwill, for without such goodwill there is a danger that speakers will fail to make the communicative effort to understand the functional intentions that lie behind individual words and utterances. In the final analysis, it is in the interpretation of functional intention, not in the interrogation of isolated linguistic elements, that genuine communication lies. In the words of one linguist,

Language is surely as complex a phenomenon as humans have ever wanted to understand, and so far we haven’t even come close. We have been retarded in this pursuit by what seems to be a scholarly drive to contract, rather than to expand, the field of vision. ... As soon as one looks beyond sentences one finds oneself forced to stop dealing with artificial data concocted to suit one’s purposes, and to look instead at language in use. (Chafe 1990: 21)

In relation to language standards, when we look beyond sentences in isolation to language in use, the critical question is not: “Have they got their words in the right order?”, but “Have they got the linguistic resources to communicate effectively in the complex world beyond the classroom, beyond the lecture theatre and beyond the tutorial room?” Only then, might pedagogies emerge that acknowledge the fact that language is surely as complex a phenomenon as humans have ever wanted to understand.

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