

THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR TEACHING: FROM COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES TO THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES.

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Summary: *In the history of language teaching, the role of grammar has been addressed by a number of linguistic theories, pedagogies and, currently, within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF). The way grammar is considered has a decisive influence on pedagogical practices, learning processes and many other areas involved in language teaching. This paper constitutes a revision of how grammar has evolved in the last fifty years paying special attention to its evolving role in both communicative (CLT) and post-communicative approaches and in the CEF. From this revision, some controversial issues concerning the pedagogic value of teaching grammar will arise as well, such as whether grammar is worth teaching in the classroom or not and how it should be taught. Even though there exists a parallel linguistic framework between CLT and the CEF, some issues still need revision concerning the notion of grammatical competence and its role for language teaching.*

Key words: *Grammar teaching, grammatical competence, CLT (communicative language teaching), CEF (Common European Framework for Languages).*

INTRODUCTION

No other issue has so preoccupied theorists and practitioners as the grammar debate, and the history of language teaching is essentially the history of the claims and counterclaims for and against the teaching of grammar. Differences in attitude to the role of grammar underpin differences between methods, between teachers, and between learners. (Thornbury, 1999:14)

Grammar teaching in the foreign language classroom has constituted an important and debated issue for the last fifty years. In the history of language teaching, the role of grammar has been addressed by a number of linguistic theories, methodologies, and currently, within the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF, for short). The way grammar is –or has been– considered has a direct and decisive influence on pedagogical grammars, learning processes and many other areas involved in foreign language teaching. Grammar, as a sub-system in a network of other linguistic sub-systems and sub-skills (Newby, 2003), has been attached different roles in the language classroom, reaching little consensus, not only about the particular items to be taught, but about *when*, or *how*, or even *where* to teach or learn.

What notion of grammar should form the basis of classroom teaching? This paper constitutes an attempt to address this issue revising the place of grammar within different Foreign Language (FL) teaching methodologies still being used in the classroom and the CEF.¹

¹ The Common European Framework for languages cannot be considered a teaching approach although it provides a descriptive framework to which teaching authorities, teachers, coursebook designers and learners must acquiesce.

1. THE GRAMMAR QUESTION: LINGUISTIC APPROACHES

‘How should grammar be taught?’, or ‘Why should grammar be taught?’ or even ‘Should grammar be taught at all?’ These questions, which many teachers may have asked themselves, can be reformulated by making reference to “the claims and counterclaims for and against the teaching of grammar” in the history of language teaching (Thornbury, 1999: 23) which are present whenever a new teaching method appears. Lock (1997:267) mentions some of the dichotomies that arise whenever dealing with grammar teaching, which are form vs. function, form vs. meaning, fluency vs. accuracy, meaning-based instruction vs. form-based instruction, and the one which most emphasizes the denial of grammar teaching: communication vs. grammar.

These dichotomies have been ‘solved’ by three general ways of approaching grammar throughout ELT history: traditional grammar teaching, communicative language teaching (CLT) and post-communicative approaches, including the CEF² (Newby, 2003).

Traditional grammar teaching was based on a formal notion of competence: *the underlying knowledge of concepts and rules stored in the minds of speakers* which equated grammar with *syntax* and *morphology*, considering *meaning* as totally different linguistic level. The theoretical foundations of this approach are based both on Structuralism and Generativism, two pre-functional linguistic movements. The Structuralist view of language, associated to observable behaviors, was based on the analysis of form (phonology, morphology and syntax) over meaning (semantics), to which it did not pay any attention. On the other hand, Generativism considered that language should not be based on the classification of ‘surface/individual’ structures but rather, on the development of a system of innate and mental rules which would account for the structural possibilities of a language; however, it still considered syntax central. The set of practices associated to this approach have to do with the presentation-practice-production cycle, where the teacher presented the new grammatical item with the rule and the explanation of form and meaning. Then some controlled exercises were done, to consolidate the rule, and this intensive practice –or drilling– would eventually lead to production. Grammatical competence was viewed as conscious, explicit knowledge of rules (declarative knowledge, in psychological terms).

Communicative language teaching was initially influenced by linguists with a notional-functional view of language. With Hymes, Austin and especially Halliday’s theories, grammar was considered as both semantic and functional (Bloor, 2004:2), or as the study of linguistic forms realizing meanings, the so-called *Systemic-Functional Grammar* (SFG). According to this new concept of grammar, which appeared in Halliday’s writings in the 70s and which was consolidated in the 80s with his *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, the dichotomies previously mentioned would be irrelevant, since the concepts of function, meaning and communication would be included within the study of grammar and linguists should focus on the use of language rather than on its form itself. Thus, grammatical knowledge was performance, rather than competence, and grammar was considered as a sub-skill to be learned as procedural knowledge (doing rather than just knowing).

Within communicative approaches a distinction can be made between the general, non-prescriptive approach called Communicative Language Teaching, which appeared in the 80’s and which transformed the world of foreign languages teaching, and other more precise communicative methods which emerged from the appearance of CLT, but which went beyond linguistic theories including a more encompassing view of the learning processes, such as

² Grammar teaching in the CEF will also be considered within the latter communicative framework, as it is an inspiring source which in turn has influenced and been influenced by the evolving views of language.

Task-Based Language Teaching, Focus-on-Form, Cooperative Language Teaching³ and Content-Based Instruction, which have been considered post-communicative approaches. Grammatical knowledge within these approaches still maintains a functional-communication based view of language, but supports linguistic views with cognitive or constructivist theories. This performance-based account of language learning can also be ascribed to the CEF, as its descriptors are, (Newby, 2006:3), “action-oriented”: they focus on what a learner *can do* with the language. However, because of its relevance, the CEF will be considered in a separate section.

Leaving aside traditional views, grammar in the different communicative approaches will be specified below.

2. THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR IN CLT

There is a widespread belief that Communicative Language Teaching does not include any grammar. However, Spada argues that the thought that “Communicative Language Teaching means an exclusive focus on meaning” is a myth or a misconception (Spada, 2007:275). In fact, that widespread belief that CLT eclipsed attention to grammar is only partly true, since although CLT syllabuses are organized according to categories of meaning or functions, they still have a strong grammar basis (Thornbury, 1999:23), that is to say, the functions into which CLT syllabuses are organized are connected with their correspondent grammatical points.

Discussing the role of grammar within any communicative approach can be controversial, due to these misconceptions and also to the influence of Natural Approaches⁴, which ascribed no grammar role in language learning. However, when explaining the role of grammar specifically in CLT, some of that controversy may be solved if we do not talk about one single type of CLT but about two main types, the shallow-end approach and the deep-end approach to CLT (Thornbury, 1999).

The shallow-end approach to Communicative Language Teaching is based on the thought that in order to make the learner use language in a communicative situation it is necessary first to learn the grammatical rules and then apply them in that communicative situation; on the other hand, the deep-end approach to CLT is based on the belief that grammar is acquired unconsciously during the performance on those communicative situations, so it would be useless to teach grammar previously and explicitly (Thornbury, 1999:18-19)

According to this, CLT does deal with grammar, at least in its shallow-end approach. First, it just dresses up the grammatical structures into communicative functions; although they are not presented explicitly, they are still there. Second, if we have a functional, Hallidayan concept of grammar, the explicit teaching of functions would still be grammar teaching: according to Halliday, grammar is the study of linguistic forms (wordings) realizing functions or meanings; both wordings and functions are studied by grammar (Halliday, 1997).

However, the fact that there is grammar teaching in the shallow-end approach does not mean that this version of Communicative Language Teaching is not *communicative*. Grammar is considered as a means towards communication. In shallow-end syllabuses grammar is taught, but it is the way in which it is taught and its final result into the learners' communicative

³ This method will not be considered here. Cooperative Language Learning can focus both on form and meaning, the only prerequisite is that activities which focus on form have to do so with a cooperative, group-based procedure.

⁴ Natural approaches (see Krashen, 1985, for an example) equated second language learning with first language learning. According to this view, L2 learning should be acquired in the same way little children acquire the mother tongue, without any kind of grammar analysis or reflection. Within this view grammar was seen to have a negative influence on communication and unconscious acquisition.

performance the two factors that make that grammar meaningful and communicative. In the shallow-end to CLT, grammar is taught in a way that we can define as *inductive*: learners are not presented with a list of grammatical rules that they have to learn by heart (presentation-practice-production cycle) but rather, the teacher provides them with examples from which the learners will have to infer the rules by themselves. Rutherford (1996) calls this inductive way of teaching *consciousness-raising*. By means of this *consciousness-raising*, the teacher makes the learners relate the new grammatical concepts to other grammatical information that they already have, both from other grammatical concepts in the target language or even from grammatical information which appears in their L1. By provoking a consciousness-raising in the learners they take into account their general framework of knowledge which is already acquired, so the new grammar is as *familiar to the learner* as possible and it is not presented as something strange or unattached to previous knowledge.

Contrarily from the shallow-end approach, the deep-end methodology claimed that grammar should be acquired unconsciously, in line with Krashen's theories (1985) reflected on his Natural Approach, which became widely popular as an acquisition-oriented model. The cycle of input-intake-output reflected in this theory assumed no role for grammar, as it would affect the final aim of communication. This model has had a great influence on ELT, and there is still a belief that the teaching of grammar might be harmful for communicative competence, as it claims that conscious reflection about grammar affects negatively input processing and performance (the dichotomy grammar vs. communication). According to Lock, this excluding view of grammar in deep-end approaches was also strongly influenced by a rejection of traditional methodologies in which grammatical competence was acquired with the approach of the rule plus drilling methodology typical of Audiolingual or traditional grammar methods (Lock, 1997:267), because learning outcomes were not satisfactory: learners knew a lot *about* grammar but were unable to put that grammatical knowledge into practice. The reaction, in deep-end approaches, was not to teach grammar, as learners would be unable to integrate it within communication processes. However, even when the contradiction about teaching grammar still exists in ELT literature, in the classroom the deep-end approach is not currently used, as most authors and teachers attach a role to grammar, without diminishing the main target of communication. As Larsen-Freeman states:

Despite the popularity such approaches [the Natural Approach] now enjoy, if the pattern alluded to earlier is perpetuated [no grammatical analysis in the classroom], then one would expect them to be challenged. Indeed, there are already signs that this is happening. [...] Thus, a more satisfactory characterization of teaching grammar, harmonious with the above assumptions, is that teaching grammar means enabling language students to use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully and appropriately. (Larsen-Freeman, 1991:279-280)

3. THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR IN POST COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT)

The shift from methods to methodology is consonant with constructivist theories of learning (Crandal, 2000:38)

As stated above, CLT, especially in its deep-end version, proved to be inadequate for learners' competence levels: neither the exposition to quality input nor its focus on output/production are sufficient to guarantee *accurate* and fluent language learning. The shallow-end version, on the other hand, made a provision for grammar teaching, which basically arose from the needs of learners' as perceived by language teachers. Post communicative approaches have tried to solve this problem integrating the advances of both the linguistic and psychological disciplines. Linguistically speaking, communicative competence has given way to a broader view in which socio-cultural, pragmatic and discourse issues are combined with a notion of language based

on computational analysis. Thus, the notion of the language to be taught, and subsequently, its grammar, has been redefined to include a more real language corpus-based approach in which socio-cultural matters are subsequently taken into account. Psychologically speaking, cognitive views focusing on memory processes, attention, recall, automatization and control (see Anderson, 1985) combined with the evolution and application of the constructivist paradigm to language learning (Ausubel, 1968) have also *refined* CLT shifting the emphasis from teaching to learning, from final results to processes, and consider that *knowledge* is not learned but *constructed* in collaboration (*social learning*: Vigotsky, 1962; *scaffolding*: Brunner, 1983).

In short, all these approaches share the functional view of language but, as has been stated in the first section, they also take into account a more operative view of learning, in which the dichotomy of conscious versus unconscious knowledge (acquisition, in Krashen's terms) is solved by asserting the fact that conscious knowledge can become unconscious or automatized (Schmidt, 2001) and, alternatively, unconscious knowledge can be analyzed (Skehan, 1998). A second issue concerns the thought processes involved in processing and learning this – grammatical- knowledge: grammar learning is considered in terms of *performance* within a skill-based approach (Newby, 2006). The third issue within these approaches relates to how knowledge –grammar- may be acquired, by an inductive or a deductive route, the later typically connected to much traditional grammar teaching but also present in many current classrooms. Within post-CLT, some of the most commonly applied approaches, Task-based teaching, Focus-on-form teaching and Content-based Instruction, will be considered (Newby, 2006). In general, all of them consider that modifications in the input and in the interaction processes have to be combined with *explicit grammar teaching* (Ortega, 2000:209), or focus-on-form teaching (Doughty, 2001) to improve competence levels. Before contemplating each in detail, Figure 1 shows their connection with CLT and functional approaches

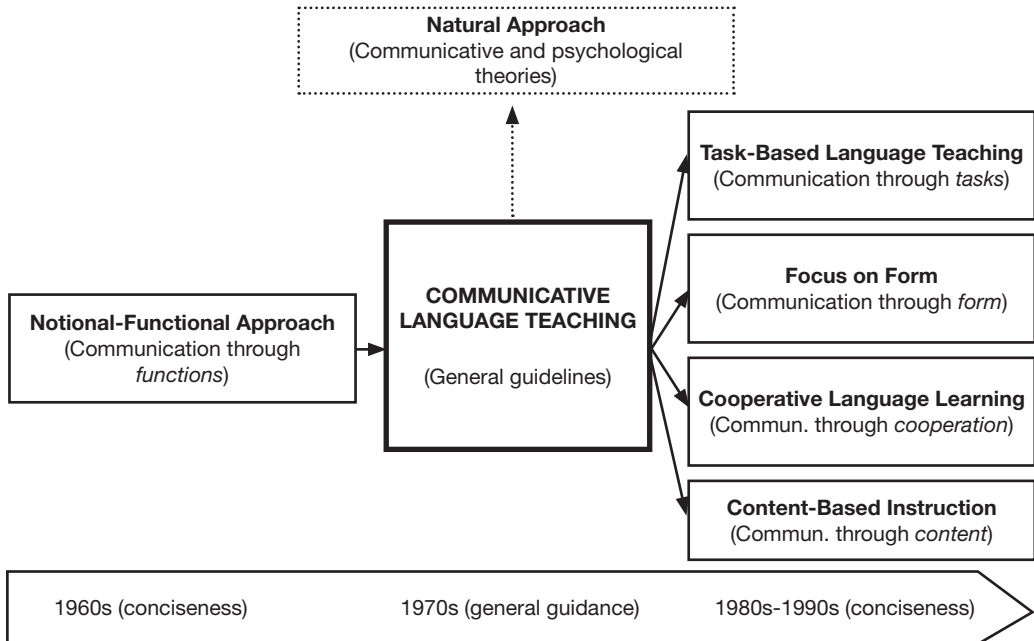


Figure 1. Evolution of communicative approaches.

In order to explain the role of grammar in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) we have to mention that there is a strong and a weak version of TBLT. Whereas the strong version does not deal with grammar teaching at all, the weak or focused-on-form version does include *explicit* grammar teaching (Nunan, 2007:93). This distinction is similar to the one about the shallow and deep-end versions of Communicative Language Teaching mentioned in the previous section.

According to the strong version of TBLT, tasks should be fulfilled with any linguistic means that are already available for the learners, so that teachers should not bias the tasks in order to use a specific linguistic structure: this type of task is called unfocused task (Nunan, 2007:97), which improves learners' communicative skills but might leave accuracy behind. On the other hand, the weak, focused-on-form version of Task-Based Language Teaching argues that in order to make students learn grammar, some focus on form is necessary. Tasks should not be so open that allow learners to fulfill them with any linguistic means already available but rather, tasks should bias students so that they will have a need for fulfilling them with a specific linguistic structure that has been previously presented and practiced; in that way learners would both improve their communicative skills and their grammatical accuracy. This type of tasks is called *focused tasks*.

Currently the weak version of TBLT is considered to be more complete and effective than its strong equivalent since it is much more advantageous: it is totally possible both to improve the learners' communicative skills and to make them acquire a specific syntactical structure and be accurate at using it. There are a number of reasons that justify this assertion.

First, the focus on form would not be presented at the beginning of each task, in a pre-communicative stage (like in the Presentation and Practice stages previous to the Production stage in the traditional, structural classroom sequence) but rather it can be presented after providing authentic input, so that the communicative mood of the lesson would not be interrupted.

Second, that focus on form would be complemented with enabling tasks, such as communicative activities, which make learners manipulate the linguistic forms in a communicative way, like in a 'find someone who...' activity, and which do not stop the communicative mood of the lesson (Nunan, 2007:24).

Third, in Task Based Language Teaching some grammatical items can be repeated throughout the syllabus instead of being presented only once, so that there is a constant review of them and learners will not have the feeling of studying the grammatical items in isolation.

So, as a conclusion about the role of grammar in Task-Based Language Teaching, it attempts to deal with grammar teaching in a way in which the learners' communicative skills are not harmed but improved. Thus, grammar is considered as a means towards communication and not as the end itself.

The second approach mentioned above, Focus-on-Form (Doughty and Williams, 1999), tries to solve the dichotomy communication versus grammar by introducing some focus on form within their communicative methodology. Focus-on-form means paying *attention* to the form, but without going back to focus-on-forms or traditional teaching (Doughty, 2001). The way in which this is done is by having a reactive (drawing the students' attention to their errors in using grammatical structures that they are supposed to be able to manage correctly already) or a proactive focus on form (making the learners use problematic structures which do not dominate yet and check their own performance) and using a sequential (first explicit instruction and then making them be aware of the different meanings of the structure) or integrated sequence (paying attention both to form and function at the same time); all this is carried out by using unobtrusive activities that do not interrupt the communicative mood of the lesson (Doughty and Williams, 1999). Small group interaction tasks with information exchanges, expansions and reformulation

techniques constitute some of the techniques implemented within this methodology, in which learners are expected to process forms, meaning and use simultaneously. This approach is strongly influenced by cognitive psychology, with its role for attention, processing constraints, and working versus long term memory. However, it also follows a constructivist framework, in which the focus is on the learner and how his/her regulation processes may be affected by the input modifications (Doughty, 2001).

Finally, regarding Content-Based Instruction (CBI), a method which is pivotal for the establishment of bilingual programs in schools (for a deeper revision, see Coyle, 2008), the only restraint that it imposes to teachers is that the syllabus must be organized around a series of topics (a topic syllabus); apart from that, language teachers have freedom for including different types of activities and different language teaching philosophies, although Communicative Language Teaching should have some preference because of the direct influence that this approach exerts on CBI. So, if the teacher is willing to teach grammar in a communicative way s/he can do some focus-on-form activities in order to do so, although it has to be borne in mind that the topic of content must remain central in the teaching process. According to the Hallidayan conception of language, grammar is meaning potential, so grammar can be used as a means towards both presentation and acquisition of non-linguistic contents and as a vehicle for the acquisition of communicative skills.

To sum up, all communicative approaches have a role for grammar teaching. Grammar can be taught within any communicative approach without interrupting the communicative mood; in fact, grammar can even help to enhance that communicative mood. As Harmer (1997:7) remarks, “at this stage, it is enough to say that grammar teaching –of both the overt and covert kind- has a real and important place in the classroom”.

The following chart summarizes the teaching philosophy of communicative approaches about grammar and which resources they use for doing so.

HOW (COMMUNICATIVE) APPROACHES DEAL WITH GRAMMAR		
Approach or Method	Competence vs. Performance	Techniques and Resources
<i>Traditional Grammar teaching</i>	Knowing about grammar: competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation-practice-production cycle • Continuous drilling for practice • Deductive teaching


	Knowing how to use grammar in context: performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grammatical structures are dressed up into communicative functions • inductive way of teaching grammar
<i>Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus on form after providing enough input • through enabling tasks • naturalistic repetition
<i>Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)</i> <i>Focus-on-Form (FonF)</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reactive/proactive focus-on-form • sequential/integrated sequence • unobtrusive activities • input modifications
<i>Content-Based Instruction (CBI)</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus on form through activities which are related to the topic in question • grammar taught within context, inductively or deductively • learning by using

Figure 2. How non-communicative and communicative approaches deal with grammar.

4. THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR IN THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES

Grammar has held and continues to hold a central place in language teaching. The zero grammar approach was flirted with but never really took hold, as is evident in both the current textbook materials emanating from publishing houses and in current theories of L2 acquisition. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that teaching grammar works. (Ellis, 2006:102)

Parallel to the development of linguistic theories with a functional view of language and pedagogical approaches for teaching the second/foreign language reflecting that view – language for communication-, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEF for short, also derived from the same Hallidayan perspective of language, although it did not specifically address or propose a teaching method or a language theory (Morrow, 2004).

The CEF had its origin in the Council of Europe, which in the fifties started focusing on teaching languages (particularly French and English) to adults. In the seventies, the Council of Europe, still with language teaching as one of its major priorities, provided the framework for the development of the Threshold level (1975, 1990), which put forward “categories of communication”, and gave way to pre-communicative approaches based on notions and functions. The emphasis was on using language for practical communication, outside the classroom. As Van Ek and Melville (1990:vi) quote in their revision of their original work in the seventies, it is “a kind of standard reference level”. They continue saying that:

It is NOT a recommended minimal vocabulary and set of structures for language, with some useful hints on how to use them in situations (...) the grammar and the lexicon is *not an end in itself*, it is simply a tool for the *performance*⁵ of communicative functions

The CEF did not constitute a teaching method, so either it followed pre-communicative approaches where grammar was present in the form of notions and functions or, alternatively, adhered to the Natural approach, in which grammar had no role, as it was considered a detriment to communication. In the classroom, however, these theories underlying applied linguistics had not yet influenced traditional teaching practices, which still focused on a drilling or presentation-practice-production layout.

In the eighties the Council of Europe continued supporting the Threshold level and promoted the incorporation of some initiatives and further developments, such as a lower (Waystage) and a higher (Vantage) level for English, which were followed by parallel descriptions for other languages. Again these levels were specified in terms of *communication* and *abilities* addressed to specific groups of learners. Grammar teaching constituted an issue left to be decided by syllabus creators, textbooks writers, and teachers. In the classroom it was the era of CLT mentioned in section 2.

In 1991, due to the change in the political situation of Europe and the broadening of its frontiers, there was a need to calibrate the standards and reference levels of different countries so that a common framework would be agreed upon. The *Waystage*, *Threshold* and *Vantage* levels developed in the 80s provided a basis for the creation of the six-level scale of the CEFR (A1-C2).

Ten years later (2001) this scale, from beginner or A1 to very proficient learner or C1, has provided a systematic description of what a learner/user of a language 'can do' at a given level in *any* language. These descriptors are sufficiently general so that they can be applied to different languages: they describe, but they do not suggest or recommend.

For example, in level B1, the learner

Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. (Morrow,2004:8).

In line with the functional framework which served as a basis for CLT, the CEF considers language in terms of communicative competence or, in other words, as the ability for learners to use the language. Communicative competence is in turn divided into several areas (linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge), although the one we will lay emphasis on is linguistic competence, which includes lexical, phonological and syntactical knowledge, or, in traditional terms, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Grammatical competence is defined in the CEF as follows:

May be defined as knowledge of, and ability to use, the grammatical resources of a language [...] Grammatical competence is the ability to understand and express meaning by producing and recognizing well-formed phrases and sentences in accordance with these principles (as opposed to memorizing and reproducing them as fixed formulae)." (Council of Europe, 2001:112-113)

⁵ Words in italics are our emphasis.

Grammatical competence is viewed as integral to all language skills, which learners have to master *progressively* to arrive at a high degree of accuracy, specifically within higher levels (C1)“(...) consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare and difficult to spot” (Council of Europe, 2001:114).

Even though grammar is explicitly mentioned as a competence or integral part of the language, the grammar that should be attached to any of the descriptors within the CEF depends on the particular language, and within that language, a range of different grammar items could be chosen to carry out any given ‘can do’ statement. A basic set of specific grammatical items within each level descriptor is being currently specified by the *Core Inventory*⁶, but additional language points have to be decided by teachers and syllabus writers, depending on the learners’ needs and the particular context. Moreover, there is no overt teaching methodology recommended for that grammar, although most of the post-communicative approaches described above and their underlying constructivist framework are being currently used in the classroom.

5. CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS: IS THERE A ROLE FOR GRAMMAR IN THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF LANGUAGES?

As has been implied in the previous section, there are a number of unsolved issues involved in the notion of grammatical competence reflected in the CEF, regarding what grammar is and its role in language learning. However, the foremost problem deals with the notion of competence.

Competence is, following a linguistic perspective and adopting Chomsky’s generativist views (Chomsky, 1965, as quoted in Westera, 2001:78), “the knowledge and rules that are necessary to produce speech” whereas performance is “the way speech functions when contaminated with external factors”. Alternatively, considering a psychological based cognitive framework, competences can be defined as “higher order cognitive skills and behaviors that represent the ability to cope with complex, unpredictable situations” (Ramos and Luque, 2010:330). The adoption of a functional perspective implies measuring *competence* through *performance*, that is to say, assessing inner knowledge with actual behavior. Accepting a cognitive view means using labels such as *competence*, *skill*, *ability* and *can do* in an interchangeable way, labels which are similar but not identical, as they involve different psychological processes. Thus, both definitions of competence involve their inability to be evaluated (Westera, 2001). Therefore, syllabus designers, textbook authors and teachers are expected to measure the acquisition of these competences through a behavior: what has been termed *descriptors* or *learning objectives*, which *explain* what the learner *can do*. This is a performance based measure.

A second problem in line with the previous shortcoming involves these descriptors, as they are categories too broad for actual implementation⁷ (Morrow, 2004). Which grammar ought to be considered? That is to say, which grammar item should be attached to those specific levels? The answer to these two questions lie in the linguistic theory considered and the notion of grammar ascribed to it. Keddlé (2004), for instance, accuses the document of ignoring grammar. Although the CEF does provide a definition of grammar (see section 4), it is not explicit in providing a explicit linguistic theory. As quoted in the CEF, this lack of accuracy is intentional, and would require researchers and specialists in further categorization work about the grammar of the different languages⁸:

⁶ <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Z243%20E&E%20EQUALS%20BROCHUREvised6.pdf> (accessed December, 2011)

⁷ For example, in A1, ‘the learner can ask for and give personal information’. There are several grammatical structures which can be associated to this descriptor.

⁸ As has been done with the development of the Core Inventory for English. See footnote 6.

The grammar of any language in this sense is highly complex and so far defies definitive or exhaustive treatment. There are a number of competing theories and models for the organisation of words into sentences [...] Here we limit ourselves to identifying some parameters and categories which have been widely used in grammatical description. (Council of Europe, 2001:113)

A third problem deals with methodology. How should grammar be incorporated in the teaching and learning process? What notion of teaching and learning should be chosen for the classroom? Would it focus on accuracy or would it be enough that the learner *can do* what we ask, even in an imperfect way? As defined above, grammatical competence is one of the skills the learners have to master *progressively*. How can *progressive* be interpreted in cognitive and linguistic terms? How would it be measured? For instance, if the learner “can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters” (see B1 level, above), would it consist on occasionally understanding, or, rather, knowing about some familiar matters and not about others? The CEF has an answer for these issues, which entails again, as in the notion of grammar, not adopting particular methodologies: ‘Nor should it embody any one particular approach to language teaching to the exclusion of all others’ (Council of Europe, 2001:18). Methodology is explicitly and intentionally left to teachers and textbook designers to decide, a fact which has received some criticisms but also support, because methodology varies with pedagogic culture.

Fourth, many teachers throughout Europe do not know what it is or how to use it the CEF. They are equally unaware of its classroom implications with regards to methodology, materials, student autonomy and assessment of communicative competence over and above such things as discrete item grammar testing, for example.

Fifth, what would the connection be between CEF recommendations and how grammar is considered in post communicative approaches (see table 1)? As the definition of grammatical competence asserts, ‘producing and recognizing well-formed phrases’ is considered much more appropriate than ‘memorizing and reproducing as fixed formulae’. However, memorization as a learning tool is not a negative strategy, as it has been shown that the learners’ age, learning style and the teaching methodology influence the type of learning strategies used for learning a language. Younger learners tend to use memory strategies whereas older ones analyze the language (Luque, 2006). Besides, there is a very positive correlation between verbal memory and language aptitude. That is to say, the more memory for words learners have, the more probabilities they will have of becoming successful language learners (García Mayo and García Lecumberri, 2003).

These problems can be summarized going back to the two initial questions of this section, what grammar is and how it should be taught, as the above problems refer to both issues.

Regarding the notion of grammar and its problem of imprecision, Gouveia (2006/7) points at the implicit *functionalist* view of the CEF, inherent in the new generation of reference level descriptions (RLD) being developed to identify the forms of a given language. There have appeared a number of British Council proposals for a *Core Inventory* using corpus data⁹ and other tools to produce more detailed descriptors. Other researchers are focusing on the development of RLDs in the areas of grammar and language functions, using empirical data from corpora and curricula to describe learning goals.

Considering the difficulty for their evaluation, the notion of *learning outcomes*, or in the CEF, *can do* statements, has evolved to overcome the lack of explicitness, although some imprecision still exists (Westera, 2001). Portfolio documents are being designed and incorporated in different countries by educational experts and included in many textbooks and curricula, both for Primary and Secondary education. Many of them can be freely accessed¹⁰.

⁹ Cambridge International Corpus, the British National Corpus, and the Cambridge Learner Corpus.

¹⁰ http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/Portfolio/documents/assessment_grid

Finally, considering methodological issues, the CEF is not a new approach for teaching languages, so we should not ask for explicit guidelines. We can find those in (post) communicative approaches, which involve a theory of language and, in parallel, a theory of language learning. This *descriptive* view of grammar *in context* entails that language is for communication, in other words, for *performing*. Thus, as long as learners *can use* the language, becoming skilled at grammar may involve inductive or deductive processes, presentation-practice-production cycles, understanding, reflecting and using, or exemplification and exploration (Newby, 2006), as long as it is not an end in itself, but a means for communication. As Gouveia (2006/7) mentions, the issue, for the CEF, is not the process, but the outcome: being able to use real language. Methodological decisions on how to do this have been left to those who instruct and have been doing so for years: teachers.

The important question is not whether teaching and learning grammar is necessary and/or sufficient for language learning, but whether it helps or not. And my own opinion is that yes, it does help, provided it is taught consistently as a means to improving mastery of the language, not as an end in itself. (Ur, 1999:77-78)

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