

## The Role of Functional Grammar in Enhancing the Communicative Ability of EFL Learners from Teachers' Perspective at SNCL/SELT

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### Abstract

The present study aimed to look into EFL Teachers' perspective towards the communicative role of functional grammar in the language learning process at Sudan National Centre Language SNCL from teachers' own perceptions through classroom's implementations of grammar instruction with regard to communicative language teaching (CLT). Participants were ten teachers who teach at SNCL. Data were collected through a questionnaire. The findings of this paper showed that there is a gap in the currently used curriculum of the communication courses at SNCL centre in dealing with functional grammar for communicative purposes. As well Teachers always teach grammar but not for communicative purposes ignoring this vital role of grammar. The findings also revealed that teaching grammar within context enhances EFL learners' communicative competence, though the lack of fluency is due to the absence of the communicative role of functional grammar.

**Key words:** functional grammar, context.

### المستخلص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة لبحث توجه أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حول دور القواعد الوظيفية في عملية تعزيز القدرة علي التخابط لدي دارسي اللغة الانجليزية في مركز السودان القومي للغات من وجهة نظر المعلمين من خلال تطبيقات الفصل لتدريس القواعد بالأخذ في الإعتبار تدريس اللغة التخابطية. بلغ المشاركون في هذه الدراسة عشرة أساتذة بمركز السودان القومي للغات. جمعت المعلومات عبر الاستبانة. وتوصلت الدراسة إلي أن هناك فراغ في محتوى المادة الدراسية لكورسات التخابط بالمركز في إعطاء القواعد دورها التخابطي كما لوحظ ان الاساتذة احيانا يغفلون هذا الدور. وكشفت الدراسة أيضا أن تدريس القواعد مضمنة في السياق يعزز قدرة الطلاب التخابطية وكذلك فإن غياب الطلاقة في التحدث يعزى إلي غياب الدور التخابطي للقواعد الوظيفية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** القواعد الوظيفية - سياق الكلام

### Introduction

The term grammar has been used immensely by so many scholars, linguists and foreign language learners. They all tried to answer a question on it entitled; what is grammar?

Roberts (1998) emphasized the important role that grammar plays in the language learning process, not only in the native language learning but on the foreign language learning as well. Grammar

learning gives the language learners a space of acknowledging the language and applying the structure more accurately in their uses of the language. It is considered as an effective way in making them deepen their perception of language and it is more effective in putting words in a correct grammatical way. The ultimate goal is to produce a sort of acceptable meaning by depending on proper linguistic rules of a logical sentence.



### 1.1 Statement of the problem:

From the researcher experiences it is found that Teachers ignore the communicative role of grammar in their teaching ; focusing on forms following the traditional trend of teaching rather than the use of the language given in which the focus is on patterns of language in context through noticing and how to be used to enable the students express themselves effectively .

### 1.2 Objectives of the study:

The present study attempted to realize the following objectives:

1. To identify teachers' perception of the communicative role of grammar.
2. To enlighten teachers of the most recent trend of teaching of grammar focusing on its communicative role.

### 1.3 Questions of the Study:

1. How far is there a gap in the curriculum of SNCL/SELTI in dealing with grammar within context?
2. In what way does the integration of grammar within context improve the communicative competence of the learners?
3. What are the outcomes if teachers teach grammar depending on a communicative teaching Approach?

### 1.4 Hypotheses of the study:

The present study hypothesized whether there is a gap in the curriculum of SNCL/SELTI in dealing with grammar within context and to what extent does the integration of grammar within context improve the communicative competence of the learners as a positive outcome.

## 2. Literature Review:

### Teaching Grammar communicatively in the foreign language teaching:

Many scholars stated that the importance of formal grammar teaching as an

effective approach as a way of helping language learners enhance their explicit knowledge of grammatical rules. However, some scholars adopt a state of consideration over the importance of teaching grammar explicitly; for example, Roberts (1998) came across Prabhus's views as 'teaching formal grammar or teaching grammar formally is neither necessary nor useful. While among others (e.g Cook,1991; Dulay,,et al, 1982; Schwartz,(1993) they do not support the fact that formal instruction doesn't play essential role in the grammar teaching which can be traced in Nasaji and Footos (2004).

Krashen(1993) discusses the issue of learning grammar via focusing on explicit language forms won't enhance the language learners competence in using the language. On the same base ,Truscott(1998) states that "learners genuine knowledge of language can not be enhanced by focusing on explicit grammar instruction only since it focuses on instructing the language rules".(p.120) ,and accordingly he claims it will not be the right tool that allows learners to possess the ability to communicate spontaneously in a given context. Significantly, Lightbown and Spada(2006) maintain that traditional grammar teaching via focusing on language forms fails to enhance and develop language learners' ability foreign language in a proper and an accurate way.

Regardless the fact that many studies show the discussion over the important values of traditional grammar teaching in an explicit way.

However, other researchers in their most recent studies (e.g. Krashen, 1999; Truscott, 1998; Nassaji and Fotos, 2004) argue that grammar teaching should consider “form-based instruction” through developing grammatical forms unconsciously, where learners’ skills in mastering of a foreign language will be enhanced through grammar drills and practice. They guarantee that this method is a good tool for addressing learners’ needs for communication purposes.

As Larsen-Freeman (1991) an anti-traditional approach to grammar teaching education mentioned Widdowson’s (1978) advocate that there are many communicative approaches which emphasize language use over rules of language use, however, many were inspired by Chomsky’s cognitive code approach which emphasizes on instructing language learners to have language practice in analyzing structures and applying rules.

So the communicative language teaching is based on the ground that teaching grammar does not only have language learners focus on acquiring the language forms, but also have them know how to apply it in their communication.

**Damaris (2013)** looks at the advantages of implementing the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the traditional grammar lessons, and the way it makes the students learn a second language in an interactive and creative classroom environment. Also, he discusses current teaching strategies and the methodological transformation of grammar in the language courses. Data was collected through a mixed investigation, which includes information extracted from a student’s survey and some other digital resources, and

that was synthesized and analyzed by the researchers with the main objective of, with the results, helping English teachers at Universidad Nacional to improve their grammar lessons through the use of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach.

**Wong and Barrera (2012)** in their study entitled “the role of grammar in communicative language teaching: An exploration of second language teachers’ perceptions and classroom practices”.

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to look into second language (L2) teachers’ perceptions and classroom implementations of grammar instruction with regard to communicative language teaching (CLT). The study focused on individual teachers’ perspectives of CLT because teachers’ perceptions of their pedagogical skills have an impact on how they teach. Participants were six college level teachers who taught Spanish as L2 in a major university in the Southern United States. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and document and record collection. The findings indicated that there was a mixture of perceptions regarding the inclusion of explicit grammar instruction in a CLT classroom. The findings also revealed that teachers’ perceptions of what they deem to be effective L2 instruction are influenced by their experience as learners as well as their observation of student learning. The results suggest that teachers’ beliefs are generally reflected in their classroom practices, but exceptions may occur due to departmental regulations. Pedagogical implications for teacher education and world language methods courses were drawn up based on the findings of the study.

From the reviewed literature the current study agrees with Krashen ,1999; Truscott,1998; Nassaji and Fotos, 2004, on the point of view, that grammar teaching should consider “form-based instruction” through developing grammatical forms unconsciously , where learners skills in mastering of a foreign language will be enhanced through grammar drills and practice which is similar to the research claims of functional grammar which gives learners space to practice situations that are similar to that of real life unconsciously focusing and practicing language within the scope of certain rules of language . Moreover, this method is a good tool for addressing learners’ needs for communication purposes.

### 3. Methodology:

A questionnaire was used and distributed for teachers to look at their attitudes towards the communicative role of grammar

### Subjects:

The population of this paper was 10 teachers of English language who teach English at SNCL. Those teachers were different in numbers of years teaching background experiences.

### Instruments

Instruments for data collection of this study was teachers’ questionnaire. This

study provides data from participants' perspective

### Procedures

In this paper the researcher distributed a questionnaire to answer research questions. The data were limited to EFL Teachers’ attitudes towards the communicative role of grammar in the language learning process at SNCL .Then the researcher collected data so as to analyze them.

### 4. Data collection

A questionnaire was designed for collecting data. The questionnaire targeted to be filled by 10 teachers at SNCL of both genders; male and female to express their ideas and opinions through its different statements to evaluate teachers' attitudes towards the communicative role of grammar.

### Data Analysis and Discussions:

The questionnaire was the only tool used to collect data of the study. The aim of this questionnaire was to find out views of the English language teachers about Enhancing communicative competence through integrating functional grammar and lexis.

The total samples of the questionnaire were 10.Likert 3-point scale was used to show responses of the participants. In scoring the participants' answers, five points were given to agree, three points to neutral and two points to disagree.

**Table (1) The frequency and percentage for Age**

age	Frequency	Percent
20-30 years	2	20.0%
31-40 years	1	10.0%
41-50 years	5	50.0%
51-60 years	1	10.0%
Over60 years	1	10.0%
Total	10	100.0%

Source: IPM SPSS 24 package

Table (1) illustrates the views of the distribution of the sample by the age as follows 20-30 years by (20.0%) and 31- 40 years by (%10.0) and 41-50 years by (50.0%) and 51-60 years by (%10.0) and Over 60 years by (%10.0) .

**Table (2) The frequency and percentage for Gender**

gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	6	60.0%
Female	4	40.0%
Total	10	100.0%

Source: IPM SPSS 24 package

Table (2) illustrates the views of the distribution of the sample by the gender as follows Male by (%60.0) and Female by (%40.0).

**Table (3 )The frequency and percentage for Work**

work	Frequency	Percent
part-time teacher	3	30.0%
permanent	7	70.0%
Total	10	100.0%

Source: IPM SPSS 24 package

Table (3) illustrates the views of the distribution of the sample by the work is follows part-time teacher by (%30.0) and permanent by (%70.0).

**Table (4) The frequency and percentage for Qualification**

qualification	Frequency	Percent
B.A	7	70.0%
M.A	3	30.0%
PhD	0	0.0%
Total	10	100.0%

Source: IPM SPSS 24 package

Table (4) illustrates the views of the distribution of the sample by the qualification is follows B.A by (%70.0) and M.A by (%30.0) and PhD by (%0.0).

**Table (5) The frequency and percentage for Experience**

experience	Frequency	Percent
0 -5 years	2	20.0%
6-10 years	4	40.0%
11-15 years	1	10.0%
16-20 years	0	0.0%
over20 years	3	30.0%
Total	20	100.0%

Source: IPM SPSS 24 package

Table (5) illustrates the views of the distribution of the sample by the experience as follows 0 -5 years by (%20.0) and 6-10 years by (%40.0) and 11-15 years by (%10.0) and 16-20 years by (%0.0) and over 20 years by (%30.0) .

### The frequency and percentage for the response of the questionnaire:

When the participants were asked to answer item number 1 (Students communicate effectively when they master linguistic aspect of the language ( e.g. grammar and lexis ) 5 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (50%). 1 of them responded ( Neutral) which represents (%10.0) whereas the 4 responded (Disagree) which represents (%40.0)

When the participants were asked to answer item number 2 (In the course of learning a foreign language EFL learners face obstacles in producing accurate patterns) 9 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (90%), 1 of them responded ( Neutral) which represents (%10.0) but no one responded (Disagree) which represents (%0.0)

When the participants were asked to answer item number 3 (ELL learners commit pragmatic failures because lexical phrases are always not used in appropriate context) 4 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (40%). 3 of them responded ( Neutral) which represents (%30.0) whereas the other 3 responded (Disagree) which represents (%30.0)

When the participants were asked to answer item number 4 (EFL learners learn vocabulary in isolation with heavy reliance on L1 in producing weak pattern of language ( unauthentic)) 8 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (80%), 2 of them responded (Neutral) which represents (%20.0) but no one responded (Disagree) which represents (%0.0)

When the participants were asked to answer item number 5 (There is a gap in the currently used curriculum of the

communication courses at SNCL centre in dealing with grammar and lexis together for communicative purposes) 7 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (70%), 2 of them responded ( Neutral) which represents (%20.0) whereas the 1 responded (Disagree) which represents (%10.0)

When the participants were asked to answer item number 6 (Teachers always teach vocabulary but not for communicative purposes) 6 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (60%), 3 of them responded ( Neutral) which represents (%30.0) where there is one person responded (Disagree) which represents (%10.0)

When the participants were asked to answer item number 7 (Teaching vocabulary should be assigned to a topic of communication) 9 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (90%), 1 of them responded ( Neutral) which represents (%10.0) where there is no one responded (Disagree) which represents (%0.0)

When the participants were asked to answer item number 8 (Integrating grammar and lexis within context enhances EFL learners' communicative competence) 8 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (80%), 1 of them responded ( Neutral) which represents (%10.0) where there is one person responded (Disagree) which represents (%10.0)

When the participants were asked to answer item number 9 (Teachers neglect the functional situational language) 4 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (40%), 5 of them responded ( Neutral) which represents (%50.0) where there is one person responded (Disagree) which represents (%10.0).



When the participants were asked to answer item number 10 (Teachers are aware of the functional situational language but they do not dedicate enough time to handle it effectively) 8 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (80%), 2 of them responded (Neutral) which represents (%20.0) where there is no one responded (Disagree) which represents (%0.0).

When the participants were asked to answer item number 11 (Teachers always teach grammar explicitly) 6 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (60%), 3 of them responded (Neutral) which represents (%30.0) where there is one person responded (Disagree) which represents (%10.0).

When the participants were asked to answer item number 12 (Teaching grammar for communicative purposes should be within a context of a situational language) all of the participants responded (agree) which represents (100%).

When the participants were asked to answer item number 13 (The weakness of oral ability for Sudanese EFL learners is due to the absence of the situational functional language)

7 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (70%), 2 of them responded (Neutral) which represents (%20.0) where there is one person responded (Disagree) which represents (%10.0).

When the participants were asked to answer item number 14 (Methods of teaching English language at SNCL need to be reviewed) 9 of the 10 participants responded

(agree) which represents (90%), 1 of them responded (Neutral) which represents (%10.0) where there is no one responded (Disagree) which represents (%0.0).

by the service by the Agree (%60.0) and Neutral by (%30.0) and Disagree by (%10.0)

When the participants were asked to answer item number 15 (The lack of fluency is due to the absence of the communicative role of lexis and grammar) 6 of the 10 participants responded (agree) which represents (60%), 3 of them responded (Neutral) which represents (%30.0) where there is one person responded (Disagree) which represents (%10.0).

**5. Conclusion:** Teachers should change their attitudes towards grammar through preparing well planned material focusing on a communicative purpose of a topic and encourage their students to learn grammar to help them communicate in an accurate and fluent way

#### **The findings of the research:**

The findings of this paper showed that:

1. There is a gap in the currently used curriculum of the communication courses at SNCL centre in dealing with grammar for communicative purposes
2. Teachers always teach grammar but not for communicative purposes
3. Teaching grammar within context enhances EFL learners' communicative competence
4. The lack of fluency is due to the absence of the communicative role of grammar

**There are recommendations based on the above findings of this study.**

1. Grammar should be assigned to topic of communication to serve a communicative purpose



2. Grammar should be embedded within a context.

3. Teachers should train EFL learners in producing accurate patterns focusing on functional grammar

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