

Overview

Spoken Grammar and Its Role in the English Language Classroom

Yusifli K. O.¹

¹ *Azerbaijan state physical culture and sports academy.*

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According to Ur “of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important.” Indeed, whether for business or pleasure, a primary motivation to learn a second language is to be able to converse with speakers of that language. This explains why so many language learners are very interested in the speaking skill. However, in addition to being an important skill, speaking is also a great challenge for foreign language learners, and students must master several difficult microskills, including the pronunciation of unfamiliar phonemes, the correct placement of stress and intonation, and the appropriate use of formal and informal expressions. To complicate matters, students in an English as a foreign language (EFL) environment have few opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom. There is little wonder then, that graduates in Azerbaijan are often incapable of effectively communicating with foreigners in English, a phenomenon known as mute English. The status quo of teaching spoken English in our country is plenty of time and money spent with unsatisfactory outcomes, a problem that has attracted the attention of the government. Opinions are divided on how to go about making a change in the way English is taught, although many see a problem with the traditional overemphasis on grammar and vocabulary in English classes where students receive intensive but separate practice in reading, writing, and listening, with

no speaking involved. Because of current trends emphasizing communicative language teaching and authenticity, recognizing the classroom role of spoken grammar is more important than ever before. Learning about characteristics of spoken grammar and ways to teach them empowers us to improve our students’ overall fluency and face-to-face conversation, increases the authenticity of our speaking lessons, and prevents students from speaking English like a textbook. Recently, though, particularly as a result of analysis of large corpora of spoken data and an emphasis on spoken communication, researchers and linguists have begun to focus on describing features of spoken grammar and to question the appropriateness of applying writing-based standards and grammatical descriptions to spoken English. Unlike written English, spoken English is usually spontaneous and unplanned and produced in real time with no opportunity for editing. Thus, the nature and characteristics of conversational English itself lead to several distinct grammatical features of spoken English as speakers try to fulfill the interpersonal and interactive functions of spoken language in real time. Not learning features of spoken grammar can impede students’ ability to speak English fluently and appropriately. The following six features of spoken grammar will help language instructors to understand what spoken grammar is and to provide class room instruction and activities that advance their students’

development of spoken grammar knowledge and overall English speaking skills. Six features of spoken grammar: Ellipsis, Heads, Tails, Fillers and backchannels, Phrasal chunks.

Literature

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