Introduction

Entering the language classroom for the first time can be both an exciting and challenging experience for the novice teacher. Likewise for the learner who embarks on a journey of learning English for the first time.

Besides the knowledge and skills developed through initial teacher education, the beginning teacher needs practical support, in terms of resources, down-to-earth material that can ease their teaching as well as facilitate student's comprehension and hence acquisition of concepts presented. If the teacher's message is unclear or too complex to understand, the students can lose their way, especially those with receptive language or working memory difficulties. Teachers who *simplify* their language give students a much better chance of understanding the intended message, which can foster motivation and not *lose* the students in the learning process.

The rationale behind the genesis of this book is in essence twofold: the first related to the learner and the second to the teacher, mutually interconnected and interdependent.

Over the past decade, I have noticed that Italian students lack a knowledge of how the English language works. They may learn the individual grammar elements but not in relation to how each item works within a sentence[1] hence, poor exam results abound. They may understand the gist of what they are reading but are unable to produce acceptably correct sentences. More often than not, tests thrive with recognition exercises that limit the task to True or False, multiple choice, dialogues to complete with choices given, etc. in which they are not asked to produce original complete meaningful sentences. More importantly, when asked to complete

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1. The term "sentence" is used in this book to mean "a group of words that expresses a complete thought". Sentences are constructed according to a system of rules known as grammar. The study of sentence structure is called syntax and a syntactic analysis forms the dominant element in a modern English grammar. (for an in-depth analysis on this topic, consult Crystal, 2003).

a paragraph or a letter as a cloze exercise, they are at an impasse because they are unable to analyze the sentence and figure out what part of speech is missing. This essentially shows a lack of knowledge of the structural framework of the language. Interestingly though, sentence structure is an extremely important element of the TOEFL[2] test which dedicates an entire section to structure. Perhaps this fact should not be underestimated.

In the teaching of English, simplification of structure is much more important than simplification of vocabulary and it is surprising that so much thought has been given to the latter and so little to the former. My personal teaching experience indicates that our students' need is not for a selection of words but for a selection of patterns. Over-emphasizing the importance of mastering words can do more harm than good. Students start learning a language with high hopes and then discouragement and weakening of effort takes over. The reason for this lack of perseverance may derive from the illusion, which most beginners have, that language learning is primarily a matter of learning words. Finding that this idea is mistaken they are disappointed at meeting unexpected difficulties and complexities and their efforts flag (cfr. Wakefield, H., 2005 reprint).

Furthermore, my experience with Teacher training courses (i.e. TFA, PAS), provided me with more insight into what teachers actually need. The trainees expressed their desire for practical material they can readily and easily put into practice with their students. These pre-service teachers voiced the need for simple language, not theoretical or sophisticated explanations which at times in textbooks can become too complex to understand. When Teachers describe structure in an explicit manner they should use simple English words and not scientific academic jargon, which can confuse learners. In addition, making reference to other languages that the learners know, including their Mother Tongue, can very often help clarify concepts. I often compare English and French with Italian students who have studied French at school. When I use cross-linguistic approaches and contrastive analysis, I find that the students in seeing the difference or similarity, something seems to click—they understand the mechanism of the language. A comparative analysis can yield fruitful results because cross-linguistic referencing becomes consciousness raising. In addition, Rutherford (1987) holds that 'successful learning comes about only when what is to be learned can be meaningfully related to something that is already known'. In fact, in recent years, research endorses the use of the

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2. See for example, Heinle and Heinle's Complete Guide to the TOEFL Test.

first language as it facilitates the learning process of the second language (Cummins 2007, García 2008 and Kang 2012).

Naturally, part of the process of language learning is the so-called item-learning, i.e. the memorization of individual items such as words and phrases, but there is a limit to the number of items one can retain and retrieve. At a certain point, we need to learn some patterns or rules to enable us to generate new sentences, in other words, grammar—a description of the regularities in a language, and knowledge of these regularities provides the learner with the means to generate a potentially enormous number of original sentences. Grammar is a sort of 'sentence-making machine', which offers the learner the means for potentially limitless linguistic creativity.

Linguistics defines language as a system of relations or a set of inter-related systems (Lyons, 1968) and grammar as a finite set of rules or generalizations on which that system is based and by which the native speaker can generate an infinite set of grammatically correct sentences (Chomsky, 1965). In my opinion, the concept of system is the keystone and must be transmitted to the foreign language learner explicitly and implicitly while guarding against its becoming obfuscated by an over-emphasis on unconnected grammatical 'points', exceptions to the rule, or "rules of low-level syntax"[3]. Besides inculcating in the student an awareness of the underlying system, it is also important to impress on him the notion that learning a language involves interpreting and classifying the manifestations of that system, deriving generalizations from them, and organizing and structuring lexical items according to those generalizations or rules. Learners need to be encouraged to call on their capacities for observation and analysis as a preliminary step to production. As teachers, we should ask ourselves how we can help the learner in his efforts to discover the system and the recurring relationships holding between the elements. Moreover, experience tells us that learners yearn for some systemization of the grammar, thus teaching about the language leads us to suggest sentence structure reflection for pedagogical use. Whenever possible illustrating concepts in context is highly encouraged. However, it must be stressed that syntactic analysis is not proposed as the predominant teaching activity in the language classroom but it is meant to be an auxiliary activity and a complementary component of any communicative type of syllabus. Similarly, it is not the intent of this book to discuss teaching methods that the teacher can

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3. Low-level syntax refers to subject-verb agreement, plural and possessive markers, tense formation, etc. (Rutherford, 1980: 62)

use since this depends on many factors such as age, number of students in the class, level of English, etc.

I concur with Bateman's viewpoint:

> Linguistics as a whole can now benefit only when contributions across a broad range of linguistic schools are drawn upon, since no one orientation to the phenomenon of human language can claim to cover all angles. This is also, in essence, to reaffirm an early position advocated by Halliday (1964: 13): "I would defend the view that different coexisting models in linguistics may best be regarded as appropriate to different aims, rather than as competing contenders for the same goal" (as reported in Bartlett and O'Grady, 2017: 24).

There are many theoretical orientations among modern second-language methods and approaches. Any approach, for example,

> that concerns itself with making a grammatical account sufficiently explicit to 'cover' the structural configurations provided by a language or language variety will necessarily have components strongly focused at the 'in texts' pole[4], be those approaches structural, generative, formalist, cognitive or whatever (*Ibid*).

Any of these approaches may have points of significance for linguistic work and be beneficial for real-time, dynamic language processing. Besides, any current theory, ranging from traditional psycholinguistic explorations to accounts of embodied semantics, all have much to add and will no doubt be of considerable relevance. Structural-functional approaches (Van Valin 1992: 2) pick out approaches that take communicative function to be a crucial motivating force for grammatical structure (as reported in Bateman, 2017). Blending approaches that provide information about form and function cannot hinder language acquisition. Recently a lot of evidence has come out against implicit grammar instruction as being ineffective or less effective than explicit instruction (cfr. 2010 meta-analysis by Spada and Tomita) and in support of the importance of metalinguistic awareness in language learning (Nazari, 2013).

The book directly addresses the reader—learner or teacher alike—making him/her think about the language. The earlier the student learns about syntax, recognizing word order and sentence structure the easier it becomes. Mastering how the language works results in a greater awareness of the intricacies of the language. As students get older, it becomes more difficult to correct syntax errors. In many cases, older students translate from their native language directly into English without considering the word order, which changes between languages. For example, a common mistake among Italian and Spanish speakers is to place the adjective af-

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4. For further explanations on this point, see Bartlett, T. and G. O'Grady (eds.) (2017).

ter the noun. Or, as Nigel Fabb (2005: 2) illustrates in his example "I was reading the letter to John", one sequence of words can produce two different and alternative meanings: structural ambiguity needs to be dealt with. Thus, the earlier the structure is reinforced, the more likely the student will develop a natural inclination to using the correct syntax. Accordingly, I do not believe that we should completely do away with traditional approaches; on the contrary, I think we should be flexible in language teaching and weave different approaches together, thus an inclusive approach to grammatical structures should include both implicit and explicit characteristics. This book does not claim in any way to be exhaustive in this field of study, but simply aims to be a valuable aid in simplifying the comprehension of the fundamentals of English structure. Raising awareness through conscious efforts gives students the tools that allow for more effective communication.

The teacher's objective is of course to enable his/her students to internalize the rules of usage and use in order to attain communicative competence in the foreign language. And, above all, to give him/her the tools to become autonomous language learners and language users. Any system that works in this direction is worth implementing.

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Abbreviations

ADJ	Adjective
ADV	Adverb
D	Determiner
DO	Direct Object
InV	Intransitive Verb
LV	Linking Verb
N	Noun
NH	Noun Head
O	Object
PostD	Postdeterminer
Pred.	Predeterminer
Prep.	Preposition
S	Subject
Sing.	Singular
TrV	Transitive Verb
UW	Uninflected word
*	Ungrammatical sentence

Chapter 1
Word order

Look at this sentence: "**Her liked he very much**."
Make it into an acceptable English sentence.

_____

There were two choices: 1) "She liked him very much."
                           2) "He liked her very much."

Most of you probably came up with "She liked him very much."

Explanation: Word order is such a vital grammatical signal in English that our impulse is to retain the word order and adjust the form of the pronouns.

Is this the case in other languages? Let us consider a few.

A friend of mine was once asked in an Italian restaurant if she ate pork.

"Mangia lei il maiale?"

the waiter said, and when she didn't understand, he repeated:

"Lei mangia il maiale?"

and, again, in the face of her blank stare:

"Mangia il maiale lei?"

To all intents and purposes, he was repeating the sentence, since a change in word order resulted in no change of meaning. The Italian learning English cannot know a priori that:

"Do you pork eat?"

is unEnglish and that the options available in Italian are not available in English where word order is far more rigid.[5]

Learners of ESL will tend to transfer to English the word order that works in their mother tongue. Thus, the German is likely to say: "he comes tomorrow home" basing this word order pattern on the German "er kommt morgen nach Hause."[6]

Although both the sentences

"He comes tomorrow home."

and   "Do you pork eat?"

or the more common "eat you pork"

are unacceptable grammatically, they are unlikely to be misunderstood. On the other hand, a word-for-word translation of a sentence like

"Diese Frau liebt der Mann"

into "this woman loves the man" conveys a notion which may or may not be true, but which is certainly unintended. This sentence properly translates as "the man loves this woman." In German, it is obvious that "der Mann" is the subject since it is in the nominative case. The word order is immaterial.

In English, with no such case system, word order is vital. However unlikely the situation to which the sentence "The man bit the dog" refers, there can be no doubt as to who was bitten and who did the biting—which the subject and which the object.
Look at this sentence:

"I gave the gove the mook."

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5. In Italian, the order of subject and predicate is for the most part free. Unless the subject contains an interrogative word (chi te l'ha chiesto), or unless it is an infinitival (è impossibile finire oggi) or a subordinate clause (è vero che vengono stasera) it may come either before or after the predicate – "il mio collega era andato in Sicilia" or "era andato in Sicilia il mio collega" – the choice of order often being stylistic.

6. In German the sentence "Mr. Meyer goes to town every morning" can be rendered in three ways:
    Herr Myer fahrt jeden Morgen in die Stadt.
    Jeden Morgen fahrt Herr Myer in die Stadt.
    In die Stadt fahrt Herr Myer jeden Morgen.
but in no case is the word order the same as it is in English. (note that in German the position of the finite verb is fixed. It must be the second element in the utterance.)

Answer the questions:

    Whom did you give it to? _____

    What did you give the gove? _____

You probably had no difficulties answering the questions. Word order, then, also indicates which is the direct and which the indirect object in English sentences.[7] In German, on the other hand, it is again the inflectional system, not word order, which gives us this information.

"I'm giving the woman the book" can be expressed as "Ich gab der Frau das Buch" or "Ich gab das Buch der Frau."

The student of German who labored over the "der, dem, die" the accusatives, the nominatives, etc., and considered it all at best superfluous and at worst a wicked plot to make the "mental discipline" of language learning more rigorous will sympathize with the German or Italian who is equally frustrated by our relatively fixed word order. It should be noted that both methods—word order and inflection—fulfill their functions equally well and are equally easy for the native to pick up, learning them as he does, painlessly at his mother's knee.

In noun compounds, it is again word order that generally tells us which is the modifier and which the head.

    What kind of chocolate do you prefer?

    I prefer milk chocolate.

    What kind of milk would you like?

    I'd like some chocolate milk.

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7. Someone might point out that "I gave the gove the mook" might represent constructions like:
    I gave the boy a kick.
    I gave the man a promotion.
    I gave the idea a thought.
which in form belong to the pattern S V'OO but with this difference:
In all cases, the second and fourth element can be replaced by a single verb—kicked, promoted, thought (about). The "gove" is simply a dummy for carrying tense, etc., and that the action is realized outside the verb is seen from the following exchange:
    I gave the boy a book.   Why did you give him that?
    I gave the boy a kick.   Why did you do that?