

Grammar in Language Teaching and Language Learning

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Abstract:

Grammar should be the focus of both rule-based language teaching approaches and non-rule-based language learning approaches, although in the former it is “*a focus on forms*”, whereas in the latter it is “*a focus on form*”. The essence of language learning is the approximation of an interlanguage system to the target language, and language teaching effects language learning only when it can conduce to the approximation. The inherent property of meaning uncertainty of the communicative approach theories determines that TESOL based on the rules of meaning cannot organize language for teaching in an efficient way with a logical sequence of activities and weighted distribution of teachings, which is a sound proof of the legitimacy of grammar-based syllabus and the indispensability of grammar-teaching in TESOL. The findings about second language acquisition mechanisms in SLA expose the significance of forcing syntactic processing and noticing form in the course of language-learner language becoming progressively more complex. The findings consist of a set of reasons and a logical basis to account for the occurrence of language learning or the enabling of learning conditions and therefore a strong support of a return to grammar in TESOL. The implication of SLA findings for TESOL research is that, the essence of language teaching should be the teaching of form, teaching the rules of form that are regularized and generalized in grammar, and TESOL should be grammar-based, since grammar-based language teaching alone conduces to the progressive complexity in form. The complexity in form is adequate evidence of learning occurrence as well as teaching effect.

Key Words: Grammar; Form-based; Meaning Uncertainty; Syntactic Processing; TESOL; SLA

Since the introduction into China in the late 1980s and the early 1990s of the communicative approach and CLT (communicative language teaching), grammar-based approaches have been discredited and have faded away from English language teaching research as well as practice. The national syllabuses promulgated by the Ministry of Education for different levels of English teaching require schools of different levels to put into effect the communicative approach first and then advocate the task-based approach. Meanwhile, grammar-based approaches have virtually become a stigma in China that few care to discuss grammar-teaching in research or dare to conduct declarative grammar-teaching in practice. Even when CLT has proved to be inefficient or even impossible, the traditional grammatical approaches see no prospect of rehabilitation or reinstatement today. This article attempts to discuss the significance of grammar in both language teaching and language learning. And, following Ellis (1985: 6; 1997: 3), it makes no distinction between learning and acquisition, between foreign language and second language, or between conscious and subconscious, and uses the simple term “language” to avoid the awkwardness caused by these controversial issues, especially the issues of foreign language and second language. When necessary, SLA (second language acquisition) is used for language learning while TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) for language teaching.

An examination of communicative competence principles will prove that there are no theoretical grounds in the principles proper for CLT to be introduced at the expense of grammar-teaching. Almost all the traditional language teaching research starts from the language question and determines language teaching approaches and syllabuses according to the different answers of various linguistic schools to the question “what is language”. Different as the approaches and syllabuses are, they have one thing in common – they are all based on grammatical forms. The communicative competence principles strike TESOL research as fresh and new because the same language question is viewed in a completely new light of sociolinguistics – “There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless” (Hymes, 1971: 15). Hymes raises three more concerns of feasibility, appropriateness and acceptability, besides the traditional concern of grammaticality, when he expounds the communicative competence (1971: 18-24). He lays emphasis, as Howatt points out, on “a better understanding of how language is used”, while to certain extent pays less attention to “a better understanding of how language is structured” (1984: 271). It might be reasonable for Hymes to exceed the proper limits in righting the mistake or malpractice of neglecting language performance in answering “what is language”, but “the baby” might be thrown out with the bath water by his sociolinguistic excess. The communicative approach consequently resulted is no longer based on grammatical forms and thus distinguishes itself from traditional grammatical approaches. This does not loyally follow communicative competence principles, however, for, overlooked as it is, there is grammatical component in the principles as Hymes puts forward. Hymes states that, “There are several sectors of communicative competence, of which the grammatical is one”, “competence is dependent upon both (tacit) *knowledge* and (ability for) *use*”, and knowledge is part of competence (1971: 18-19). In fact this grammatical

component stands number one in the four well-known questions of Hymes' as "whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible" and later re-emerges in applied linguists' works, especially that of Widdowson's, as "form" with respect to "meaning" or as "usage" with respect to "use". Such linguistic dichotomy indicates not just the opposite relation but also the unified relation between form and meaning. In applied linguists' works, the same dialectical relation is also found in the dichotomy of linguistic competence and communicative competence, where elaborations of communicative competence are always accompanied with discussions of linguistic competence. Linguistic competence is part as well as base of communicative competence, while communicative competence includes as well as depends upon linguistic competence. Moreover, even though Hymes does over-emphasize language performance in his discussion of the principles, he does not mean his theory to be followed by TESOL research or applied in TESOL practice. He states, instead, at the beginning of his famous "On Communicative Competence" that "this paper is theoretical", and "a related connotation [of 'theoretical'] is that one knows too little about the subject to say something practical" (1971: 5). The principles of Hymes' four concerns are purely theoretical and need to be carefully rendered manipulatable for a communicative approach to take shape. This is where applied linguists come in. Some applied linguists come up with several practical ideas and pragmatic models for TESOL research and practice, and in these ideas and models the grammatical component remains conspicuous.

Widdowson states that, "a knowledge of use must of necessity include a knowledge of usage" (1978: 18), for meanings must be conveyed in certain forms. According to Widdowson, grammar-teaching is indispensable and there is no justification for CLT to discard declarative grammar-teaching in developing students' communicative competence. If Widdowson develops the communicative competence principles with certain compromise between form/usage and meaning/use, Morrow and Brumfit stress the indispensability of grammar-teaching and give priority to grammaticality over sociolinguistic concerns. Morrow points out that, "communicating involves using appropriate forms in appropriate ways" (1981: 65), in which "forms" is related to the grammatical concern of possibility, "ways" is related to the sociolinguistic concerns of feasibility, appropriateness and acceptability, and "using" means language performance. The crucial point here is that language-using cannot occur without certain "forms" because the exclusion of "forms" from language performance will simultaneously deprive "using" of the object being used; therefore Morrow states that "the acquisition of forms" is "a central part of language learning". Brumfit explicitly favours grammar-teaching and implicitly slights function-notion with an allusion to functional-notional items by saying that "syntax is the only generative system so far described for language", and "a generative system will be more economical as a way of organizing language work for student learning than a non-generative taxonomy of items" (1981: 50). What is most significant in Brumfit's idea is that the word "generative" implies using the learned language, especially that in language production, and syntax is the only language system conducive to the development of using the learned language. Among enthusiastic communicative discussions for

Hymes' principles to develop into a communicative approach, Canale and Swain work out a model of communicative competence with an analysis of Hymes' competence in four dimensions of grammar, socio-culture, discourse and strategy (1980). The Canale and Swain model has great impact on the pragmatic development of the communicative approach. Widdowson also contributes a great deal to this development by developing the dialectical relation between linguistic competence and communicative competence, by means of dichotomy, into linguistic skills of speaking, hearing, composing and comprehending and communicative abilities of saying, listening, writing and reading, and declares that "one cannot acquire [communicative abilities] without acquiring [linguistic skills]" (1978: 57-76). Based on these ideas and models, more concrete suggestions emerge from TESOL research for applying the communicative approach. Brumfit comes up with a manipulatable model of a grammatical ladder with a functional-notional spiral around it (1981: 50), the significance of which does not simply lie in its manipulatability in TESOL practice, but also in the concepts it provides for TESOL research that form is the core of language teaching and that it is possible, at any stage of students' language development, to develop linguistic competence (grammaticality) and communicative competence (feasibility, appropriateness and acceptability) respectively at the same language level but in different teaching courses. Brumfit's ladder-spiral model can be conveniently applied in China's TESOL classrooms (Zhang, 1990). Morrow comes up with not only the proposal that in TESOL practice linguistic skills and communicative abilities should be dealt with respectively, but also with the assumption that "it is possible (and desirable) to divide language teaching into two phases – learning the forms and then learning to use them", and the idea that at certain stage of teaching it is possible as well as legitimate to "ignore 'communication' altogether and focus on the forms of the language" (1981: 65-66). From the discussion above it is clear that declarative grammar-teaching should be a legitimate practice of CLT, since it is an indispensable component of the communicative approach theories.

On the other hand, the history of TESOL practice has proved that "there is no reason why communicative performance cannot be promoted on the basis of a traditional language syllabus" (Howatt, 1984: 287). However, it is strange as well as unfortunate for the TESOL development, that form should be set opposed to meaning in CLT, that grammar-teaching should be "so scorned by language teachers over the last thirty years" (Sowden, 2004). This strangeness can be viewed in the perspective of syllabus why the only language system conducive to the development of language performance should miss the attention of CLT syllabus designers. Howatt examines CLT in the weak version of a performance view that "stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purpose" and the strong version of a competence view that "advances the claim that language is acquired through communication" (1984: 279, 286-87). The two versions are common in their non-grammar-based nature, in their one-sided emphasis on meaning and wrongful neglect of form, which distinguishes CLT classroom activities from the teaching/learning activities of the 3Ps approach and other teaching approaches and of the TBL approach and other learning approaches. The aim of a CLT syllabus as well as the

communicative approach theories is no other than the use of language. Nevertheless, the aim of the traditional ones is the use of language as well, although in the traditional it is implicit as well as ultimate. It is virtually the ultimate aim of both instrumental and integrative language-learning motivations and corresponding language-teaching syllabuses. It is just not declaratively stated in the traditional approaches and syllabuses, where what is declaratively stated is the language knowledge presented in the form of grammar. So for CLT to distinguish itself from the traditional, it excludes grammar-teaching from its classroom, from which emerges the problem of CLT syllabus design. On the one hand, a syllabus closely following the communicative approach theories should be of necessity a comprehensive one treating not just functional-notional items but lexical-syntactical items as well, but in so doing it is to lose its distinction of the alleged supremacy of non-grammar-based nature. The paradox is that in TESOL, because of a general misinterpretation of communicative competence principles, both weak and strong versions of CLT are the most distinguished from the traditional TESOL by eliminating grammar-based nature and grammar-teaching traces from their theory and practice, but with the same elimination both seem to be acknowledged orthodoxy of communicative approach theories. On the other hand, it is human nature of vanity to want to be in the swim, which yields syllabuses of various sorts with the same unjustified claim to be communicative. They are in fact not as differentiated as the weak and strong versions of CLT from the traditional ones, for grammar-teaching can be found illegitimately existing in these quasi- or self-called communicative ones. The essential difference in respective syllabuses then is not the aim of language use but the legitimacy of grammar-based nature and the licence for grammar-teaching practice. Nunan talks about the phenomena in this way: "A great deal has been written and said about CLT, and it is something of a misnomer to talk about 'the communicative approach' as there is a family of approaches, each member of which claims to be communicative (in fact, it is difficult to find approaches which claim not to be communicative!)" (1989: 12). This quasi- or self-called communicative family is actually of various approaches with more or less traditional traces of grammar-teaching, but in their attempt to stand aloof from the traditional ones they have distorted or even destroyed their original grammatical framework that they are no longer grammar-based. The same is the case with teaching method.

As to the teaching method, Widdowson points out that, "One way of characterizing the pedagogy of language teaching in vogue over the past ten years or so is to say that it is, in a word, communicative", but "the term has been bandied about so freely, has been so liberally used as a general marker of approbation, that its descriptive value has all but vanished" (1990: 117). The descriptive value of the term "communicative" is its applied linguistic intension of Hymes' principles of possibility, feasibility, appropriateness and acceptability, Widdowson's dichotomy of linguistic competence and communicative competence, and Canale and Swain's model of four communicative competences. As the result, the term loses its intension of communicative competence in such a way that it reduces to its dictionary definition of "conveyance or exchange of information". In one sense, however, it is inevitable. For one thing,

teaching activity is in the last analysis one kind of “conveyance or exchange of information” and therefore is communicative by nature, although not necessarily precisely in the sense of applied linguistics. For another thing, the use of language is actually part of teaching activities of all the traditional TESOL, although it is not declaratively stated in the syllabuses or emphasized as the aim, but just “a means to the internalization of [language] knowledge” (Widdowson, 1990: 158) there. Finocchiaro and Brumfit identify 22 corresponding features through a comparison between the typical traditional of audio-lingual and the typical communicative of functional-notional in the perspective of pedagogy, among which is “communicative activities” – in both traditional classrooms and communicative classrooms (1983: 91-93). Besides, it is difficult to “draw a hard and fast distinction between ‘communicative’ and ‘non-communicative’” because “meaning and form are closely interrelated” (Nunan, 1989: 10). It is even impossible to decide whether the communicative activities are authentic or not, which is a matter of degree instead of category. Then the real disparity between CLT and traditional is not the authenticity of or the existence of the communicative activities as the CLT loyalists insist, but the nature of respective teaching of grammar-based or not. So when the traditional methods are lured by the novelty of the alleged applied linguistic supremacy and eager to be tagged with “communicative”, it is easily done. This accounts for why teaching methods of various sorts claim to be communicative without awkwardness, even though they cannot be justified in their claim just because of the actual existence of the communicative activities in their teaching. They are nondescript; they are enthusiastically engaged in communicative activities, so much so that their original grammatical framework is distorted or deformed, so much so that they are no longer grammar-based. Anyway, both weak and strong versions of CLT are the most distinguished from the traditional TESOL because they are based on rules of meaning instead of on rules of form, on function and notion instead of on lexicology and syntax. It is this nature that endows CLT with the applied linguistic novelty and alleged supremacy as a way of organizing language teaching, which leads to its prevalence in the field of TESOL for quite a while, but ironically it is precisely the same nature that deprives CLT of the possibility to develop into a language teaching method, from which eventually ensues the absence of the communicative approach in the TESOL methodology. By clarifying “the difference between a philosophy of language teaching at the level of theory and principles, and a set of derived procedures for teaching a language” (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 15), Anthony identifies approach, method, and technique. By Anthony’s identification, the so-called “communicative method” does not exist, which is a misnomer of either approach or technique. Nevertheless, TESOL research in China frequently confuses the concepts of a planning method and an implementing technique, generally mistaking an approach or a technique for a method.

For according to Anthony, an approach is “a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning,” a method is “an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material,” while a technique “is a particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish” teaching; their relation is hierarchical: “techniques carry out a

method which is consistent with an approach” (1963). This plan must be overall to account for a vast ocean of possible language phenomena in an orderly manner. This presentation must be orderly to be accomplished with a logical sequence of activities and weighted distribution of teachings. Thus a quality is required of any language teaching method, that is, to be highly generalized as well as regularized so as to be true for all possible language material in a constant definite systematic pattern. This quality of regularity and generality determines that the way of organizing language for teaching cannot work without certain grammatical framework of language knowledge. For certain grammar knowledge alone can justify the sequence and weight of what is to be taught for a certain teaching method in an overall, regularized, generalized manner. A grammar is a regularized system and generalized description of infinite occasional language phenomena, which can be embodied in certain linguistic items taught and linguistic skills trained in certain language classrooms. A grammar can cover all the possible language phenomena because it is overall and complete and at once regular and general. Without a grammatical framework, a presentation of language material in terms of functional notional items instead cannot be regular or general or overall and consequently cannot be orderly the way a presentation in terms of lexical syntactical items is. A system of function and notion described for language cannot provide for the planning anything constructive or substantial about a logical order of activities or weighted distribution of teachings. This incapacity arises from the property of communicative competence principles in the light of sociolinguistics. In the sociolinguistic view of language, a correct form, unlike in the light of traditional linguistics where a correct form may generally have a definite propositional meaning, may changeably have several communicative meanings with different communicative functions in various contexts, where meaning is conditioned by specific context and therefore meaning is uncertain without taking specific context into consideration. A form does not have a definite communicative meaning until it is used in specific context. This uncertainty of meaning is one of the properties of Hymes’ competence principles. Since the meaning itself is changeable without specific context, and context is irregular, incidental and infinite, a plan based on meaning cannot be at one time overall and complete as well as regular and general in comparison with a plan based on grammar. A meaning-based plan for language presentation is thus bound by the meaning uncertainty to be anything rather than an overall plan for an orderly presentation. It is destined not to be orderly by this property, and it is therefore impossible for a language teaching method. For a language teaching method must be “an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material.” That is the reason why the communicative approach does not boast its own teaching method other than CLT, which is just a “teaching” instead of a method. Meaning uncertainty deprives CLT of regularity and generality and entails the impossibility for CLT to be an orderly method of logical sequence and justifiable weight, which in turn entails CLT defect of inefficiency and its eventual unpopularity in TESOL practice. The alleged applied linguistic supremacy gathers some momentum for CLT for a decade, but when CLT is proved inefficient, its strength collapses.

Some may raise an issue as to whether CLT develops into a language teaching method or not,

but there is no way around the fact that in theory CLT cannot be efficient when the teaching material is presented in a disorderly pattern of irregular items of incidental uncertain meaning and in practice it is proved not efficient as a way of organizing language for teaching devoid of certain constant definite system. Unfortunately, when CLT falls into disfavour with TESOL research and practice because of its inefficiency, those who care to make an analysis of and learn a lesson from its failure are few and far between. In China, the mainstream of the research is involved in debating about the issue of “natural acquisition” and “conscious learning”, with an ambition to work out “a foreign language education of Chinese characteristics” (Editorial Office 2007), as if it were not because of the inherent properties of communicative approach but because of the language environment that the TESOL practice in China of the 30 years is far from being desirable or worth while; a branch of the research of CLT loyalty attempts to cover up the unsuccessful or even shameful experience by disguising CLT with TBL, euphemizing CLT with propaganda that TBL is a development of CLT or a new form of CLT (Zhang 2008), which is diametrically mistaken for the essential differences existing between the two (Zhang and Yu 2009), while more researchers simply shun the issue of CLT, as if it were never existent in China’s language classrooms. The fundamental cause escapes the attention of TESOL research. Meaning uncertainty is inherently fatal to any meaning-based language teaching including CLT, as well as inherently harmful to those quasi- or self-called CLT in their distorted or deformed grammatical frameworks. In retrospect, one might feel amazed at what happened to TESOL over the last 30 years, at the so wide and so long exclusion of declarative grammar-teaching from language teaching classrooms. One might wonder after the exclusion what is left there to be taught. However, the exclusion actually occurs when TESOL researchers and teachers are swept off their feet by the CLT novelty and overwhelmed by its alleged supremacy; it actually reaches epidemic dimensions that grammar-based syllabus is discarded and grammar-teaching becomes a stigma. The negative impact is such that, when the overwhelming CLT prevalence is over, traditional grammar-based syllabus and grammatical framework of language teaching is not resurrected as a natural result. When the few admit the failure of CLT, feel the impropriety in the exclusion and sense the need for a grammatical resurrection in TESOL, they treat grammar in a condescending manner. One example is found in the title of Sowden’s article (though in a humorous tone) “Come back Grammar-Translation, all is forgiven” (2004). For they fail to realize the ultimate cause of meaning uncertainty in the CLT failure or see the necessity of grammar-based syllabus and grammar-teaching in TESOL. From what has happened to TESOL over the 30 years follows the moral that no matter how superior a linguistic theory may sound, only a system based on form can be so much definite and constant so that language can be presented in a systematically regularized and generalized manner. The 30 years witnesses the malpractice of taking the use of language to be the exclusive aim of language teaching without distinguishing teaching stages or learning levels, because of the over-emphasis of meaning in the light of sociolinguistics. The CLT inefficiency resulted from the inherent property of meaning uncertainty justifies a reinstatement of grammar-based syllabus in TESOL. The findings in SLA research can be cited in justification

for a resurrection of grammar-based TESOL as well, although it is quite another story.

SLA takes the learning question rather than the language question as its starting point, trying to discover how people learn a second language instead of to decide what to teach and how to teach. However, language teaching simultaneously involves language learning – without learning teaching would be without objective, whereas language learning to a large extent depends on language teaching, especially in school education (but not including free-learning) – therefore learning effect is often regarded in proportion to teaching quality. That is why the two are frequently confused in China's TESOL research, but that also explains why SLA research can be borrowed to shed some new light on TESOL research from a disparate perspective. Teaching quality is judged in reference to learning effect, which in form-based traditional TESOL is how well rules of form is learned, while in meaning-based CLT is how well rules of meaning is learned. The TESOL practice has proved that CLT cannot be efficient because of its inherent defect of meaning uncertainty, and now findings in SLA can be a strong support of a return to grammar in language teaching. In answering the learning question, SLA research investigates why some students are learning while some are not in certain conditions and examines what conditions enable learners to learn a second language or what do not. For SLA researchers to pass their judgment on the occurrence or non-occurrence of language learning as well as on the enabling or non-enabling of learning conditions, there must be objective scientific criteria. SLA research is soundly based on the scientific grounds of the interlanguage concept. SLA development in psycholinguistics “postulates not only an independent grammar but also a psychological mechanism for creating and using it” (Cook, 1993: 19). This independent grammar, called interlanguage as well, is “a definite system of language at every point in [a learner's] development, although it is not the adult system in the one case, nor that of the second language in the other” (Corder, 1981: 10). The interlanguage concept is of great significance for SLA development, for it provides “SLA research with an identifiable field of study that belonged to no one else” (Cook, 1993: 19), and provides “the theoretical framework for interpreting SLA as a mentalistic process and for the empirical investigation of language-learner language” (Ellis, 1985: 50). It is inspiring and enlightening for TESOL research as well. The interlanguage concept exposes the essence of second language learning, which is the approximation of the learners' independent grammar to the target language. In this framework, the Interaction Hypothesis by Long (1983; 1969: 413-68), the Output Hypothesis by Swain (1985: 235-52; 1995: 125-44), the Noticing Hypothesis by Schmidt (1990; 1994), the Dual-mode System by Skehan (1996; 1998) and other findings about second language acquisition mechanisms share a common line of reasoning, that is the grammatical changes of an interlanguage system, “the formal features of language that linguists have traditionally concentrated on” (Ellis, 1997: 4), and evolve into a set of mechanisms capable of explaining the changes in the whole course of happening, developing and completing of second language acquisition. Long pays increasingly more attention to the role of form in language acquisition, where the negotiation of meaning involves not just comprehension but production as well. Swain emphasizes the difference between comprehension and production and brings up three functions of language production that “may stimulate learners to move from the semantic, open-ended, non-deterministic, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete

grammatical processing needed for accurate production” (1995: 128). Schmidt deconstructs “consciousness” into “intentionality” and “attention”, and maintains that either conscious learning or subconscious learning involves conscious attention to the formal features of language. Schmidt’s hypothesis is a more profound more elaborate explanation of the mental processes and mechanisms of second language acquisition based on Long’s hypothesis and Swain’s hypothesis, where noticing of form is stressed. Skehan rounds off the evolution of the hypotheses about the mechanisms with his discussion about complexity in promoting interlanguage development, where syntactic processing is emphasized.

Based on Swain’s hypothesis of three functions of “noticing” (consciousness-raising), “hypothesis testing” and “conscious reflection”, Skehan discusses the importance of output in its “six roles” and thus develops the Output Hypothesis. He points out that of the six roles “the central roles for output in promoting interlanguage development are forcing syntactic processing, testing hypotheses, and developing automaticity” (1998: 19). For language production requires syntactic processing and noticing language form, through which learners can internalize and control language knowledge, enhance language competence and realize automaticity. Based on Schmidt’s hypothesis, Skehan argues that language production does not necessarily “encourage a focus on form”. He comes up with “a dual-mode system” of “lexicalized modes of processing” and “a rule-governed system”, explains why “lexicalized modes of processing” does not “provide an incentive for structural change towards an interlanguage system with greater complexity” and maintains the necessity for the learners “to reorganize their own underlying and developing language system” through syntactical modes of processing (1996: 20-22). Language learning requires “the development of an underlying and evolving interlanguage system which becomes progressively more complex and closer to the target language system” (Skehan, 1998: 4). Skehan advocates “a balance”, a “middle ground”, between accuracy of language form and fluency of language meaning; however, his complexity of formal features of an interlanguage system cannot be a simple compromise between accuracy and fluency but overtops the two. First, in “complexity” and “accuracy” respectively, the form is not the same. In terms of language performance, “complexity concerns the elaboration or ambition” of production (Skehan, 1996: 22), which is the result of output in complex form, while in terms of language competence, complexity refers to the approximation of language-learner language to the target language, which is the process for form to go through becoming complex. Complexity in form is a dynamic feature of competence development process; accuracy in form is a static feature of output resulted from performance. Therefore, Skehan’s emphasis should be on competence, since it is in the framework of interlanguage. Second, unlike accuracy that is intolerant of ungrammaticality, fluency and complexity are similar in that both are tolerant of formal mistakes or errors, but in “fluency” and “complexity” respectively, the tolerance is not the same. The communicative approach research and practice tolerate mistakes in form so that their reoccurrence or permanence is no concern at all, as long as meaning is smoothly realized in communication, for the fluency of meaning is the sole objective of pursuit there. In the interlanguage concept, on the other hand, errors in form are evidence of an interlanguage system, are the unique features of language-learner language in the course of approximation, and therefore are normal and tolerable and should be

tolerated. However, the formal errors are expected to fade away before fossilization sets in through forcing syntactic processing and noticing form. By the above two points, Skehan's complexity cannot be a simple balance or middle ground between accuracy of form and fluency of meaning; the stress lies on form, even though meaning can be complex as well, for complexity is eventually embodied in form. All these findings are focused on form, on the grammatical changes of language-learner language through forcing learners to be engaged in syntactic processing and therefore to pay attention to form. When the approximation is observed in an interlanguage system, the learner can be judged to be learning and the conditions to be enabling. These findings of psycholinguistics in SLA research in the framework of interlanguage consist of a set of reasons and a logical basis to account for the occurrence or non-occurrence of language learning or the enabling or non-enabling of learning conditions. The implication of the SLA findings for TESOL research is that, language teaching effects language learning only when it is conducive to the approximation of language-learner language to the target language.

Grammar – not just syntax but also lexicology for the former is based upon the latter – is a generative system because of its unique properties of regularity and generality. It concerns the rules of form. Once students learn a form, they can turn out innumerable sentences in language performance. On the other hand, a functional notional system concerns the rules of meaning. It teaches students certain meanings in specific situations, which cannot be applied to all possible language situations, because meaning is conditioned by specific language context. A danger ensues from the fixation on CLT that language form “is regarded as somehow irrelevant or unnecessary” in TESOL (Shortall, 1996: 31), whereas the findings about second language acquisition mechanisms bring language form back to the focus. If the essence of a second language learning is the approximation of the learners' independent grammar to the target language, the essence of language teaching then should be the teaching of form – teaching the rules of form that are regularized and generalized in grammar, and TESOL should be grammar-based for the simple reason that grammar-based language teaching and no other else conduces to the approximation or complexity in form, which is evidence of learning occurrence as well as teaching effect. Grammar is of great significance for both TESOL and SLA. Of course, as non-rule-based SLA approaches (such as task-based, content-based, genre-based, etc.) and rule-based TESOL approaches (including meaning-based CLT) are diametrically disparate in the starting-point and objective-of-pursuit, and consequently in many other aspects, the “form” in the two is of disparate nature. Long and Crookes' idea of “*a focus on form*” as opposed to “*a focus on forms* (plural)” (1992) gives expression to this disparity (Zhang 2008). However, since in TESOL research “syntax is the only generative system so far described for language,” while in SLA research “syntactic processing” alone is conducive to the approximation of an independent grammar system towards the target language, the two can find a point of integration in grammar – grammar (syntax as well as lexicology) should be the focus of both language teaching approaches and language learning approaches. In language teaching classrooms, the core courses of linguistic skill training such as intensive English or comprehensive English should be based on the rules of form, which feature “*a focus on forms*”,

and therefore the teaching effect is displayed in the learning achievement through the learners' conformity to grammatical rules, whereas the ability developing courses may include some meaning-based activities, which feature "a focus on form", if non-conformity-oriented learning is to be encouraged through forcing syntactic processing and raising consciousness for noticing form, and therefore the teaching effect can be partly reflected by the idiosyncratic development of individual learner's interlanguage system.

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