# Grammar and Grammars

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Intro to Applied Linguistics – week 3

# Outline

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- Form and Function
- Type versus Token
- Discourse Grammar
- Spoken vs Written Grammer
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- Learning Grammar
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# Introduction

- When it comes to definitions of grammar, confusion abounds. One problem is that the word 'grammar' means different things to different people.
  - To do with do's and don'ts
    - It is I *not* It is me.
- Grammars with rules that make distinction between correct and incorrect forms are defined as 'prescriptive' grammars.
- Grammars that do not make these distinctions and that aim to describe language as it is actually used are called 'descriptive' grammars.
  - Focuses on how native speakers speak, not how they ought to speak.

- Value Neutral Terms ‘grammatical’ and ‘ungrammatical’ are used to distinguish between patterns that are well-formed, possible sentences or phrases in the language and those that are not.
- Grammar in this sense consists of rules of syntax, which specify how words and phrases combine to form sentences, and rules of morphology, which specify how word forms are constructed.

- For applied linguists, the focus is more on ‘pedagogical grammar’, the type of grammar designed for the needs of second-language students and teachers.
- Although teaching grammar in a second language does involve some of the prescriptive rules for the standard varieties, a pedagogical grammar resembles a descriptive grammar much more than a prescriptive one, especially in terms of the range of structures covered.

- **pedagogical grammars are typically more eclectic, drawing on insights from formal and functional grammars, as well as work on corpus linguistics, discourse analysis and pragmatics.**
  - Formal Grammar
    - is a set of production rules for strings in a formal language. The rules describe how to form strings from the language's alphabet that are valid according to the language's syntax
    - Formal Grammar is used to describe the structure of individual sentences. This type sets language as a set of rules which allow or disallow certain sentence structure.
  - Functional Grammar
    - a theory of grammar concerned with the social and pragmatic functions of language, relating these to both formal syntactic properties and prosodic properties.
    - Functional Grammar is used to describe language in actual use and so focus on texts and their contexts. This type sets a language as a resource for making meaning.
- **Applied linguists must be concerned that students not only can produce grammatical structures that are formally accurate; students must be able to use them meaningfully and appropriately as well.**

| Type of differences | Formal / traditional grammar | Functional grammar |
|---|---|---|
| Primary concern | - How is (should) this sentence be structured? | - How are the meanings of this text realized |
| Unit of analysis | Sentences | Whole texts |
| Language level of concern | Syntax | Semantics |
| Language | - is something we know- as a set of rules for sentence construction | - Is something we do- as a resource for making meaning |

# Which Rules to Describe

- We tend to expect grammars to state rules in terms of general statements, to describe how structures behave in a predictable, rule-governed way. Grammar must include both rules that are invariant and rules that admit variations.
  - He leaves now.
  - I insist that he leave now.
- Some descriptive grammars may include only standard varieties as spoken and written on formal occasions by educated speakers of the language, whereas others may focus more on standard forms but also include certain non-standard, or 'informal' variants.

- Pedagogical grammars, on the other hand, may focus on standard formal patterns but also include a number of informal patterns, with explanations of the situations in which each is acceptable, for example, class assignments, job interviews and the like typically required for formal writing or speaking.

# Form and Function

- Models of grammar differ greatly, depending on whether they are formal grammars or functional grammars. Formal grammar is concerned with the forms themselves and with how they operate within the overall system of grammar. The most influential formal grammar in the later half of the twentieth century has been the generative (transformational) theory of grammar (Chomsky) and its competing variants. The focus is primarily on syntax and morphology

- Generative theory is based on a rationalist approach, the central assumption being that language is represented as a speaker's mental grammar, a set of abstract rules for generating grammatical sentences. This mental grammar, internalized, unconscious knowledge of the system of rules is termed 'competence'.
- Dell Hymes (1972) developed a functional model that focuses more on appropriate use of language, that is, on how language functions in discourse.
- Although not rejecting Chomsky's model entirely, Hymes extended it and gave greater emphasis to sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors. A central concern of his model is the concept 'communicative competence', which emphasizes language as meaningful communication, including the appropriate use of language in particular social context.

- In applied linguistics, the influence of these theoretical models is evident in various areas. For example, the approach to grammar as abstract linguistic descriptions is found in learners' grammars (such as Quirck et al (1972).. On the other hand, a functional approach is evident in Leech and Svartvik (1975), which is a communicative grammar based on correspondences between structure and function. Those that evolved from functional considerations, tend to promote fluency over accuracy.

- Various teaching approaches also draw on insights from these differing approaches to grammar.
- Approaches influenced by formal theories such as generative grammar tend to view language learning as rule acquisition and, therefore, focus on formalized rules of grammar.
- Those that evolved from functional considerations, known as communicative language teaching, view language as communication and tend to promote fluency over accuracy, consequently shifting the focus from sentence-level forms to communicative functions, such as requests, greetings, apologies and the like.

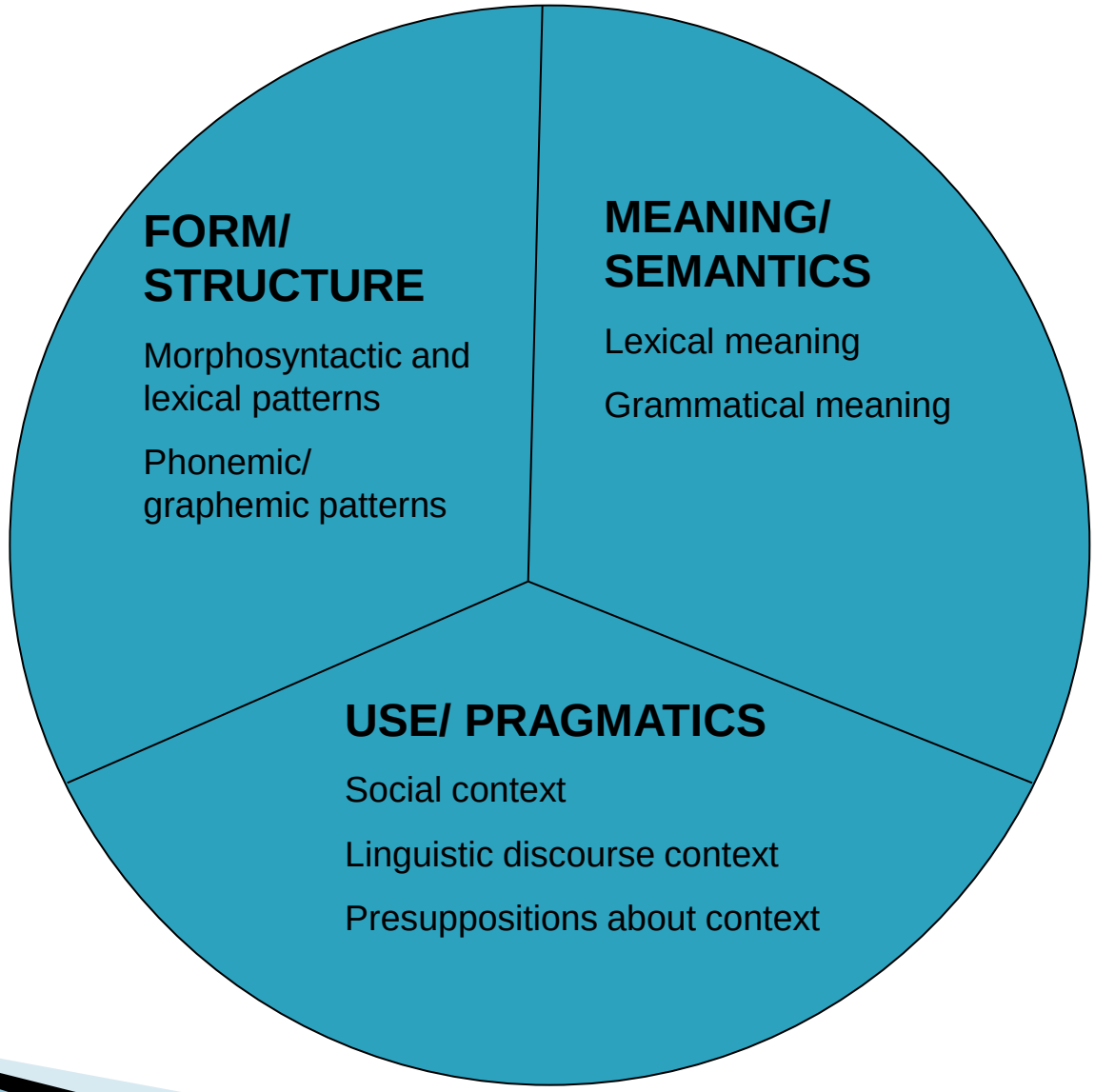
# The Middle Ground

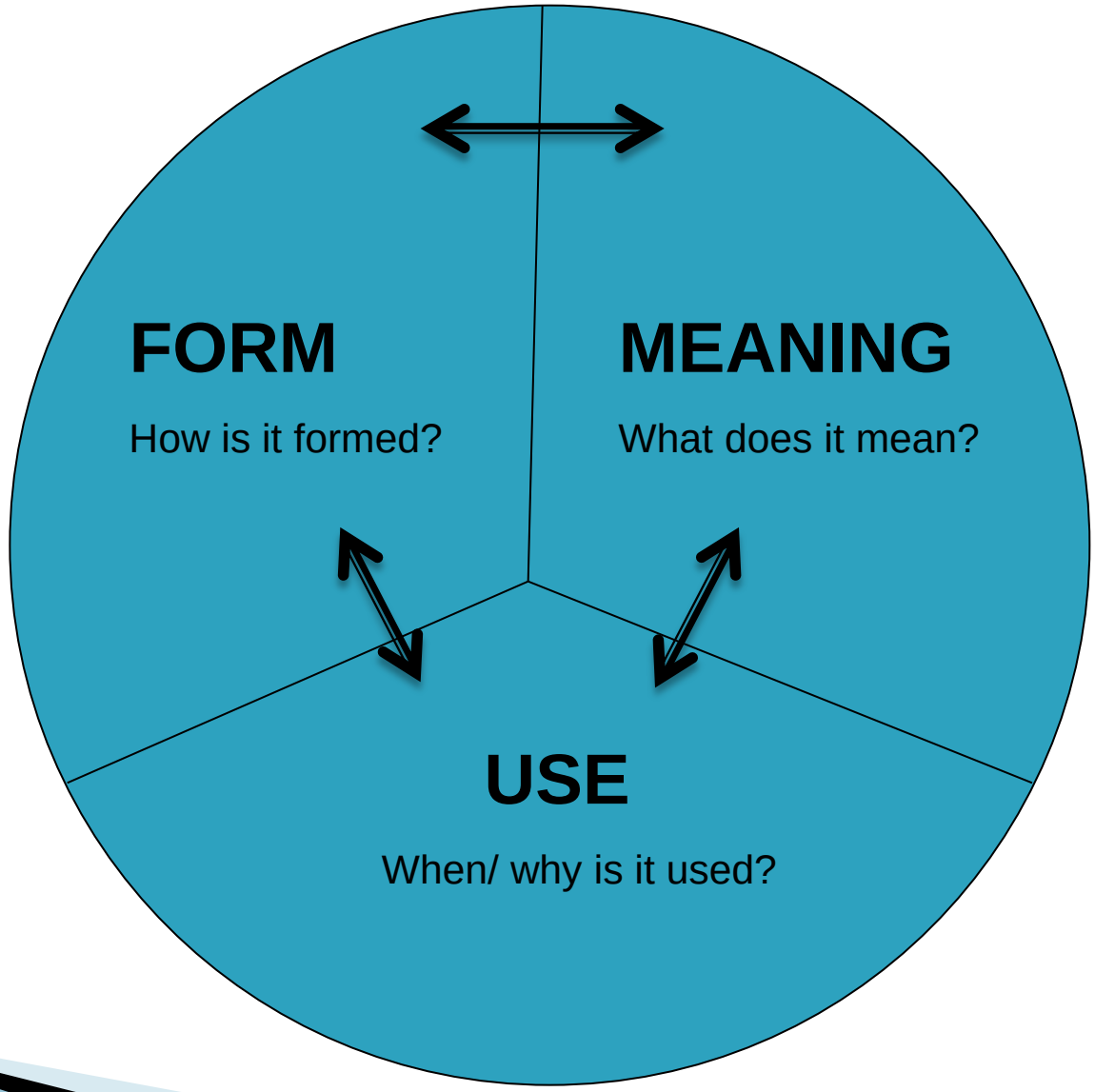
- More recently, some applied linguists have argued for an approach that draws not on one or the other, but on both.
- Widdowson is particularly insistent that it is a mistake to concentrate solely on functional considerations while ignoring form altogether.
  - that just as approaches that rely too heavily on achievement of rules of grammar often lead to dissociation from any consideration of appropriateness, so approaches which rely too heavily on an ability to use language appropriately can lead to a lack of necessary grammatical knowledge and of the ability to compose or decompose sentences with reference to it.
- What is needed is an approach that provides a middle ground in that it neglects neither.

- These authors (**Diane Larsen-Freeman & Jeanette DeCarrico**) aim for a middle ground that gives prominence not to both from and function but to meaning as well.

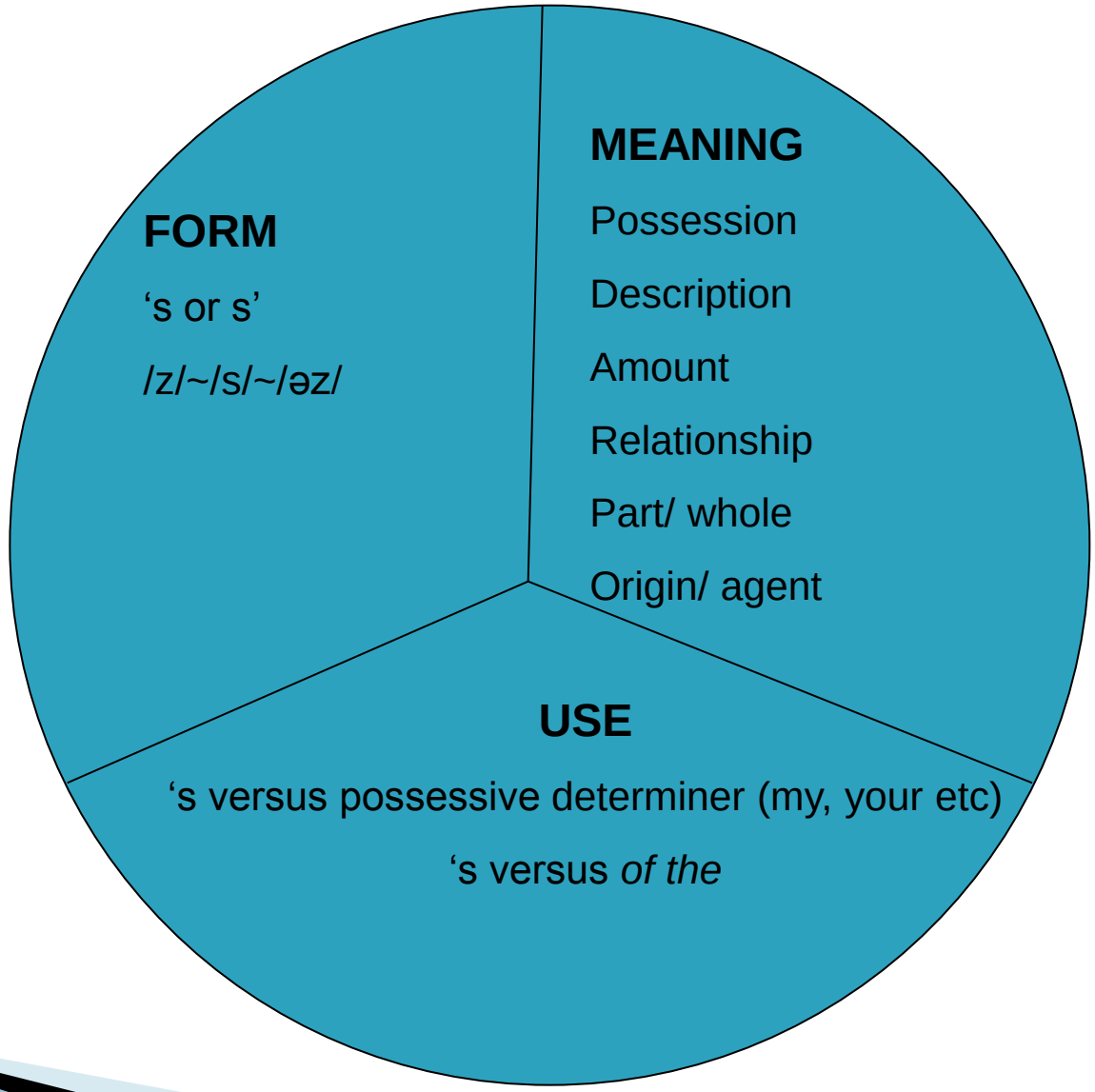
- Pedagogical grammarians Celec-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) give strong support to the view that,
  - **in language teaching, a formal or functional approach should not be taken to the exclusion of the other.**
- In fact, these authors recommend adopting a three-prong approach, including meaning as a separate dimension, along with those of form and function.
- They recognize that grammar is not merely a collection of forms ‘but rather involves the three dimensions of what linguists refer to as (morpho)syntax, semantics, and pragmatics’

Grammatical structures not only have FORM, they are also used to express MEANING in context-approriate USE.

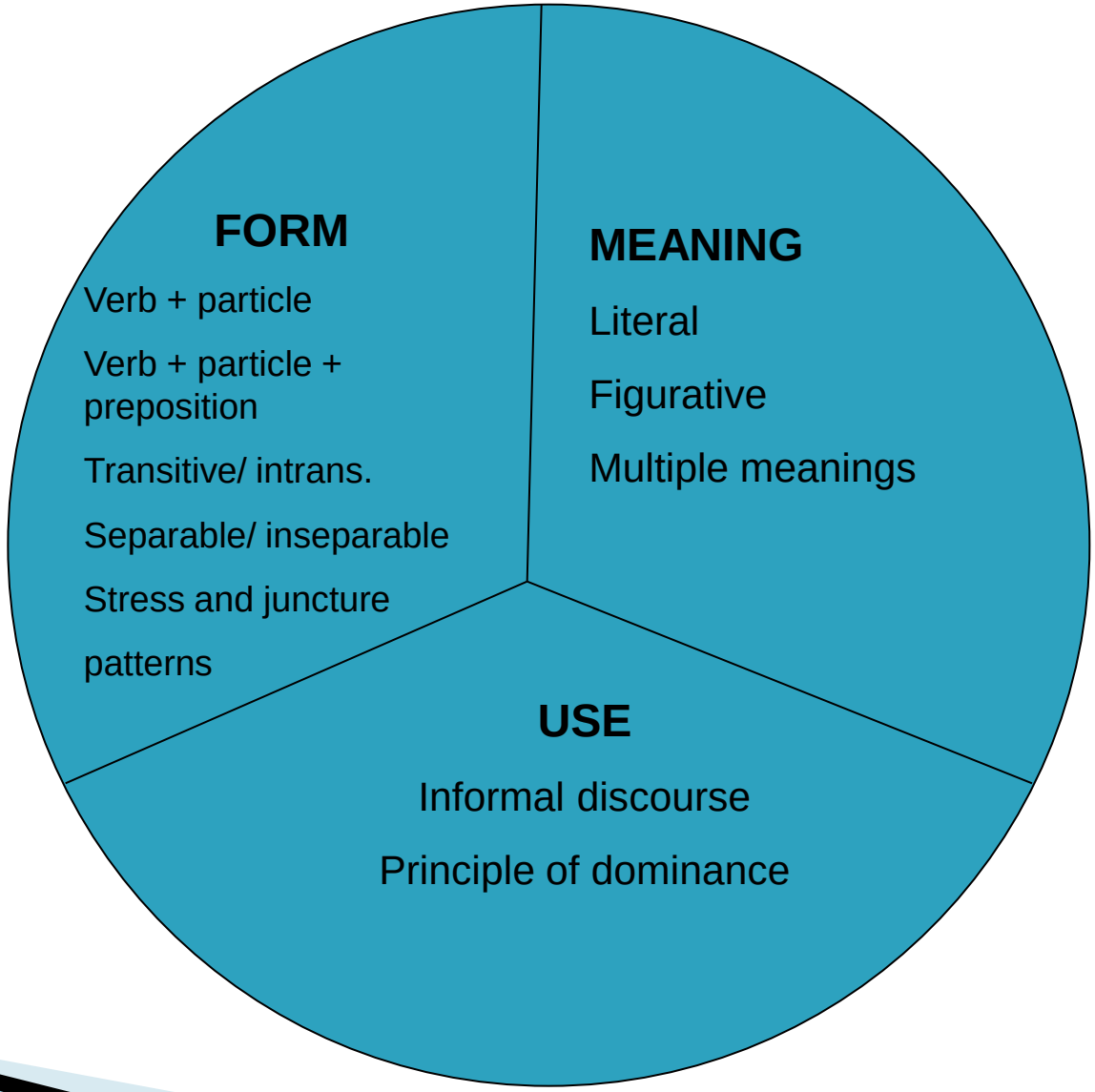

FORM/ STRUCTURE
Morphosyntactic and lexical patterns
Phonemic/ graphemic patterns
MEANING/ SEMANTICS
Lexical meaning
Grammatical meaning
USE/ PRAGMATICS
Social context
Linguistic discourse context
Presuppositions about context


FORM
How is it formed?
MEANING
What does it mean?
USE
When/ why is it used?

# POSSESSIVES



# PHRASAL VERBS



- Form
  - Meaningful practice
  - Games
  - Cuisenaire rods
  - Problem-solving activities
- Meaning
  - Associate form + meaning.
  - Realia / pictures.
  - Actions (TPR).
- Use
  - Selecting between different options. (Why use one form and not another?)

- The framework helps teachers identify where *the learning challenge* lies.
- And  helps teachers *make clear decisions* about how to teach grammar.

# Type versus Token

- Descriptions of language will also have different outcomes depending on whether they account for types of linguistic element in the abstract, or for tokens of linguistic element as they actually occur in contexts of use. Whereas a type description might present a board array of structures and give each equal weight, a token description 'might well reveal that some of these were of rare occurrence, or restricted to a realization through a limited range of Lexical items, almost exclusively confined to certain contexts, or associated with certain meanings.

- With the development of computers and computer analysis of language, token descriptions are now possible on a massive scale, and such descriptions have revolutionized the way we view language.

# Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

- In one sense of ‘word’ we may count three different words; **Types**
- in another sense we may count ten different words. **Tokens**”.

- Sinclair (1985) notes that type descriptions lacking attested data do not provide an adequate source of reference for language teaching. Instead, he believes that language for pedagogical purposes should be a projection of what actually occurs as recorded by the computer analysis of text.
- Projects based on analyses of this and other corpus studies have produced various dictionaries and grammars, including the *Collins COBUILD English Grammar* (1990)

# Discourse Grammar

- Corpus studies have also led to an increased interest in analyses of 'discourse grammar',
  - Analyses of the functional roles of grammatical structures in discourse.
- Here we are using discourse to mean the organization of language at a level above the sentence or individual conversational turn – that which connects language at the suprasentential level.

- Speakers and writers make grammatical choices that depend on how they construe and wish to represent the context and on how they wish to position themselves in it (Larsen-Freeman, 2002).
  - For example in the tense aspect system the past perfect tense aspect combination is often used not to indicate the first of two past events but to give a reason or justification for the main events of the narrative. These events are not the main events themselves but, rather, are felt to be an essential background to what happened

# Spoken and Written Grammar

- Corpus studies also reveal important **distinctions between spoken and written grammar**.
- Comparisons of spoken and written corpora have raised some basic questions concerning descriptions of grammar, such as
  - how different types of spoken language can be classified,
  - how features of written and spoken grammar are differently distributed and
  - what the status of the spoken language is, as an object of study within applied linguistics

- Carter and McCarthy (1995) believe that the differences between spoken and written grammar are especially important for pedagogical grammars, since ‘descriptions that rest on the written mode or on restricted genres and registers of spoken language are likely to omit many common features of everyday informal grammar and usage’
- Leech (2000) contends that the same grammatical repertoires operate in both speech and writing, although the structures used in each may occur with different frequencies.
- It should also be noted that there has often been a ‘written bias’ in linguistic descriptions

# Limitations of Grammatical Descriptions

- Grammar is not a separate system within language.
- Other parts of language system have a say (influence) in describing/determining the descriptions of grammar

# The Interdependence of Grammar and Lexis

- Regardless of the type of description or the approach taken, when we try to make general statements about grammar that neatly identify broad patterns, we are abstracting away from the overall system in ways that are somewhat artificial.
- It is very difficult to isolate grammar and lexis into completely separate categories, because grammar does not exist on its own. It is interdependent with lexis and, in many cases, grammatical regularity and acceptability are conditioned by word.
  - We easily recognize that a sentence such as *Mary is taking a nap indicates* a temporary activity, whereas *Mary is taking a class* indicates an activity of extended duration.

# Lexicogrammar: The Problem of Defining Boundaries

- A more striking instance of the interdependence of lexis and grammar is that of prefabricated ‘chunks’ of language, in which the boundary between the two becomes even more blurred. Native speakers tend to use a great many expressions that are formulaic in nature, fixed or semi-fixed expressions that act as single lexical units used as wholes. That is, they are not composed each time from scratch by the rules of syntax. As fixed units, they appear to be intermediary between lexical words and grammatical structures.
- These prefabricated units are called by many names, perhaps most commonly ‘**formulaic sequences**’ (Wray, 2002), and exhibit great variability

# formulaic sequences

- 'multi-word lexical phenomena that exist somewhere between the traditional poles of lexicon and syntax, conventionalized form/function composites that occur more frequently and have more idiomatically determined meaning than language that is put together each time'. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992)
- As form/function composites, lexical phrases differ from other formulaic language, such as idioms (*kick the bucket*, *hell bent for leather*), in that they have associated discourse functions.
  - **completely fixed**: as in *by the way*, which functions to shift a topic in discourse,
  - **relatively fixed frames**: with limited slots for fillers, as in *a___ago*, used to express time relationships (for example*, a day ago, a long time ago*),
  - **considerable variation**: *I'm (really) (very) sorry to hear that X* (where X may be an entire clause, such as, *you flunked the test, you lost your job*, etc.), used to express sympathy.

- The descriptive part of the problme is that these phrasal units, which are pervasive in langauge, cannot be adequatlly accounted for by models consisting of abstract rules of sentence syntax, supported by a lexicon of single word items that are inserted into abstract categories such NP, VP, PP, etc.
- There's a considerable evidence that the mind stores and processes lexical phrases as individual wholes, including evidence from first language acquisition studies indicating that they are learned first as unanalysed chunks and, and, only later, analysed as to particular grammatical patterns.
- There's a growing interest in investigating the implications of formulaic language for descriptions of grammar, in particular, implications for how we view the components of syntax and lexicon, and for how the components interact with each other, and with discourse level concerns.

# Learning Grammar

- different theories of learning have been proposed to account for how grammar is learned
  - Learning Grammar through **Habit Formation**
    - middle of the previous century
  - 'rule formation'
    - generative grammar and its view of language as a system of rules
  - Shift to communicative language teaching changed grammar learning once again

# Communicative Approaches

- For Some grammar learning took place implicitly and most effectively when students' attention was not on grammar at all. Krashen and Terrell, 1983)

- Chomskyan universal grammar (UG) perspective felt that target language input alone or input with negative evidence might be sufficient to have learners reset the parameters of UG principles in order to reflect the differences between the native language and target language grammars (White, 1987).

- For others, explicit grammar teaching had a role (Norris and Ortega, 2000

# Input from SLA research

- an analysis of the language that learners use, their '**interlanguage**', reveals that grammar is not acquired in a linear fashion, one structure being mastered after another.
  - Overgeneralisation – goed, foots
  - Pre-verbal negation – 'no want'
- New structures are not simply assimilated one by one, but rather as a new structure makes its appearance into a learner's interlanguage, the learner's system begins to shift.

- Connectionist / Neural Networks research
  - Rule formation does not account for all language learning:
    - Patterns are extracted from the way structures are statistically distributed in massive amounts of input data.
- Emergentists
  - speakers' performance being managed by a 'top-down' rule-governed system, learners' interlanguage emerges from **repeated encounters with structures and with opportunities to use them.**

- Regardless of which type (or types) of process is responsible for learning, SLA research makes clear that some attention must be given to grammar by second language learners.
  - also clear that the attention to form should not come through the use of  decontextualized drills or isolated grammar exercises
- pedagogical activities have to be psychologically authentic

- students must first notice what it is they are to learn (Schmidt, 1990).
- Larsen's Three pronged approach:
  - Students should know
    - Formulate the form
    - Know the meaning (compositional)
    - Understand the context in which to use it

- E.g.,
  - English Subject Verb Agreement
    - Form:
      - ‘s’ added to word stem
    - Meaning:
      - Signals present tense and third person is single entry
    - Use:
      - meaning contribution is independent from form, show departure from convention
        - *Ten miles makes for a long hike.’*

- *E.G., 2*
  - Good Evening:
    - Form: Attributive adjective + Noun
    - Meaning: greeting at a particular time of day
    - Use: when to appropriate, (Hi, not Good Bye / Good Night)

# Teaching Grammer

- the prevailing view today is that students must notice what it is they are to learn.#
  - Make it more implicit or interactive
    - Input Enhancement (implicit)
    - Implicitly obvious: Making the target structures bold face
    - Guided Participation
    - peer interactions, may also heighten awareness (consciousness-raising tasks)
      - *Sandy bought Margaret a gift.*
      - *Sandy bought a gift for Margaret.*
      - *Sandy bought it for her.*
      - **Sandy bought her it*
    - Input-processing tasks,

- Just noticing is not enough:
- Overt productive practice is essential

- Depending on the learning challenge the productive practice activity will differ
  - Focus on form:
    - Daily routines for present simple tense
    - Also useful for lexical phrases/ formulaic expressions
  - Focus on meaning:
    - Practice bonding form and meaning together
  - Focus on Use
    - students will need to make a choice

# Feedback

- Feedback is also seen to be a necessary part of grammar instruction
  - Direct correction to recasts
  - Overt correction are noticed but may negatively influence motivation,
  - Recasts may go unnoticed,
    - Make them noticeable
- Should students be encouraged to make mistakes

- Grammar learning is an organic process, not necessarily a sequential, like beads on a string.
- This suggests that a traditional grammatical syllabus that sequences structures one after another may result in a mis-match between learnability and teachability
- many have recommended the use of a ‘spiral syllabus’, where particular structures are recycled from time to time during a course
  - It would be helpful to use a different dimension of that structure every time it is revisited

- Some even suggested not to adopt a grammatical syllabus at all.
  - that the grammar that students need to learn will become apparent as they work on meaningful content.
  - a ‘focus on form’ should only occur as needed; students should otherwise spend their time engaged in meaningful tasks and in learning content (Long, 1991). When it appears that students are ready to learn, their attention can be drawn to linguistic form.
    - (But you may miss some infrequent structures

- grammar checklist – Perhaps the best compromise
  - Ensures all grammar structures are included-
  - Non-sequential
  - supplementary tasks for non naturally occurring structures.
  - Low risk of focus on form in isolation

- Don’t just teach English, teach something with English – use language for the purpose it is used for.
  - Tasks should have both
    - Content Objectives, &
    - Linguistic Objective

# Thank you