

GRAMMARING

A TESOL Virtual Seminar

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Should we teach grammar?

Some say “no.” They say first language acquisition is successful without teaching grammar.

My answer: “Yes.” Second and foreign language acquisition is different from first language acquisition. Besides, we have responsibility for all our students.

Should we teach grammar?

Some say “no.” They say that grammar teaching results in the “inert knowledge problem”.

Inert knowledge problem: Students are not able to use what they have learned in the classroom for their own purposes. (Alfred North Whitehead, 1929)

My answer: “Yes, but we have to deal with the “inert knowledge problem”.”

Should we teach grammar?

Some say “no.” They say grammar instruction is boring.

My answer: Grammar instruction should not be boring. However, I don't need to entertain my students.

I do need to engage them.

How should we deal with the inert knowledge problem?

It's simple. Teachers naturally teach as we understand our subject matter.

So all we have to do is to change the way we think!

Poll Question #1

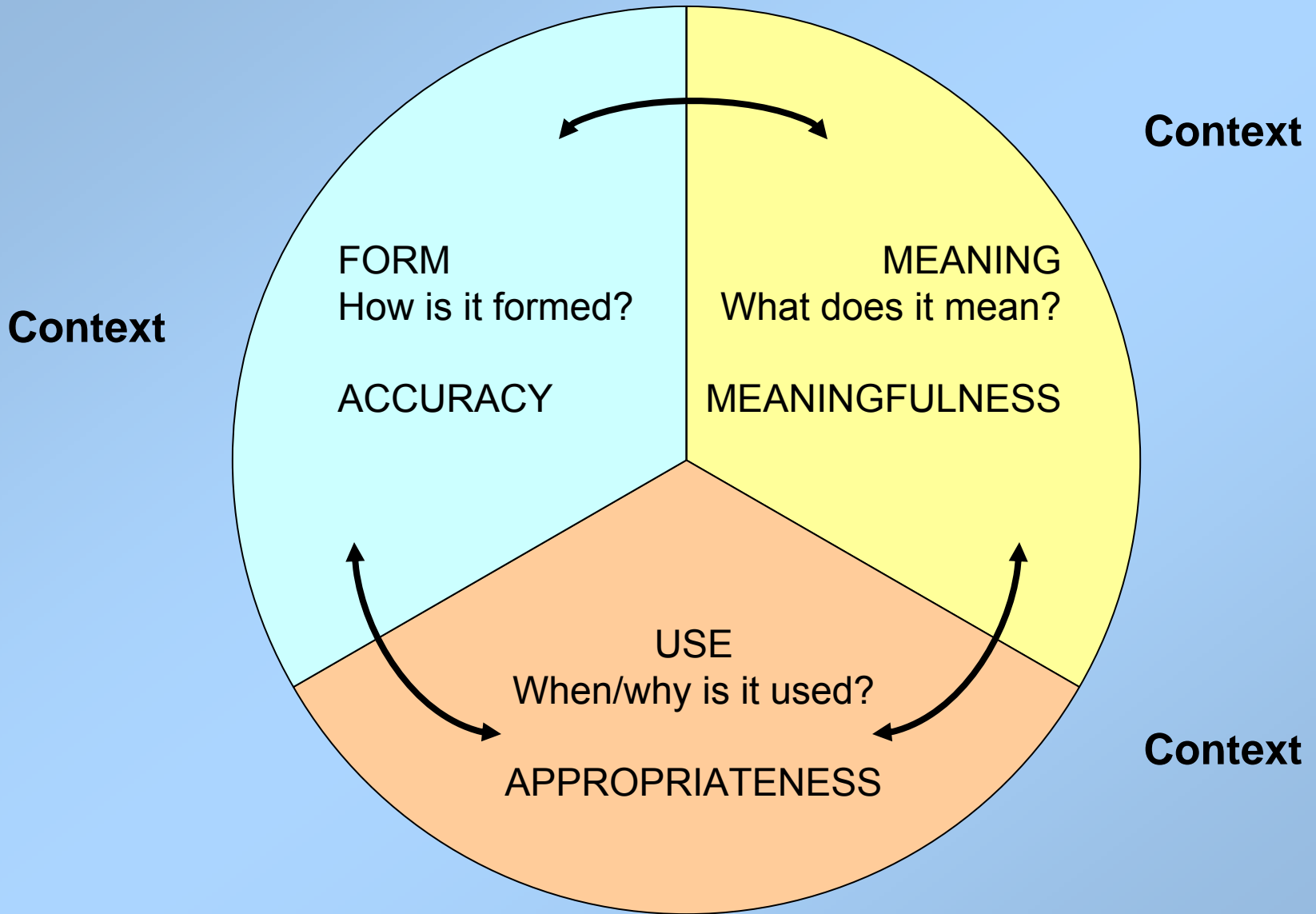
How do you think about grammar?

True or False?

Grammar is a description of the forms or structures of a language.

Grammar is about the forms or structures of a language, but there are three important qualifications to this statement.

1. Structures have meanings and they have uses.



Grammar is about the forms or structures of a language, but there are three important qualifications to this statement.

2. A second qualification is that it is often the case that the learning challenge of a given structure or form is not form.

The Challenge Principle:
Often it is the case that one of the
three dimensions affords the
greatest challenge.

- Use your experience to define the learning challenge.
- Let your students show you what the challenge is.

Poll Question #2

Use your experience.

What is the learning challenge of phrasal or two-word verbs (e.g., *look up*, *run into*, *hand in*)?

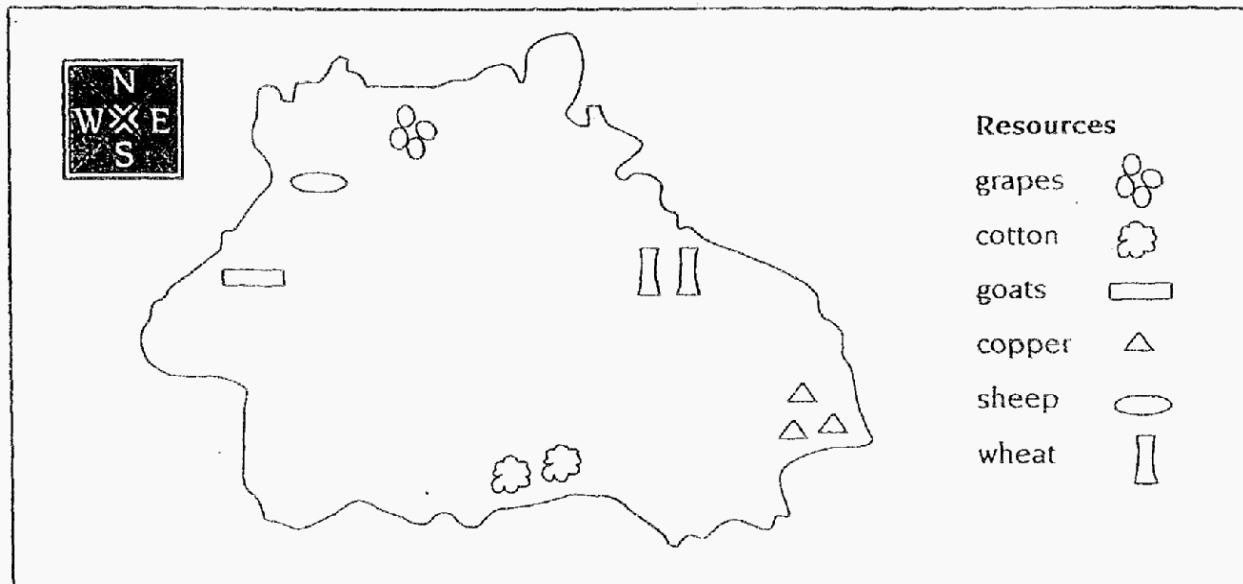
Is it:

- a. Form?
- b. Meaning?
- c. Use?
- d. All of the above?

Pedagogical implications?

The Challenge Principle: Let your students show you.

A. MAP-READING



(Source: Rigganbach, Heidi and Virginia Samuda. 1997. *Grammar Dimensions, Book 2*. 1997. Heinle & Heinle Publishers)

What are the natural resources of Campinilea and where are they located?

Farmers grow cotton in the south. Miners mine copper in the southeast. Farmers grow wheat in the east. Shepards raise sheep in the northwest. Etc.

Pedagogical implications?

Grammar is about the forms or structures of a language, but there are three important qualifications to this statement.

3. A third qualification is that structure or form can include lexis. Indeed, it is preferable to think of lexicogrammatical patterns.

My house needs painting.

Poll Question #3

Grammar is a set of rules that operates at the sentence level.

True or False?

Grammar is about reasons as
much as rules.

Joan looked up the word (in the dictionary).

Joan looked the word up.

Joan looked it up.

*Joan looked up it.

There + *be* verb + indefinite NP + PP

Grammar often cannot be explained at the sentence level.

I don't know what to do for my vacation. It will start in three weeks. I saved enough money for a really nice trip. I already went to Hawaii. It will be too early to go to the mountains. I worked hard all year. I really need a break.

- **DISCOURSE HOPPING (Changing reference points)**
- **DISCOURSE FREEZING (maintaining one point of reference)**

I don't know what to do with my vacation. It starts in three weeks. I have saved enough money for a really nice trip. I have already been to Hawaii. It is too early to go to the mountains. I have worked hard all year. I really need a break.

(From Larsen-Freeman, Kuehn, and Haccius, 2002)

Poll Question #4

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are the skills of language teaching. Grammar and vocabulary are areas of language teaching.

True or False?

In order to overcome the inert knowledge problem, it is better to think of grammar as a skill rather than as an area of language.

Grammaring is the ability to use lexicogrammatical structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately.

In addition, the *-ing* on grammar shows that grammar is dynamic. It evolves, changes, and is learned in language use.

Sir, the Germans desire to have three of
your horses:

the duke himself will be to-morrow at court,

and they **are going to** meet him.

(Merry Wives of Windsor, IV.3)

Duke: Sir Valentine, whither away so fast?

Val.: Please it your grace, there is a messenger
That stays in to bear my letters to my friends,
And I **am going to** deliver them.

(1595, Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, III.i.51)

(Examples from J. Bybee, *From usage to grammar. Language*,
December 2006)

[aimənə]

I am going to leave now.

I am going to the park now.

[aimənə] leave now.

*[aimənə] the park now.

“The act of playing the game has a way of changing the rules.”

(James Gleick, 1987. Chaos: Making a New Science)

- Reflexive pronouns
- Comparative form of adjectives
- *There's*
- Present perfect
- *A person...they*

Poll Question #5

Teaching grammar means using drills and written exercises.

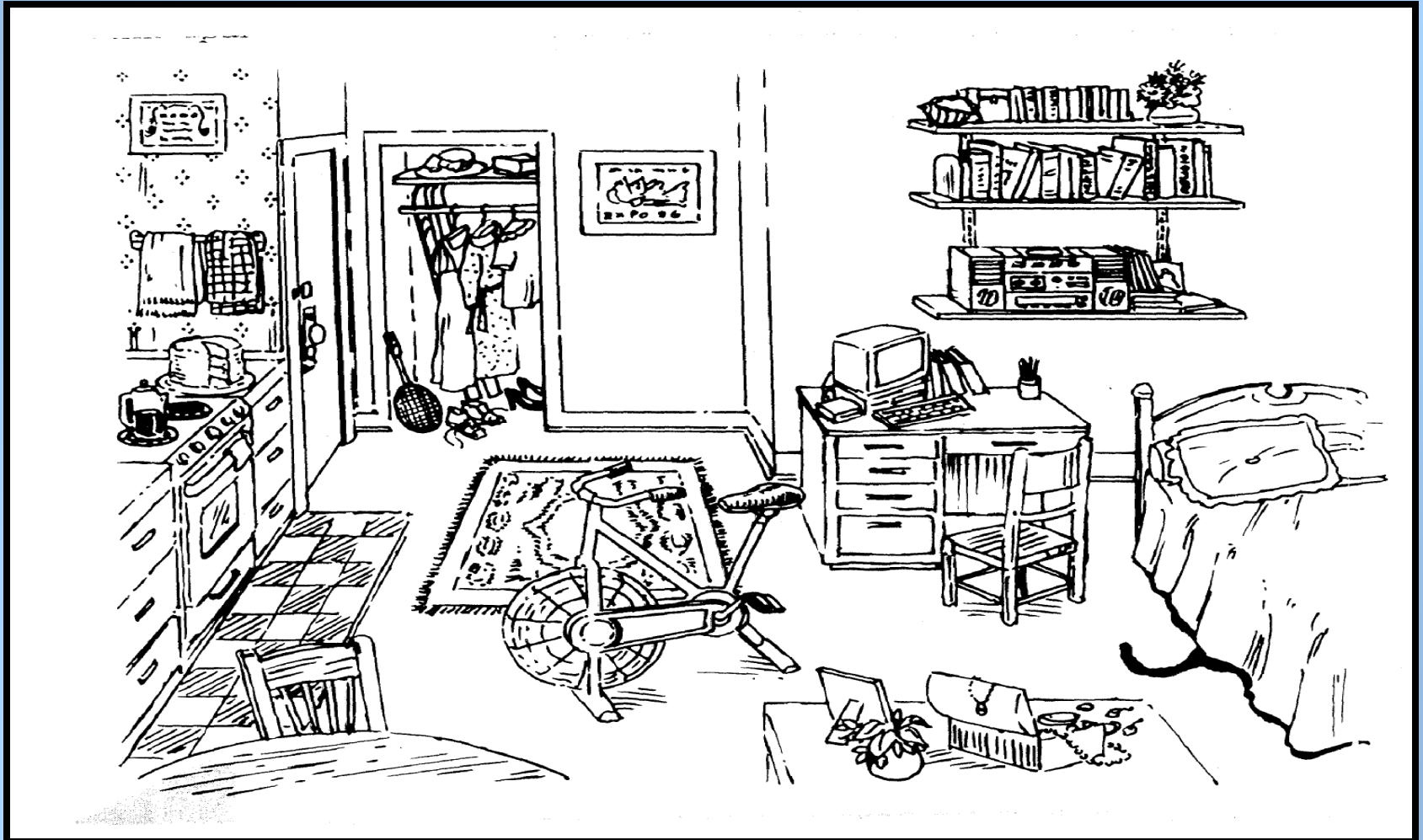
True or False?

To learn to use grammar naturally, practice activities need to be psychologically authentic.

(where the conditions of learning match the conditions of use/recall. This is necessary to overcome “the inert knowledge problem.”)

Who lives here?

Grammar Dimensions. 2007. Book 1. 4th edition. Victoria Badalamenti and Carolyn Henner-Stanchina



Summary

In this TESOL Virtual Seminar, I have tried to make the case for a grammaring approach.

A grammaring approach calls for helping students to develop the ability to use lexicogrammatical structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately.

A grammaring approach does so by understanding that

1. grammar structures can be characterized by form, meaning, and use.
2. grammar structures are often best understood at the discourse level.
3. teaching students reasons is as important (more important?) than teaching them rules.
4. grammar is not fixed, but is a dynamic system that changes in the dynamics of language use between and among individuals. It emerges.

A grammaring approach does so by understanding that

5. psychologically authentic activities will be helpful in overcoming the inert knowledge problem.
6. a teacher's job is to engage students, not necessarily to entertain them.
7. in order to serve all students, teaching grammar is essential in second and foreign language acquisition.

Thank you... and
Happy Grammmaring!