

The Grammar of Spoken Language or the Grammar of Standard Language?

Abstract

In the light of the fast-developing technology which is encouraging spontaneous global communication, conversational skills have become an inestimable asset. Natural conversation calls for the use of certain interactive and interpersonal structures which only spoken grammar (the grammar of conversation) can offer. However, almost all accounts of English grammar have been based, to a very high extent, on the standard version of the language. Through this paper, we set out to demonstrate the significant contribution of spoken grammar to natural conversation. Light is shed on the distinct nature of spoken grammar, as opposed to the nature of standard grammar, with a special focus on the interactive and interpersonal aspects of spoken grammar. The study aims at investigating the extent to which spoken grammar is used by students and the viability of teaching spoken grammar in order to make students' conversational English more natural. It will also provide information about whether spoken grammar is taught, the way it is presented and the teachers' views about the usefulness of integrating aspects of spoken grammar into the teaching of speaking.

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ملخص

تهدف هذه المقالة إلى تسليط الضوء على الدور الجوهرية الذي تلعبه قواعد المحادثة في تعليم و تعلم اللغة الشفوية الانجليزية، وبشكل خاص فإنها تسعى إلى وصف خصائص قواعد المحادثة وتبيان اختلافها عن قواعد اللغة الفصحى. وتشتمل هذه المقالة على عرض لنتائج دراسة قمنا بها، والتي تهدف بشكل أساسي إلى معرفة ما إذا كانت قواعد المحادثة تستعمل من طرف الطلبة، بالإضافة إلى تحديد أهمية تدريس عناصر منتقاة من قواعد المحادثة في المساهمة في تنمية قدرة الطلبة على المحادثة بشكل طبيعي أكثر. من الأهداف الأخرى لهذه الدراسة، محاولة التحقق مما إذا كان يتم تدريس قواعد المحادثة و الكشف عن طرق تدريسها. كما تم تناول آراء أساتذة التعبير الشفوي حول ضرورة إدماج عناصر منتقاة من قواعد المحادثة في المنهاج.

Introduction

The history of the description of the English grammar aspects has been largely a history of the description of English grammar as it has occurred in written standard language. This situation is the result of the popular misconception that spoken language has a corrosive influence on grammatical norms.

Recent interest in spoken grammar has shifted grammarians' and discourse analysts' attention to the significant interpersonal and interactive meanings conveyed by the aspects of spoken grammar in conversational settings.

In this paper, light is cast on what characterises spoken grammar and how it differs from standard grammar. We will particularly get insight into the most salient aspects of spoken grammar as well as some of its basic principles. In addition, we will discuss the importance of teaching spoken grammar in the development of natural conversation. A further equally significant aspect of this paper is that it aims at investigating the extent to which spoken grammar is employed by the students as well as the impact of spoken grammar instruction on the learners' conversational output. The teachers' methodology and views about spoken grammar will also be brought to light.

1. Definition of Spoken Grammar

The concept of spoken grammar has been around at least since the mid-1990s, when the *English Language Teaching Journal* published "Spoken Grammar: What Is It and How Can We Teach It?" by McCarthy and Carter (1995). Spoken grammar could be defined as a set of "grammatical items restricted to or particularly common in spoken English and some types of writing that mimic the spoken style" (Paterson, 2011: 1). Although it is claimed that widespread interest in spoken grammar is recent, the pioneering work of grammarians such as Palmer and Blandford (1969; cited in McCarthy and Carter, 2002): *A Grammar of Spoken English* should not be dismissed. These grammarians were ahead of their time in seeing many of the insights of the grammar of speech. Early spoken grammars, however, McCarthy and Carter (2002) explain, did not have the benefits of large-scale computerised corpora; this is why this area of language is usually described as "recent."

McCarthy and Carter (1995) point out that English grammar has always been viewed and described according to the rules dictated by written standard language. This situation has historical parallels in lexicography, as when Johnson (1755; cited in McCarthy and Carter, 1995) excluded entries from his *Dictionary of the English Language* which were not attested in written literary sources, on the grounds that they constituted ephemeral vulgarisms. Such a view of language explains, to some extent, why at least in first language education, writing and reading carry greater prestige than speaking.

Popular conceptions of spoken language are often that it is "corrupt" in relation to "correct" English grammar, the codified standard grammar of English. Yet, what is codified in standard grammar "does not tell the whole story" about the nature of spoken language (McCarthy and Carter, 1995: 207). In other words, there are many interpersonal, interactive aspects in the grammar of everyday speech (see 2. Aspects of Spoken Grammar) that standard, written-language-based grammar seems not to have addressed. Having taken into account the distinct nature of the conversational process and the insufficiency and inappropriateness of written, formal-language-based corpora in the formulation of rules of the grammar of conversation, some researchers have begun to collect data from spoken language, suggesting a socially embedded grammar. In the latter, forms are acceptable if they are communicable, adequate in context and

commonly used by their native speakers (McCarthy and Carter, 1995, 2002). The information gained has been processed to develop spoken grammar, designed not to replace standard grammar, but to address the naturally-occurring grammatical phenomena of conversation that standard grammar neglects or considers as ungrammatical. The purpose behind what has been said, McCarthy and Carter (1995, 2002) explain, is not to criticise the existing grammar of English (standard grammar that is regularly based on written-language-based examples and a proscriptive approach to “correct” English), but to shed light on the point that like standard grammar, spoken grammar deserves grammarians’ and corpus analysts’ attention and analysis.

It is theoretically possible to have short conversations where each utterance consists of only a single word or short phrase, as in this example (Thornbury, 2005: 20):

A: Coffee?

B: Thanks.

A: Milk?

B: Please.

In this instance, Thornbury (2005) explains, context factors, including lack of formality, make the use of complex language unnecessary. But, to sustain a conversation like this one over a variety of topics with a number of speakers would be virtually impossible. The effect would be like “baby talk.” In order to generate a much more sophisticated range of meanings, the resources of grammar need to be considered. This does not mean, however, that the grammar of speech (spoken grammar) is identical to the grammar of written texts (standard grammar). Crystal (2003) states that there are a number of differences between speech and writing, and some of the most important differences have to do with the notion of a sentence. As he puts it: “*Do we speak in sentences?*” The answer is that we do, but the kind of sentence organisation found in speech is rather different from the one found in writing, as the example below shows (Crystal, 2003: 214). As this example is a transcript of speech, and the aim is to observe its organisation, there are no capital letters used. Major pauses are signalled by the symbol “–” and units of rhythm by “/”.

We had our breakfast in the kitchen / – and then we sort of did what we liked / and er got ready to go out / we usually went out quite soon after that / – erm the children were always up / at the crack of dawn / with the farmer / – and they went into the milking sheds /

Crystal (2003) explains that when writing, one usually has time to make notes, plan ahead, pause, reflect, change his/her mind, start again, revise, proofread and generally polish the language until s/he has reached a level which satisfies him/her. The reader sees only the finished product. But, in everyday conversation, there is no time for all this to happen. Speakers do not have the opportunity to plan what they want to say, and thus they have to allow for false starts, interruptions, second thoughts, words on the tip of the tongue, repetitions and a set of other disturbances which take place while the speaker is in full flow. Thornbury (2005: 20) notes that “the demands of producing speech in real-time with minimal planning opportunities places considerable constraints

on the kind of complexity [of utterances] that speakers can achieve.” A sentence like the last one (between quotation marks), he explains, is much more typical of written language than spontaneous spoken language. Had it been spoken, it would have sounded like the following: “*Speaking, you’re doing it in real-time, you don’t have much planning time, so it tends to be less complex than ... or rather it’s a different kind of complexity, than, say, writing*” (Thornbury, 2005: 20).

2. Aspects of Spoken Grammar

Thornbury (2005) reports that the distinct nature of spoken grammar is reflected through the aspects that native speakers of English use in their everyday speech. Some aspects of spoken grammar that distinguish it from standard, written-language-based grammar exist in the form of **rules**, such as the use of question tags and the three-part division of utterances into a “body” plus optional “head” and “tail” slots. Other aspects, he continues to explain, are less rules than **tendencies**; for example, the preference for direct rather than reported speech, and the inclination to use vague language structures rather than precise ones. Moreover, a few aspects seem to be neither rules, nor tendencies, but rather mere audible effects of real-time processing difficulties, namely **performance effects**, such as repetitions, hesitations and false starts.

Up to now, linguists and discourse analysts have not yet arrived at a comprehensive coverage of the aspects of spoken grammar. However, although each of the works that address the issue of spoken grammar has focused on specific aspects of spoken grammar and not mentioned others, a common belief unites these works: spoken grammar aspects have uniquely special qualities that distinguish them from written (standard) aspects (McCarthy and Carter, 2002). Native speakers of English, McCarthy and Carter (1995) bring to light, tend to make grammatical choices between the aspects of standard grammar and the ones of spoken grammar according to the context in which language is used: spoken or written, formal or informal. The choice of the aspects of spoken grammar reflects the interpersonal, interactive nature of the speaker’s conversations. The most salient aspects of spoken grammar are heads, tails, conversational ellipsis, vague language, spoken discourse markers, informal reported speech, question tags, contractions, vocative use, statements as questions and response questions.

- **Heads**

Pre-posing, or fronting, is mainly common in spoken English in the form of pre-posed elements, called “heads.” Heads do not occur in written English because they are informal forms. They help listeners comprehend better by highlighting key information for them at the beginning of an utterance, as shown in the following examples from Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000: 153-7).

- *London*, it’s not very safe at night.
- *This friend of ours*, his son’s just gone to university.
- *His cousin in London, her boyfriend*, his parents bought him a Mercedes for his birthday.
- Well, *that house*, if you live in that house you may go nuts.

– *I didn't tell you, did I? That time on the way back from Hong Kong*, well, we were just about to land in Bahrain when ...

These examples, McCarthy and Carter (2002) explain, show that the highlighted items can provide content for the subject (the first example), an attribute of the subject (the second example), an attribute of the object (the third example), can merely flag up an entity and repeat it in the upcoming clause (the fourth example), or can simply provide a broad topical framework, not necessarily repeated in any subsequent element (the last example).

- **Tails**

As there is a slot at the beginning of clauses for inserting “orientating” structures (heads), there is also a slot at the end of clauses for particular grammatical aspects – “tails,” or post-posed elements. The latter, Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000) report, enable the speaker to amplify or extend what s/he has said. Native speakers prefer to use the tail pattern, rather than the subject-verb-object pattern, when they are having conversations. Tails often involve repeating a noun, pronoun or demonstrative from an earlier part of the clause, as the following examples taken from Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000: 147-8) show.

– He was very helpful, *Max*.

– A: What're you going to have?

B: I'm going to have a burger with chilli sauce, *I am*.

– It's very nice, *that road up through Skipton to the Dales*.

– It affects a lot of people, *migraine does*.

They explain that tails usually occur in statements where the speaker is evaluating matters, saying something positive or negative about someone or something. Therefore, they can be found in utterances which include words like *exciting*, *very nice*, *great* and *too much*. Tails are also used in connection with names of people and places and allow the speaker to express his/her attitude towards them. In other words, they are grammatical choices made by the speaker to serve the interpersonal nature of his/her spoken communication: these elements allow the expression of the speaker's affect, personal attitude or evaluative stance towards the topic.

- **Conversational Ellipsis**

Complete sentences are not always used in speech, especially if the meaning is already clear; for instance, a speaker might say “*Any chance of a lift?*” instead of “*Is there any chance of a lift in your car?*” This process, Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000) explain, is known as “ellipsis,” a common grammatical aspect where words are left out without destroying the meaning. They distinguish between two major types of ellipsis, one that occurs at the beginning of the clause and one that occurs later in it. The first type (that occurs at the beginning of the clause) involves the omission of the subject or both the subject and verb, for example:

–(+) *Don't know if I can do that*.

–(~~Are you~~) ***Fine now?***

On the other hand, the second type of ellipsis (which occurs later in the clause) involves the omission of (a) certain item(s) that come(s) after the verb. Examples include:

–A: Does he like fruit? B: No, ***he does not*** (~~like it/fruit~~).

–A: Do you want to come with me? B: Yes, ***I'd love to*** (~~come~~).

- **Vague Language**

McCarthy (1998) reports that vague language, also referred to as vagueness elements, is very extensive in conversations. When one interacts with others, there are times when it is necessary to give exact and precise information (for example, departure times for trains), but there are occasions where it would not be appropriate to be precise as it may sound unduly authoritative and assertive. In most informal contexts, most speakers prefer to convey information which is softened in some way by vague language, although such vagueness is often wrongly considered by standard grammar as a sign of “careless thinking” or “sloppy expression.” Examples of vague language include structures such as the ones highlighted below (the first two are taken from McCarthy, 1998: 181; the last two from Paterson, 2011: 1).

– Can you get me a sandwich ***or something?***

– Have they got mineral water ***or anything*** like that?

– A: More coffee?

B: No, thanks. I've got ***a bit of*** a stomach ache.

– My Dad's buying ***a sort of*** artist's studio.

Thornbury (2005) explains that speakers do not use vagueness expressions only to fill pauses, but also to reduce the assertiveness of statements. This is a way of fulfilling Grice's “maxim of quality”: “Make your contribution one that is true” (p. 21). It is also a way of reducing the “face-threatening” potential of an assertion, of being less “bold.” Writing, however, typically requires greater precision or may use other means such as modality, to reduce the assertiveness of statements; for instance, the use of the modal “may” in this sentence. McCarthy (1998) emphasises that despite their vagueness, the elements of vague language rarely cause problems for listeners and pass unnoticed. They seem to make an important contribution to the natural, informal tenor of speech. The listener would be considered uncooperative and irritating if s/he constantly demanded clarification of vagueness elements.

- **Spoken Discourse Markers**

Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000: 175) define spoken discourse markers as “words or phrases which help [one] to structure and monitor a stretch of (...) spoken language.” They classify such markers into two categories: markers which focus on the listener, such as ***yeah, mm, I see, you see, you know, I don't know, right and okay***, and markers which focus on the speaker, such as ***I mean, I think, so, well*** and ***anyway***. The spoken discourse markers which focus on the listener help to check that the latter follows what is being said and/or make sure that the speaker does not sound very certain or dogmatic to the listener. The markers “yeah,” “mm” and “I see” check that the listener understands the speaker, and that both share the same viewpoint. Similarly,

“you see” (or simply “see?”) and “you know” are employed to check that the speaker and listener share the same knowledge. The marker “I don’t know” is sensitive to the listener(s): it is used to make sure that the speaker does not sound very certain or dogmatic. When “right” and “okay” occur at the beginning of utterances, they usually indicate for the listener(s) a boundary between one part of a conversation or one topic and another. In the following examples, a few spoken discourse markers which focus on the listener are highlighted.

– A: **You know**, it’s not easy to find a good job these days.

B: **Mm, right**.

– A: She can always change the address, **you see**, at a post office where she goes to.

B: **Yeah**.

The spoken discourse markers which focus on the speaker, **I mean, I think, so, well** and **anyway**, help him/her to structure what s/he is saying. Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000: 175-6) note that the markers “I mean,” “I think” and “so” often indicate that further comments or more details will follow. “Well” can be used to indicate that the speaker has started speaking, while “anyway” is particularly common in drawing the conversation to an end. Examples of these markers include:

– A: **Anyway**, I’ll ring later to confirm it.

B: **Well**, see you then.

– A: It’s practical, **I mean**, you can use it even in college.

B: **So, I think** I’ll take it.

• Informal Reported Speech

Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000) report that native speakers of English exhibit a preference for direct speech, rather than reported speech. Direct speech, also referred to as informal reported speech, is a good way of creating a very vivid and dramatic picture of the events being reported. In contrast, indirect speech makes events less dramatic, as illustrated by a comparison between the direct reports in the following example and their indirect versions below.

– Direct speech version

Mary: So she **was saying**, “Well, go in the queue and find out what’s happening.” So I go back to Dulcie and she **was saying**, “All right Mary, will the bingo be starting soon? I can’t see any chairs and tables.” “No,” I **said**, “We’re in the wrong place.” (Carter, Hughes and McCarthy, 2000: 140)

– Indirect speech version

She **asked** me to go in the queue and find out what was happening. I went back to Dulcie, and she **asked** me if the bingo would be starting soon and told me that she couldn’t see any chairs and tables. I **answered** in the negative and told her that we were in the wrong place.

As seen in the preceding example of direct speech, Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000) note, native speakers often tend to use the verb “say” for direct reporting of questions in conversations. They do not use “ask” or “answer,” as seen in the previous example of indirect speech. It has also been observed that in informal reported speech,

speakers tend to use the past continuous tense of the reporting verb (*was saying*) if they want to concentrate on the content of the topic, rather than the words. Furthermore, McCarthy and Carter (1995) state that when reporting someone’s speech indirectly in conversations, the tense of the verbs that come after the reporting verb does not have to change (*I said, “We’re in the wrong place”*).

- **Question Tags**

The speaker uses question tags to make a direct appeal for the listener’s agreement or consent. Therefore, they have a primarily interpersonal function. The speaker also uses question tags to develop a point in exchanges with other people, as in the following example (Carter, Hughes and McCarthy, 2000: 151).

A: ... Because Jimmy’s a very busy person, *isn’t he?*[He laughs.]

B: [nods]

A: Young Jimmy is, mm. But, we started getting colds then, *didn’t we?*

Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000) explain that in this exchange, as Tony is speaking, he is observing what his wife is doing and using the alternative clause structures to ask and answer his own questions with his wife’s support. McCarthy and Carter (1995) highlight the fact that question tags constitute an essential aspect of spoken grammar in use that is selected by native speakers of English as appropriate to the more intimate contexts of interaction. In such contexts, meanings are not simply stated, but are the subject of negotiation and re-negotiation.

- **Contractions**

In spoken English, native speakers tend to use contractions, also called “short” or “contracted forms,” such as “I’m,” “you’ve” and “didn’t,” rather than full forms (“I am,” “you have” and “did not”). Contractions contribute to the natural tenor of speech. Murphy (2004: 297) suggests the following lists of contractions.

'm = am	I'm						
's = is <i>or</i> has		he's	she's	it's			
're = are					you're	we're	they're
've = have	I've				you've	we've	they've
'll = will	I'll	he'll	she'll		you'll	we'll	they'll
'd = would <i>or</i> had	I'd	he'd	she'd		you'd	we'd	they'd

isn't (= is not)	don't (= do not)	haven't (= have not)
aren't (= are not)	doesn't (= does not)	hasn't (= has not)
wasn't (= was not)	didn't (= did not)	hadn't (= had not)
weren't (= were not)		
can't (= cannot)	couldn't (= could not)	mustn't (= must not)
won't (= will not)	wouldn't (= would not)	needn't (= need not)
shan't (= shall not)	shouldn't (= should not)	daren't (= dare not)

Some of these contracted forms are used after question words (who, what, where, when, why), after “that”/“there”/“here”, and after nouns; for example,

- Who *'s*that woman over there? (= Who is)
- I think there *won't* be many people at the party. (= there will not)
- Catherine and Jane *can't* go out tonight. (= Catherine and Jane cannot)

- **Vocative Use**

Vocative use, or “vocative forms,” indicates that somebody or something is being directly addressed by the speaker. Such forms involve the listener(s) in the conversational process through the use of their names, adjectives or pronouns that directly address them, as shown in the following examples (Paterson, 2011: 4).

- [Mike is calling Steve to help him fix the remote control.]

Mike: *Steve*, come and see this!

Steve: What is it, *Mike*?

- [Father giving permission to his daughter to go to a party]

Father: You can go, *honey*, but don't be late.

Daughter: OK, *Dad*.

- **Statements as Questions**

They are statements which sound as questions, but are formed with no inversion of the subject and verb, i.e. the order of words in such questions is similar to that in statements. They convey information in a more satisfactory manner than regular questions do. Examples of such statements include the following (Paterson, 2011: 1):

- [Students in a residence hall]

A: I've done all my e-mails.

B: *So you're ready to go?*

- [Friends talking about an invitation to a party]

A: He didn't invite me, but if he had, I don't know, erm...

B: *You would have gone?*

- **Response Questions**

They are questions used in response to what someone has said. They do not require answers, but express emotions or personal attitudes in response to what has been said; for example (Paterson, 2011: 3):

- [Friends talking about yesterday's incident]

A: I rang the police last night.

B: *You did what?*

– [Business partners discussing a problem]

A: I talked to them, and they promised to help us.

B: *Are you kidding?*

A: It was the only way.

3. Principles of Pedagogical Spoken Grammar

McCarthy and Carter (1995) point out that there is an urgent need for considerable refinement in the analysis of the functions of particular spoken grammar structures. Such analysis requires more extensive comparison with standard grammar norms and a recognition that there are many intermediate categories along a continuum from “Spoken” to “Written” and from “Very informal” to “Very formal.” This will enable one to describe properly a piece of discourse as being more spoken or written, informal or formal than another one. It will also allow more precise formulation of the entire network of grammatical choices between the aspects of standard grammar, which are suitable for written and formal spoken settings, and the aspects of spoken grammar appropriate for semi-formal and informal speech.

Rühlemann (2008) suggests that in the framework of pedagogical spoken grammar, the notion of “correctness” should be replaced by the notion of “appropriateness”; the latter depends on the contextual conditions of language use: spoken or written, informal or formal. Moreover, he recommends, the role of grammar should be viewed as conducive, not restrictive, to natural communication. In other words, there seems to be no reason for not considering spoken grammar when designing speaking activities since grammar aims at facilitating natural communication, rather than restricting it by sorting out natural-occurring forms as “ungrammatical.” The predominant role of standard grammar in English as a foreign language, primarily caused by the predominant role of Standard English, needs to be reassessed. Owing to its almost exclusive reliance on written or formal language, standard grammar is not appropriate for conversational production, and thus should be supplemented by spoken grammar which is based on corpora built from samples of real-life spoken discourse.

Although some aspects of spoken grammar are of little or no pedagogical value, such as the socially or regionally marked aspects, syllabus designers and teachers are left with a variety of useful and potentially-teachable aspects of spoken grammar such as the eleven ones highlighted previously in 2. Aspects of Spoken Grammar. Thornbury (1999) notes that the major problem with the recent shift of focus to spoken grammar teaching is that spoken English, including its spoken grammar, displays many strong regional and idiomatic aspects. The latter appear to cause comprehension problems to the students; for example, the UK Caribbean all-purpose negative question tag “innit?” (meaning “*isn’t it?*”, “*didn’t they?*”, “*can’t we?*”, etc.) and the negative auxiliary “ain’t” (a contraction of *am not*, *is not*, *are not*, *have not* and *has not*). Such aspects may be hard for the students to understand and inappropriate for use in the kinds of contexts where most students of English as a foreign language operate: they usually use English to communicate with other non-native speakers. For the purposes of mutual intelligibility, the best model of spoken grammar for students of English as a

foreign language might be a form of neutral grammar, without marked regional aspects or a strong bias to either the informal spoken mode or the standard one.

A further point about the principles of pedagogical spoken grammar has to do with the lack and complexity of authentic spoken language materials. Timmis (2005) declares that finding materials that answer the appropriate criteria, mainly of interest and plausibility in terms of naturalness, is far from being an easy task. However, with the Internet as an available and relatively widely used source, syllabus designers and teachers of Oral Expression are in a better position than ever to get access to a variety of materials that are both interesting for the students and rich in various aspects of spoken grammar. With regard to the complexity of authentic spoken language materials, Cook (1998) suggests, it is important that vocabulary and cultural components are simplified in a way that suits the level of the students. In other words, the solution to the complexity of spoken language materials lies in achieving a compromise of naturally-occurring and specially-constructed texts.

It is of equal significance to stress the crucial role of audio-visual materials in reinforcing the teaching and learning of spoken grammar. We see that using a variety of materials that are not based only on writing, such as filling in transcripts, but are also available for listening and watching, is more likely to achieve better teaching and learning results. The students can get a clearer idea about various conversational contexts, interlocutors, their relationships and tones. In other words, the interpersonal and interactive implications that spoken grammar reflects can be demonstrated more clearly if they are not merely embedded in texts, but also heard from native speakers in real-life situations. In fact, this stresses the earnest need to equip our language laboratories with the necessary tools, such as tapes and audio-visual means, that may enable the students to enrich their oral communicative competence and the teachers to draw a more effective pragmatic methodology.

4. Importance of Teaching Spoken Grammar

Crystal (2003) reports that the grammar of conversation (spoken grammar) is commonly thought of as “incorrect,” “inferior” to, or at best, “less important” than standard grammar. Such a negative view is a result of the legacies of traditional grammar. The latter sees that spoken language is full of “imperfections” and has “less” grammar because it does not “conform to the rules” of written language. In fact, there are many crucial differences between speaking and writing, but such differences do not suggest that the grammar of conversation (spoken grammar) is less correct than the grammar of writing and formal speaking (standard grammar). Rather, such differences imply that each type of grammar has its specific characteristics and aspects which distinguish it from the other type. In other words, whereas standard grammar meets the requirements of the writing and formal speaking processes which are usually planned in advance, spoken grammar is very suitable for the conversational process which takes place in real time, with very minimal time for detailed planning. Therefore, each type of grammar is an indispensable system which reflects and facilitates the expression of meanings for its particular type of language.

Another important argument in favour of teaching spoken grammar relates to the interpersonal, interactive nature of spoken grammar. McCarthy and Carter (1995) argue

that the aspects of spoken grammar are a systematic part of how native speakers of English establish relationships. These aspects enable a greater degree of interpersonal and interactive language uses of the language which are in harmony with the goals of Communicative Language Teaching (see 2. Aspects of Spoken Grammar).

Rings (1992) argues that there are dangers, in English as a mother tongue and English as a foreign language domains, of producing speakers of English who could only speak like a book because their English is modelled on an almost exclusively written version of the language. Likewise, McCarthy and Carter (2002: 51) hold that “[t]here can be very faint hope for a natural spoken output on the part of language learners if the input is stubbornly rooted in models that owe their origin and shape to the written language.” They stress that pedagogical spoken grammar has to provide students with the aspects of spoken grammar alongside the aspects of standard grammar. This will enable learners to make informed grammatical choices and vary them for different communicative situations. In other words, students will be able to interact more naturally and flexibly in a wider range of contexts, not only the written or formal ones, but also the informal spoken ones. In a similar manner, Seeger (2010) acknowledges the inadequacy of the standard-language-based approach to teaching speaking and points out that such an approach results in “bookish” spoken language. This “bookish” language can be a hindrance to spoken communication, as illustrated by her learning experience: “Talking to native speakers in Scotland after nine years of school English and encountering amusement or incomprehension, I was mortified when being kindly told that my English sounded ‘funny’ and ‘book-like’” (Seeger, 2010: 9).

We believe that spoken grammar justifies the time taken to teach it in the classroom and deserves to be incorporated into speaking skill syllabuses. What is the point producing students of English who cannot have a natural conversation because their English is based only on samples from standard language? Is it sufficient for our students to be able to carry out only formal functions? Giving due care to both types of functions, formal and conversational, helps train the students to be more efficient communicators who are able to vary their grammatical choices according to the context in which language is used.

With respect to the level at which students’ attention should be drawn to spoken grammar, Seeger (2010) sees that beginner and intermediate students may be curious and unbiased towards spoken grammar since they have not been as much drilled in the grammar of Standard English as advanced students have. However, the complexity of authentic spoken language and its grammar requires simplification. More advanced students, having been more drilled in the grammar of Standard English, may have difficulties to develop an awareness of spoken grammar. This situation points to teaching spoken grammar at an earlier stage, on the one hand, and introducing spoken grammar to advanced students through specific methodologies that address their cognitive abilities, on the other hand. We hold that consciousness-raising-based methodologies such as that of McCarthy’s and Carter’s (1995), referred to in 5.3 Instruction of the Spoken Grammar Aspects, are more appropriate for advanced students. The latter, being more accustomed to the notion of “correctness,” which is deeply rooted by the almost exclusive exposure to standard grammar, can be

encouraged to start using aspects of spoken grammar if made aware of the different natures of standard grammar and spoken grammar.

5. The Place of Spoken Grammar in the Teaching and Learning of Speaking for Second Year

University Students

Based on our general dissatisfaction, as a teacher of Oral Expression, with the students' unnatural conversational output, we undertook a study in order to get insight into the type of grammar the students employ in conversations and the role that spoken grammar instruction plays in the development of the learners' natural conversation.

5.1 Background of the Study

McCarthy and Carter (1995, 2002) have observed that the grammar presented to the students of English as a foreign language has been based almost exclusively on samples from the written standard language. The grammar of the spoken language (spoken grammar) is commonly believed to have a negative impact on the grammatical system of the language. However, they argue, recent research suggests that spoken grammar offers a wide range of interpersonal, interactive aspects which enables the students to interact more naturally in conversational contexts.

From our experience as a teacher of Oral Expression at the Department of Letters and English, University of Constantine 1, we have observed that in the teaching of speaking, the grammar presented to the students has been based, to a high extent, on samples from written standard language. The students seem to have the aspects of standard grammar as the only choice for interaction in all kinds of spoken contexts: the formal, semi-formal and informal ones. This situation accounts for the students' unnatural conversational output. In other words, the learners who are exposed to only standard grammar are more likely to develop conversational English which is rather bookish. The present situation has led us to wonder whether spoken grammar is adequately taken account of in the teaching and learning of speaking at the Department of Letters and English, University of Constantine 1.

Through our study, we aim at examining the students' use of spoken grammar and testing the impact of teaching a selected range of spoken grammar aspects on the learners' conversational output. We also aim at gaining insight into whether spoken grammar is taught, the way it is presented (the methodology) and the teachers' views about the usefulness of integrating a range of spoken grammar aspects into the teaching of speaking. In the light of these aims, we hypothesised that if the students under study receive instruction of a selected range of spoken grammar aspects, their conversational English is likely to be more natural. We also hypothesised that the Oral Expression teachers who are convinced of the importance of teaching the intrinsic aspects of spoken grammar would refer less to standard grammar in the teaching of conversation. The first hypothesis was checked by means of a pre-test post-test control experimental group design, whereas the second hypothesis was tested through a Teachers' Questionnaire.

5.2 Role Cards

The Control Group and the Experimental Group, constituting 68 students (taken from a population of approximately 490 students) with an average of 34 each, were subjected to a pre-test and a post-test, during which their oral performances were recorded by means of a tape recorder. The students in both groups were divided into pairs in advance; each pair was required to choose a topic from a variety of 20 topics and perform a role play or a simulation. The topics were classified into three general themes: **Theme 1: Family Relationship:** Topic 1: Child and Parent: Permission to Go to a Birthday Party, Topic 2: Child and Parent: Permission to Go on a Trip, Topic 3: Child and Parent: Convincing One of Your Parents about Having a Job, Topic 4: Child and Parent: Choosing a University Degree, Topic 5: Blaming Your Sibling for Messing Your Apartment, Topic 6: Preparing a Dish/Cake with Your Sister's Help, Topic 7: Siblings: Remembering Last Summer's Incident, Topic 8: Cousins: Preparing for a Wedding Party; **Theme 2: University Relationship:** Topic 9: Students: At the University, Topic 10: Students: The University Conditions, Topic 11: Sharing Memories with a Former Classmate, Topic 12: Refusing Politely a Roommate, Topic 13: The New Roommates; **Theme 3: Social Relationship:** Topic 14: Friends: Complaining about Being Late, Topic 15: Shopping with a Friend, Topic 16: Refusing an Invitation from a Friend, Topic 17: Discussing TV Programmes with a Friend, Topic 18: The New Neighbours, Topic 19: Missing a Neighbour's Party, Topic 20: Looking after a Neighbour's Apartment.

We made use of role cards on the basis of the fact that this technique is time-saving for the teacher and appealing for the students. In other words, it would have taken us a great deal of time and been boring for the students if we had dictated each pair their topic or written it on the board. The role cards displayed a number of prompts (cues), so as to help provoke the students' thoughts during the preparation phase and to act as reminders during the performance phase. What follows is a model role card used in our test.

Topic 2: Child and Parent: Permission to Go on a Trip

PARENT

- **You're an over-protective parent.**
- **Your child is asking your permission to go on a trip with friends.**
- **You don't accept easily until s/he gives you the details about the trip, for example: the place s/he's going to, the names of friends, how long s/he's going to stay there, the place s/he'll be staying in, etc.**

5.3 Instruction of the Spoken Grammar Aspects

The Control Group was taught conversation in the usual way, with reference to standard grammar. The Experimental Group was provided with instruction of a

selected range of spoken grammar aspects in the scheduled hours for four weeks. The instructional period was meant to raise the awareness of the Experimental Group of the various elements of spoken grammar, to sensitise the students to the distinctive properties of this kind of grammar and the differences between it and standard grammar. The aspects of spoken grammar that were selected and taught are the eleven aspects considered by McCarthy and Carter (1995, 2002), Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2000), Timmis (2005), Carter and McCarthy (2006), Rühlemann (2008) and Paterson (2011) as potentially-teachable and worth being incorporated into the pedagogical grammar of spoken English: heads, tails, conversational ellipsis, vague language, spoken discourse markers, informal reported speech, question tags, contractions, vocative use, statements as questions and response questions.

As regards the teaching methodology, an inductive three-stage-based method, namely Illustration-Interaction-Induction recommended by McCarthy and Carter (1995), was put into practice. In the presentation of each aspect of spoken grammar, we initially illustrated the targeted element in examples and encouraged the students to notice, analyse and negotiate the form, meaning and use of the spoken grammar aspect, in comparison with the standard grammar aspect. In the interaction phase, we supplied the students with an activity for each aspect, the aim of which was to give the students more room for interaction and negotiation of the interpersonal, interactive meanings of the targeted spoken grammar aspect. Then, we presented the students with two conversational extracts embedded with the eleven aspects of spoken grammar to help the students see the integration of the various aspects in conversations. In the induction phase, the students were encouraged to come out with conclusions about the interpersonal, interactive nature of spoken grammar that is distinct from the nature of standard grammar. The ultimate aim was to enable the students to develop an ability for noticing such aspects in other contexts, as they move through the different stages of language learning. Having drawn conclusions, the students chose a topic of their own and performed a role play using various aspects of spoken grammar which they had been introduced to. Finally, we reformulated the students' produced language against the eleven-point list of spoken grammar aspects.

5.4 Results of the Study

The analysis of the results obtained by the Control Group reveals that there is no remarkable difference between the pre-test and the post-test performances: the majority of the students did not use most of the spoken grammar aspects. More importantly, the percentage of use of many aspects dropped in the post-test: conversational ellipsis (from 88.23% in the pre-test to 82.35% in the post-test), vague language (from 23.53% in the pre-test to 17.65% in the post-test), heads (from 17.65% in the pre-test to 11.76% in the post-test), tails (from 05.88% in the pre-test to 00% in the post-test), question tags (from 05.88% in the pre-test to 00% in the post-test), and response questions (from 05.88% in the pre-test to 00% in the post-test). Informal reported speech was made use of by the same very extremely limited percentage of students in the pre-test and post-test (05.88%). An exception is made to four aspects which percentage of use slightly stepped forward in the post-test: spoken discourse markers (from 82.35% in the pre-test to 100% in the post-test), statements as questions (from 05.88% in the pre-test to 23.53% in the post-test), vocative use (from 70.59% in the pre-test to 82.35% in the

post-test), and contractions (from 94.11% in the pre-test to 100% in the post-test). The Control Group students have not achieved significant progress because they did not receive instruction of the spoken grammar aspects.

On the basis of the results obtained by the Experimental Group, it could be said that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test performances. Progress has been recorded in the percentage of use of most of the spoken grammar aspects: heads (from 11.76% in the pre-test to 52.94% in the post-test), question tags (from 00% in the pre-test to 41.17% in the post-test), conversational ellipsis (from 82.35% in the pre-test to 100% in the post-test), vague language (from 47.05% in the pre-test to 64.71% in the post-test), response questions (from 41.17% in the pre-test to 58.82% in the post-test), vocative use (from 76.47% in the pre-test to 88.23% in the post-test), spoken discourse markers (from 94.11% in the pre-test to 100% in the post-test). This significant improvement could be traced back to the provided treatment (instruction of the spoken grammar aspects) which has proved to be worthwhile in sensitising the students to the various aspects of spoken grammar and their interactive, interpersonal meanings. Indeed, spoken grammar instruction has helped the students to approximate a more natural conversational output. It follows that the first hypothesis is confirmed.

Through the analysis of the Teachers' Questionnaire feedback, we have come to the conclusion that more than half the Oral Expression teachers did not teach the main aspects of spoken grammar, but referred to the standard grammar aspects in the teaching of conversation. Concerning the rest of the teachers who took into account the teaching of (some of) the spoken grammar aspects, a considerable proportion did not mention the method(s) and activities implemented in their presentation (spoken discourse markers: 56.52%, conversational ellipsis: 46.66%, vague language: 46.16%, tails: 45.45%, informal reported speech: 44.45% and question tags: 42.31%). The results have also shown that over half the teachers (53.66%) believe that reference should be made to spoken grammar, rather than standard grammar, in the teaching of conversation. At the other extreme, 41.46% of the teachers think that spoken grammar should not be referred to in the instruction of conversation. Reluctance of these teachers to integrate the spoken grammar aspects into the teaching of conversation was accounted for by various reasons: deviation of the spoken grammar aspects from standard grammar, difficulty of these aspects for the students, the teacher's lack of familiarity with such aspects and the absence of a clear teaching methodology. On the basis of the examination of the data collected from the questionnaire, the second hypothesis has been partly confirmed: over half the teachers are convinced of the importance of presenting the spoken grammar aspects, but do not translate this consciousness into practical classroom activities.

Conclusion

The pedagogical grammar of spoken language has to ensure that the full range of grammatical choices, i.e. the aspects of spoken grammar as well as the aspects of standard grammar, is described and made available to students. This will enable them to make informed grammatical choices and vary them for different communicative situations. In other words, students will be able to interact more flexibly and naturally in a wider variety of spoken contexts, not only the formal, but also the semi-formal and

informal ones. There is no type of grammar, standard or spoken, that is more correct than the other. Each type is an indispensable system that reflects and fosters the generation and expression of meanings for its particular type of language. Being committed to a communicative methodology that stresses the significance of the speaking skill, any well-evidenced information about spoken grammar will be a further positive contribution to the English language teaching domain.

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APPENDIX
Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear teacher,

This questionnaire is part of a research work. It aims at investigating whether and to what extent the teachers of Oral Expression present spoken grammar, the methodology they adopt in teaching it, as well as their views about incorporating it into the Oral Expression syllabus.

You are kindly requested to answer the following questionnaire. Please, tick (✓) the appropriate box (or boxes) and make full statements whenever necessary.

Your answers will be valuable for the completion of this work.

May we thank you in advance for your collaboration.

Miss Fatima-Zohra SEMAKDJI
Department of Letters and English
Faculty of Letters and Languages
University of Constantine 1

Section One: General Information

1. What is your degree?

- a. Licence
- b. Master
- c. Magister
- d. Doctorat

2. How long have you been teaching Oral Expression?

..... years

3. Which year(s)?

- a. First
- b. Second
- c. Third
- d. Master

Section Two: Teaching Spoken Grammar

Informal spoken English is mainly characterised by the use of Heads, Tails, Conversational ellipsis, Vague language, Spoken discourse markers, Informal reported speech and Question tags.

4. Have you taught these aspects?

Aspects	Examples	Yes	No
a. Heads	A friend of mine , his uncle bought a Ford Escort.		
b. Tails	It's really nice, this dress .		
c. Conversational Ellipsis	Seems nice . I like the place, very exciting there , and honestly never seen so many people!		
d. Vague Language	<u>Speaker A</u> : Are you upset or something? <u>Speaker B</u> : I'm afraid I've a bit of a stomach ache. I guess I'm going to a sort of throw up.		
e. Spoken Discourse Markers	<u>Speaker A</u> : Well, I mean in some ways, you should make the difference but, you know , it's complicated as well. <u>Speaker B</u> : Yeah, I see .		
f. Informal Reported Speech	<u>Mary</u> :... So she said, 'Well, go in the queue, Mary,' she said, 'and find out what's happening.' So I went back to Dulcie and she says, 'All right Mary, will the bingo be starting soon? I can't see any chairs and tables.' 'Oh, no,' I said, 'we're in the wrong place!'		
g. Question Tags	Jimmy's a very nice boy, isn't he? He never says 'no' to someone who needs his help, does he?		

5. If "Yes", which teaching method(s) have you used?

- a. Implicit / Inductive
- b. Explicit / Deductive
- c. Both

Aspects	Teaching Method
a. Heads	
b. Tails	
c. Conversational Ellipsis	
d. Vague Language	
e. Spoken Discourse Markers	
f. Informal Reported Speech	
g. Question Tags	

6. If “Yes”, please, list some activities you have used. (You may choose more than one answer.)

Aspects Types	a. Listening-based Activities	b. Speaking-based Activities	c. Writing-based Activities
a. Heads			
b. Tails			
c. Conversational Ellipsis			
d. Vague Language			
e. Spoken Discourse Markers			
f. Informal Reported Speech			
g. Question Tags			

Section Three: Views about Spoken Grammar

7. When teaching conversation, one should not refer to standard grammar, but rather to spoken grammar as characterised by the seven aspects covered in Q4, Q5 and Q6.

- Yes
- No

8. If “No”, which spoken grammar aspects should NOT be taught?

- a. Heads
- b. Tails
- c. Conversational Ellipsis
- d. Vague Language
- e. Spoken Discourse Markers
- f. Informal Reported Speech
- g. Question Tags

9. Why should each of these aspects NOT be taught? (You may tick more than one answer.)

Aspects Reasons	a. It is difficult for the students.	b. It deviates from standard grammar.	c. It is less familiar to you.	d. There is no clear teaching methodology.	e. Other: Please, specify.
a. Heads					
b. Tails					
c. Conversational Ellipsis					
d. Vague Language					
e. Spoken Discourse Markers					
f. Informal Reported Speech					
g. Question Tags					

Section Four: Further Suggestions

10. Please, add any further suggestion or comment.

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