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Dieses Projekt wurde mit Unterstützung der Europäischen Kommission finanziert. Die Verantwortung für den Inhalt dieser Veröffentlichung trägt allein der Verfasser; die Kommission haftet nicht für die weitere Verwendung der darin enthaltenen Angaben.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Did you know that grammar helps you express yourself?



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Luxemburg 2017

Grammar - bad image?

Grammar has a bad image these days. Most people and, among of those people, many teachers and students think that grammar does not have much to do with 'real' language or communication. Grammar is seen as normative, boring and useless. Even in research, many studies show that grammatical knowledge is not necessary for writing acquisition. In these studies, however, grammar indeed refers to normative grammatical rules. The researchers, in their experiments, teach the students grammatical rules without any communicative context.

Long tradition of grammar

What do people imagine when they think of grammar? 'Grammar' refers to grammar books. Some of these books show how one should speak and write prescriptively. Generations of students have learnt grammatical rules by heart and often have suffered during grammar class. Learning grammar seemed particularly useless, as the students already knew the language. Grammar did not seem to help the students in their communication. In contrary, grammar seemed to hinder the students in communicating and expressing themselves orally and literally.

What does grammar mean?

The primary meaning of grammar, however, does not refer to grammar books. Indeed, grammar is, along with the lexicon, the center of any language. When we acquire a new language we therefore not only learn words but we also learn how to use these words within a sentence. We might learn words such as the, house, garden, with, I, live, and big. Each of these words has a particular meaning. Moreover, each one is associated with a concept of what a house or garden is and the word might refer to a particular house or garden. In order to communicate however, we don't use, single words but instead integrate them into sentences and utterances. Combined with other words within a chain of words, the meaning moves

beyond the meaning of each word. For example, I live in a house with a big garden. The choice of another tense immediately modifies the semantics such as in the following: I used to live in a house with a big garden, or, I have lived in a house with a big garden. XXXX Living in a house with a big garden, I was happy differs from: Living in a house with a big garden makes me happy.

As a writer or speaker, tense is one aspect that influences your point of view. You might choose past tense when you are reporting and want to give somewhat objective information. You might choose present tense in a story; the aim here would be here to let the audience witness how the protagonists develop and interact.

Grammar as a tool for writing

Some researchers in present time focus on grammar as a tool for writing. The hypothesis is that learners need particular grammatical structures in order to cope with a particular genre of text. The researchers therefore advocate for a strong association between grammar learning and writing tasks. If students have to write reports for example, they absolutely must master simple past tense. A teacher should therefore give them the tools to use this tense.

Grammar as a part of communication

To conclude, grammar is first and foremost part of our repertoire of communication. All learners of a language will learn smaller or bigger parts of this repertoire. First language learners acquire grammar and lexicon implicitly, whereas second or foreign language learners need some explicit teaching to grasp grammatical structures. But the following applies to all: A speaker who masters a broad range of grammatical structures has the freedom to choose how he or she wants to put his or her ideas into words.