

Grammaticality vs. Acceptability. Issues in the EFL and ESP classroom

Aneta NAUMOSKA
Biljana NAUMOSKA-SARAKINSKA
Ss Cyril and Methodius University

Abstract: *Though the concepts of grammaticality and acceptability are obviously different, they are intrinsically linked where language is concerned, and especially in terms of (foreign) language learning. As such, grammaticality is more theoretical in nature, in connection to whether the grammatical rules of the language have been followed, that is, conformed to. Acceptability, on the other hand, has more to do with whether the language has been used appropriately in a particular situation and/or context, and in that sense, it is speaker-oriented. Bearing in mind the lingua franca status of English on the global stage, it is not unexpected that variations will occur in terms of what is deemed (un)acceptable through the prism of grammaticality, as well as through the prism of the approach employed - descriptive or prescriptive. This paper will take a closer look at the two concepts - grammaticality and acceptability - and compare them in terms of their similarities and differences, as well as look at their role in foreign language learning, focusing on the EFL and ESP classroom, the various challenges that might surface and the potential ways to deal with them. Bearing in mind that the primary purpose of language is to facilitate communication, we may conclude that this applies to foreign language learning, too, and in that context, it would be useful to take a closer look at which of the two notions holds greater significance in achieving communicative competence, whether they can work together for this aim, and if so, the strategies and techniques that may be employed.*

Keywords: *grammaticality, acceptability, EFL, ESP, prescriptive vs descriptive approach*

1. Introduction

It is a fact that language is the most efficient tool for communication, though certainly not the only one, bearing in mind that different types of communication exist, the main division being into verbal and non-verbal communication. However, it goes without saying that the proficient use of language is indispensable in achieving communicative competence, especially in the framework of foreign language (FL) teaching and learning.

There are various techniques and strategies that are at our disposal in our bid to help learners in their acquisition of a given foreign language, their use invariably affected by the prevailing societal dynamics and trends, and each method carrying its own distinct advantages and potential limitations.

At this moment in time, with the significant technological progress and the availability of numerous means of communication, across various domains, it is unsurprising that the communicative approach dominates in (E)FL learning, as this approach centers on methodologies rooted in the notion that the primary goal of language, and consequently language learning, is effective communication. This idea grew primarily out of the works of British linguists Firth (1957) and Halliday (1976), and American linguist Hymes (1972), who viewed language first and foremost as a system of communication.

Despite the fact that linguists may take different approaches in their study of language, it is, nevertheless, noteworthy that all systemic linguists set out from the view that language is a social semiotic, focusing on how language is employed in everyday social interactions. Consequently, in communicative classrooms, the focus is on language being used in spontaneous situations, where learners are set both in the role of active participants, as well as that of recipients, with the ultimate aim of achieving communicative proficiency (Brown 241). Thus, linguistic and communicative abilities are set on an equal footing, with equal emphasis placed on both in recognition of the fact that mastering language forms is futile unless they can be applied fluently and appropriately. Conversely, fluent and appropriate language use is impossible without a firm grasp of language forms, which simply highlights the inseparable connection between linguistic and communicative competence.

Within this framework, a crucial question emerges: Can we possess linguistic competence without communicative proficiency, and if so, which should take precedence - mastery of language structure or effective communication skills? In this context, and particularly regarding the concepts of grammaticality and acceptability, we must acknowledge that the former is more theoretically inclined, while the latter is more speaker-grounded. Based on this, a dilemma arises as to where the emphasis should be placed in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and consequently, in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms - should it be placed on fostering grammatical accuracy, ensuring communicative acceptability, or perhaps pursue an entirely different focus altogether?

Unsurprisingly, just like in many other language-related matters, and depending on their starting point of study and analysis, linguists, English Language Teaching (ELT) specialists, and even language users all offer a variety of viewpoints and perspectives. Therefore, if we set out from the premise that language is primarily a tool for communication, it logically follows that the central objective of acquiring English as a foreign language is to enable effective communication, to break down cultural and linguistic barriers, to foster deeper interpersonal connections, as well as to encourage

and enhance the cultural dimension and a cross-cultural sensitivity and identity.

2. Literature review

Language is studied by linguists from various angles, which offers us a plethora of interpretations and viewpoints regarding its usage and purpose. In addition, these diverse perspectives enable us to gain a richer and deeper comprehension of its significance as a means of communication, as well as a more encompassing understanding of the different functions it carries out. This becomes particularly apparent within the framework of language teaching and learning, as this is where linguistic principles intersect and intertwine with pedagogical methods, as can be evidenced in the range of existing teaching strategies and techniques.

It is unsurprising that linguists present diverse interpretations regarding various linguistic phenomena, bearing in mind the intricacy of the English language, together with its historical evolution and widespread global usage. These diverse interpretations also cover numerous discussions centering on the concepts of *grammaticality* and *acceptability*, especially in terms of what they may have in common, as well as the reasons that may lie behind the potential overlap, or lack thereof.

According to Chomsky, as quoted in Chapman and Routledge, acceptability should not be confused with grammaticality: while an acceptable sentence must be grammatical, not just any grammatical sentence is necessarily acceptable (Chapman and Routledge 2). In this context, we can mention the existence of *garden path sentences*, which are essentially sentences that are perceived as unacceptable to those with a native or native-like command of the language, despite the fact that they comply with the English grammar rules, and, are, as such, grammatically correct. The reason why they are deemed unacceptable arises from the fact that they confuse the mental framework we have set up and rely on for speaking the language. Basically, we can easily comprehend and accept sentences that align with our mental framework, and we perceive them as grammatically correct. On the other hand, when sentences deviate from our mental framework, our brain classifies them as ungrammatical and simply dismisses them. There are, however, instances where grammatically correct sentences appear misleading, disrupting our mental framework and posing cognitive challenges. Despite being grammatical, theoretically speaking, they are often deemed unacceptable due to their initial appearance of incorrectness; they lead us astray, much like wandering down a garden path.

As an illustration of a garden path sentence we may take the following example: *The old man the boat*. Although it could be rephrased, and, thus, simplified as *The elderly people control the boat*, the former

version initially makes us wonder whether it is correct by appearing incorrect at first glance. This confusion arises from the fact that we initially interpret ‘old’ as an adjective describing ‘man,’ to which we assign the role of a noun. Consequently, as we proceed to read the rest of the sentence, we are at a loss as to where the verb is, prompting us to dismiss it as incorrect, since we have been taught from the very start that the subject-verb-object sentence arrangement is one of the fundamental rules of English grammar. Essentially, in our mind we process the original sentence as consisting of a noun phrase (NP) + a verb phrase (VP), where the NP consists of the determiner ‘the’ + the adjective ‘old’ + the noun ‘man’, and the VP consists of a verb ??? (hence, the problem that appears concerning acceptability) + a NP, which consists of the determiner ‘the’ + the noun ‘boat’.

However, in order to properly read, and understand, the sentence, we basically need to rewind our processing and reinterpret ‘man’ as the verb of the sentence and ‘the old’ as a collective noun which functions as the subject of the sentence. In other words, ‘The boat is manned by the old (people)’. Now our blueprint is happy, since it is able to process the sentence with no confusion, as consisting of a NP + a VP, where the NP consists of the determiner ‘the’ + the noun ‘old’, resulting in a NP that refers to a group of people in general, and the VP consists of the verb ‘man’ + a NP consisting of the determiner ‘the’ + the noun ‘boat’.

Moreover, we may note the following sentence, which, despite being grammatically correct, is not considered to be acceptable: *Dogs dogs dog dog dogs* (Barton et al.). Along those lines, we may encounter a grammatically incorrect sentence which is considered acceptable: **More people have been to Russia than I have* (Montalbetti). These above-mentioned examples are not particularly rare nor unique, as numerous other sentences can be used to illustrate the distinction between grammaticality and acceptability.

In addition, both notions - grammaticality and acceptability - are seen as gradient properties, and in linguistic literature they are marked with a combination of ? and * for grammaticality, where a sentence that is marked with ** would be seen as strongly ungrammatical, a sentence that is marked with a ?* would be questionable, and # would be a mark of acceptability (Chomsky 58). This is in line with the view that the grammaticality of a sentence refers to whether the sentence conforms to the syntactic rules of a given language (Fromkin and Rodman 106), and that “it is a characteristic of the stimulus itself” (Bard et al. 33).

While speakers invariably tend to possess an instinctive grasp of the grammatical correctness of a given sentence, we certainly cannot consider this intuition as either being reliable or having any formal significance, especially in the context of learning a foreign language. Many linguists, too, use intuition about the grammaticality of sentences as the primary source of

evidence for and against their hypotheses (Bard et al.). These intuitive renderings may be noted in different terms and with different symbols, such as acceptable, marginally acceptable, unacceptable, good, terrible, etc., and with ?, *, **, etc., respectively.

Linguists have frequently encountered difficulties over what is acceptable in English and, as a result, they have become increasingly interested in the nature of acceptability and in how to determine it (Greenbaum 1965). In language, as in life, there is seldom one definitive or universally correct and unanimously accepted answer, since to a great extent it is the language users' perspectives and approach, as well as their ever-changing and evolving needs that shape and determine what is considered grammatical and/or acceptable. In this context, we may note that what was once deemed incorrect might now be accepted, and acceptable, and vice versa - previously acceptable forms may no longer be so due to changing attitudes and societal influences that continually impact language.

3. Overview of important concepts

It would be helpful if we were to take a closer look at the terms and concepts that are involved in the grammaticality versus acceptability discussion, and, as such, this section will provide a general overview of certain notions that are actively involved, though specifically as viewed through an EFL and ESP perspective.

Language is inevitably a reflection of societal dynamics, and, as such, it undergoes constant evolution, subjected to numerous changes to satisfy the needs of its users in a particular time. This phenomenon inescapably influences English, the globally accepted lingua franca, and consequently impacts English language teaching. Therefore, the transition from General English (GE) to ESP within the realm of EFL instruction has not been an unexpected turn of events, where the focus has now shifted to enabling learners to enhance their proficiency in areas directly relevant to their professional endeavors. As a result, ESP has diversified and branched out into various specialized domains and subfields, such as English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) or English for Vocational Purposes (EVP), Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL), English for Social Sciences (ESS), among others, as presented in the tree of ELT (Hutchinson & Waters 1978)

In that context, ESP can be seen as a sub-branch of EFL, defined as “the careful research and design of pedagogical materials and activities for an identifiable group of adult learners within a specific learning context” (Dudley-Evans & St John 1998), viewed as being tailored to the learners' particular requirements, helping them achieve their learning goals and aims

by employing methodologies, approaches and tasks relevant to the discipline in question, and focusing on the pertinent language as regards grammar, vocabulary, style, etc., as compared to GE, for example.

How, then, can the concept of *communicative competence* be applied to support EFL learners in reaching their goals and objectives, taking into account their varied needs, and irrespective of whether it lies within the scope of GE or ESP? Additionally, how does this application translate in terms of most effective practical teaching strategies and techniques aimed at helping learners achieve their necessary proficiency level?

The term *communicative competence* was first coined by American (socio)linguist Hymes (1972), who explained it as “a knowledge of the rules for understanding and producing both the referential and social meaning of language” (Hymes 272), further elaborating that it “includes linguistic competence, implicit and explicit knowledge of the rules of grammar, and socio-linguistic knowledge of the rules of language use in contexts” (Hymes 283). According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence consists of four separate components: *linguistic competence* (grammatical accuracy), *sociolinguistic competence* (suitable and appropriate language usage in various social contexts), *discourse competence* (fluency, coherence and cohesion), and *strategic competence* (effectiveness of communication and the use of appropriate strategies to overcome gaps in language knowledge). Language users’ capacity to comprehend language and grammar, grasp cultural nuances, possess adept conversational skills, as well as manage language barriers reveals the interconnectedness of these components. Proficiency may be achieved in two or three of these aspects, or perhaps in all four, depending on a given user’s abilities, yet it is essential that it is present in at least one component. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) also adds a *pragmatic component*, describing it as “the functional use of linguistic resources, production of language functions, speech acts, drawing on scenarios or scripts of interactional exchanges; it also concerns the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the identification of text types and forms, irony and parody” (CEFR 13).

Language learners’ grammatical proficiency in the production of written and spoken communication, including the practical comprehension and (correct) use of grammar, vocabulary and syntax, which covers such mechanical aspects as punctuation and spelling, as well as pronunciation, all fall within the scope of linguistic competence. In fact, it is this type of communicative competence that is most often found and explored in classroom settings, where learners are expected to understand and make use of the principles that dictate word formation, verb tenses, sound interactions, various word combinations, i.e. collocations, word and phrase meanings, and

sentence structure. In addition to this, constructing grammatically acceptable sentences also requires (at least) a basic proficiency in some other, additional, components of linguistic competence, such as knowing how larger units of language, such as phrases and sentences, are formed (syntax), knowing how meaning works (semantics), how sounds are arranged (phonology), as well as how they are produced and perceived (phonetics).

How, then, can we look at the grammaticality/acceptability debate within the framework of the EFL and ESP context? Do we need to insist on perfectly formed grammatical sentences or can we just be happy with perfectly acceptable, but perhaps ungrammatical, sentences? In this context, are we starting to move in the direction of ‘good enough’, where we are satisfied if the message has been communicated, without worrying too much about the form itself? And, who is to judge, to prescribe how the communication should proceed, and to make a pronouncement on what is more important: the fact that the message itself has been conveyed, received and understood, or that the form of the message follows the established grammatical rules?

In line with the above, we may note that there are two streams in terms of how language is studied and perceived, two approaches - the prescriptive and the descriptive approach. As such, we may correctly predict that the *prescriptive approach* will be the one shaking its head in disapproval at the blatant disregard for the already-established grammatical rules, while the *descriptive approach* will be content with this flexibility, as the view on what constitutes a rule in this approach essentially means looking for patterns and frequency instead of focusing on rules.

Prescriptivism takes language to be governed by formal rules. As a result, for prescriptivists ‘good’ or ‘correct’ language usage depends on following these rules. *Descriptivism*, on the other hand, focuses on observing how language is used rather than on imposing rules. From this perspective, correct usage is simply a matter of convention. Prescriptive grammars state that there is ‘only one right way’ of using a language, whereas descriptive grammars simply tell us how the language is ‘actually’ used by its native speakers, implying that there are many possibilities at our disposal to say the same thing. Furthermore, truly descriptive grammars are now typically corpus-based, giving instances and evidence of use; they, then, formulate the rules which underlie those instances - not the grammar’s rules, but the underlying rules to be discovered from actual usage. As such, a grammar may tell us which words *may* be used as pre-determiners, not which words *should* be used as pre-determiners. The descriptivist approach to language does not dispute that rules shape behavior, but it is aware that the rules are based on observations of what works. A good example of descriptivism is that the rule is not fixed, and in practice is not adhered to, nor is it necessary to ensure

grammatical English. Thus, the descriptive approach is all about being flexible about what constitutes a rule; it looks for patterns and frequency instead of focusing on rules.

It goes without saying that a balanced approach is invariably the best solution, and anything that is set to the extreme of one or the other side may be counterproductive. Thus, yes, rules are important and necessary, as without them we may easily slip into anarchy and a state where communication is impeded, which is not what we want to achieve, bearing in mind what the primary function of language is - enabling and facilitating communication. However, sticking too rigidly to the rules, and blindly insisting on their adherence may also have a negative effect, as we risk entering GPS territory, that is - *grammatical pedantry syndrome* - the compulsive desire to correct grammatical errors.

Of the two notions - grammaticality and acceptability - we do not necessarily wish to resort to an either/or option, but we may note that it is context-sensitive. Linguistics-wise, *grammaticality* has to do with how well a given utterance adheres to the norms of language usage prescribed by the grammar of a specific linguistic variety. The concept of grammaticality and the development of generative grammar, which aimed to establish principles governing the formation of grammatically correct sentences, appeared and developed simultaneously, and within this framework *grammaticality* can be taken as the degree to which a sequence of words conforms to predefined rules. The implication is that a native speaker produces sentences that align with these rules with the help of their internalized grammar, allowing them to assess whether a particular utterance is acceptable. Thus, grammaticality in language denotes an adherence to the grammar rules, where the grammatical principles recognized and confirmed by native speakers are employed and followed.

Acceptability, as opposed to grammaticality, refers to the degree to which a sentence, seen as grammatically correct in accordance with the rules, is deemed suitable by both speakers and listeners; it denotes the quality of being permissible or tolerated. The terms *grammaticality* and *acceptability* are often used interchangeably, and at times a sentence may be assessed in terms of the former instead of the latter. This is particularly relevant from an EFL and ESP perspective, as learners receive information concerning language rules and grammatical structures in order to avoid making and using ‘ungrammatical constructions’, as well as to recognize examples where, despite complying with the grammatical principles, a construction may still be seen as unacceptable. The unacceptability marker may arise either from a lack of grammaticality or from a lack of appropriateness, since there are instances where appropriate grammatical constructions that may challenge our memory power would not be considered acceptable. However, besides

the linguistic, i.e. grammatical factors, acceptability is also determined by situational and psychological factors, as it would be quite challenging, for example, for a listener or a reader to understand highly complex constructions. Thus, it is imperative that we are sensitive to the norms of present-day usage and not to the arbitrary rules of prescriptive grammarians, as a number of the constructions that are deemed as ‘incorrect’ by them are, in fact, grammatical. At the same time, it is also important that we do not rely blindly on the standard variety of English, as there are constructions which may be appropriate in one situation but not in another.

In this context we may mention the concept of *World Englishes*, a notion that refers to the differences in the English language that emerge as it is used in various contexts worldwide. Native speakers of a language - including linguists - frequently disagree as to whether particular sequences are acceptable; differences in evaluation may reflect variation in language use (Greenbaum 165). The notion *World Englishes* is considered to be relatively recent in origin, going back to 1965 and the linguist Braj Kachru. In fact, it is in his article “The Indianness in Indian English” that he sets the theoretical groundwork for the term, by looking at how English is nativized in India, describing some of its unique sociological and cultural aspects and illustrating that ‘Indian English’ is a unique variety of English, falling neither under the category of American or British English. Kachru also defines the quality of ‘nativeness’ in *World Englishes* “in terms of both its functional domains and range, and its depth in social penetration and resultant acculturation” (Kachru 68), arguing that the English language does not belong solely to its native speakers, but to its various non-native users throughout the world as well. From this premise, and in this context, Smith proposes the following three terms to understand the interaction between speaker and listener: 1) *intelligibility* (word/utterance recognition), 2) *comprehensibility* (word/utterance meaning), and 3) *interpretability* (meaning behind word/utterance), displacing the grammaticality stance in favor of acceptability (Smith 81).

4. Grammaticality and acceptability in the EFL and ESP contexts

It is an indisputable fact that language is a tool for communication, yet it goes without saying that communication can be achieved without the use of full, grammatically-formed phrases and sentences, especially in informal contexts. How does this translate in the EFL and ESP context, then, in terms of expectations and setting teaching and learning goals and outcomes? What will the aims of the EFL classroom become - to help learners become communicatively competent and proficient or to master the grammatical forms and structures of the language, bearing in mind that they do not always have to go hand in hand? Ideally, we would attempt to achieve both,

grammatical and communicative proficiency, but to what extent will we demand grammatical accuracy if the communicative function of language has been achieved?

These are all issues that arise in the ELT framework of EFL and ESP instruction, yet it is of great importance that we bear in mind that the grammaticality/acceptability distinction is not black or white, but rather, it is context-sensitive and context-dependent. English teachers are in the enviable position of not just teaching the linguistic nuances of English, but of also providing an inclusive environment in which to carry it out, in a diverse setting, with learners from different backgrounds. It would be a shame if this opportunity to build cultural bridges and break down language and communication barriers were to not be seized with both hands due to perhaps an unnecessary amount of linguistic pedantry.

In this context, we may refer to Diagram 1 below, as presented by Drummond in 2019, illustrating the distinction between *linguistic knowledge* and *linguistic pedantry* in line with the grammaticality versus acceptability dilemma:

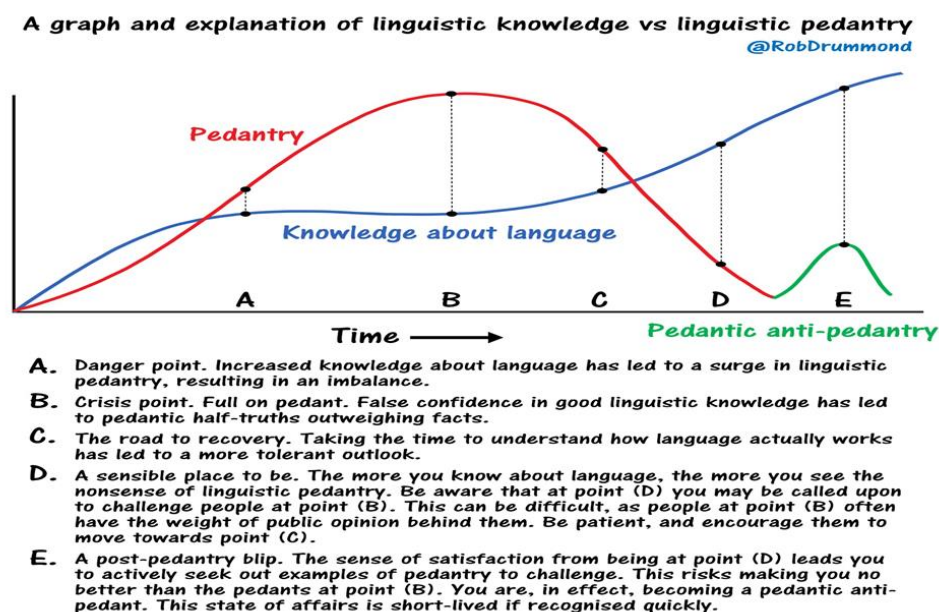


Diagram 1. Linguistic knowledge vs linguistic pedantry (Drummond 2019)

Interestingly, this can even be tied in with the prescriptive versus descriptive approach to the study of language, and all the encompassing areas, including ELT.

In addition, the lingua franca status of English has made it such that it is now a language that is owned by nobody, i.e. it is a language that is owned by everybody; it is the medium that is used when it is the only option to communicate. In other words, it is the living users, speakers and writers of English that own it collectively, and govern it by global, regional and local consensus. As connected to the notion of World Englishes, the question that now arises is if enough speakers use it, does something eventually become acceptable? From a descriptive point of view, if an entire identifiable group regularly uses that language, form, construction, etc., then it has become grammatical; the definition of ‘grammar’ - being that a group of people agree and consistently use a certain form.

5. Issues in the EFL and ESP classroom and their resolution

It goes without saying that EFL and especially ESP are vital for equipping non-native English speakers from all fields to be competitive in the workplace. Successful interactions require possessing and displaying viable communication and strategic skills, where the language user aims to get the job done, as well as to create rapport. A main source of potential issues resides in inadequate communication skills, which inevitably turns the focus to the importance of acquiring, developing and improving users’ communicative competence, as the notion of ‘culture’ refers to community cultures and practices, and individual cultural backgrounds.

As stated previously that English is the medium of communication among non-native English speakers, it is not surprising that it is defined as “highly situation-specific, dynamic, idiosyncratic and consequently, inherently tolerant of different varieties” (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 57), as a result of being spoken by users from different cultural backgrounds.

In addition, the advent of the internet has both had its advantages, as well as its drawbacks. Living in an age of unprecedented technological advances means that communication has become instantaneous, which also means that mistakes go viral in a matter of seconds. This is in line with the global lingua franca status of English, as noted earlier, English being the language with which people communicate, native speakers and non-native speakers alike. We are witnesses to situations where non-native English speakers that share the same mother tongue communicate in English without thinking twice about it. At the least, this is an evident sign of excellent language planning, though not without issues that arise as a result, and that ought to be resolved at some point. Mistakes, and not just of a grammatical nature, occur, spread, and repeat, up to the point that they are accepted and become acceptable. Undoubtedly the majority of the mistakes originate among non-native English speakers, but native speakers are certainly not

immune to making their fair share, and thus, enabling the spread of ungrammatical constructions on the one hand, and them becoming acceptable, on the other.

It is nowadays quite common to come across such mistakes as would make any good prescriptivist turn in their grave, such as the loss of -s in the third person singular, as in **She love basketball*; the incorrect use of the apostrophe for possession/plural, such as in **The boy's dropped their bags and ran off* and **The boys mother is waiting for him to finish up*; the incorrect spelling of *they're/their/there* and *your/you're*, the omission and/or incorrect use of the indefinite article; the incorrect formation of perfect tenses, such as **have went*, **had ate*, as well as the increasing (incorrect) use of forms such as **would of*, **should of*; the lack of capitalization and/or punctuation, among others. It is also fairly certain that these ungrammatical forms will, over time, become accepted, and acceptable, until one day they, themselves, become the norm, and are considered grammatical (variations). The question is how we, as linguists, teaching experts, and language users, will choose to deal with this - whether we will simply accept it, accept it with grace, find it inevitable, or perhaps even useful in the framework of language development and evolution.

6. Conclusion

Overcoming the grammaticality versus acceptability dilemma is not something that will happen overnight, in the near future, or perhaps at all. There are issues and challenges that may be looked at from different angles, and, as such, will offer different solutions and ways of dealing with it. Language can be studied from different perspectives, with linguists applying a myriad of approaches to determine its innate nature. As it is a phenomenon which is inherently dynamic and capable of undergoing (unexpected) changes and transformations, influenced by society and all the goings-on taking place at a given point in time and place, it is quite reasonable to expect that this will undoubtedly persist in the future.

The notion of 'grammar' came into late Middle English from Old French *gramaire*, via Latin from Greek *grammatikē* (tekhnē) - '(art) of letters', from *gramma*, *grammat-* 'letter of the alphabet, thing written'. No matter how much we deviate from the established grammatical rules, we cannot escape the fact that grammar is, in fact, the backbone of the language, any language, and English is no exception, as it is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. Thus, communication, the main purpose of language essentially, would be greatly impeded if the grammatical rules are not followed to some extent. What needs to be borne in mind is the context-sensitive nature of this dilemma, that in some contexts the notion of grammaticality will take precedence, while in other contexts, it will be the

notion of acceptability that will be given priority. Even in the context of internationally-recognized English proficiency assessment there is some flexibility in terms of grammaticality and acceptability, attempts being made to ensure a balanced approach.

The situation is much the same in the EFL and ESP context, as here, too, we cannot make a strict division over what should take precedence, and, thus, we instead focus our attention on achieving balance - ensuring that learners have enough knowledge of the structure in order to meet their communicative needs, both in terms of sending and receiving messages. Learning English, in an EFL context, enables us to establish global connections, which, in turn, leads us to foster cultural understanding and promote a global community of sorts. In addition, within the framework of ESP, a branch of EFL, becoming proficient in English tailored to particular fields, such as business, law, medicine, etc., provides users greater career prospects and possibilities, since the focus is set on improving their linguistic competence, adapted to specific professional contexts or disciplines. In both instances, communication is the common variable, and without it, we would have the theoretical aspect covered, but not the applicative, practical one.

We may, thus, conclude that it is certainly not an either/or option, but rather one where the two notions are linked, inherently intertwined, and go hand in hand, all with the aim of achieving optimal results in the teaching and learning process. Or, to cite British linguist David Crystal, the world's foremost expert on the English language:

It is the role of schools to prepare children for the linguistic demands that society places upon them. This means being competent in Standard English as well as in the nonstandard varieties that form a part of their lives and which they will frequently encounter outside their home environment in modern English literature, in interactions with people from other parts of the English-speaking world, and especially on the internet. They have to know when to spell and punctuate according to educated norms, and when it is permissible not to do so. In a word, they have to know how to manage the language – or to be masters of it (as Humpty Dumpty says to Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*). (2010, December 14)

Works Cited

Bard, Ellen Gurman, et al. “Magnitude Estimation of Linguistic Acceptability.” *Language*, vol. 72, no. 1, 1996, pp. 32-68. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/416793>. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

- Barton, G. Edward, Robert C. Berwick, and Eric S. Ristad. *Computational complexity and natural language*. MIT Press, 1987.
- Brown, H. Douglas. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (5th ed.), Pearson Longman, 2007.
- Canale, Michael and Swain, Merrill. "Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing," in *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 1, no. 1, Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 1-47.
- Chapman, Siobhan and Routledge, Christopher. "Acceptability/Grammaticality". *Key Ideas in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language*, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp. 1-2.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748631421-004>
- Chomsky, Noam. *Syntactic structures*. Mouton de Gruyter, 2002.
- Council of Europe (CEFR). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Crystal, David. "On being a champion of - what?" DCBLOG, 14 December 2010,
<https://david-crystal.blogspot.com/2010/12/on-being-champion-of-what.html>
- Drummond, Rob [@RobDrummond]. "A graph and explanation of linguistic knowledge vs linguistic pedantry." *Twitter*, 16 September 2019,
<https://twitter.com/RobDrummond/status/1173657440325373953>
- Dudley-Evans, Tony, and Maggie-Jo St John. *Developments in English for specific purposes: a multi-disciplinary approach*. CUP, 1998.
- Firth, John Rupert. *Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951*. OUP, 1957.
- Fromkin, Victoria and Rodman, Robert. *An Introduction to Language*. Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998.
- Greenbaum, Sidney. "Language Variation and Acceptability". *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1975, pp. 165-172. JSTOR,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3585483>. Accessed 23 Jan. 2024.
- Halliday, Michael. *System and Function in Language: Selected Papers*. OUP, 1976.
- Hutchinson, Tom and Waters, Alan. *English for Specific Purposes. A learning-centred approach*. CUP, 1987.
- Hymes, Dell. "On Communicative Competence," in *Sociolinguistics*, edited by J.B. Pride and J. Homes, Penguin, 1972, pp. 269-293.
- Kankaanranta, Anne & Louhiala-Salminen, Leena. "Business communication in BELF." *Business Communication Quarterly* 70, 2007, pp. 55-59.
- Kachru, Braj B. "World Englishes and English-Using Communities." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 17, 1997, pp. 66-87.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190500003287>

- Montalbetti, Mario M. *After binding: On the interpretation of pronouns*. Diss. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1984.
- Smith, Larry. “Spread of English and issues of intelligibility”. *The other tongue: English across cultures* edited by Braj Kachru, University of Illinois Press, 1992, pp. 75-90.