

# Integrating Grammar and Discourse: A New Approach to Language Teaching

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**Abstract:** Discourse competence plays a crucial role in English Language Teaching (ELT) as it forms the foundation for effective communication and language learning. It encompasses the ability to construct coherent and cohesive discourse, understand text features, apply construction strategies, and possess knowledge of academic writing. Developing discourse competence aids in mastering academic writing, enhancing communicative skills, and understanding language structures in context. Furthermore, integrating media-discursive competence into learning materials can improve students' conversational skills and motivate learning. This article compares discourse competence with grammar skills, how it works if the learners use them together in speech. In the classroom, discourse competence is essential for language teachers as it influences learners' engagement and the learning process. Overall, discourse competence is a fundamental component of ELT that facilitates effective communication, language learning, and teaching practices with correct grammatical structures and relevant knowledge.

**Keywords:** Discourse competence, tense, grammatical structures, cohesion.

**Introduction:** In recent years, the widespread and continuously developing innovative technologies and internet resources have become a key factor in the advancement of every field, including education. The stages and methods of foreign language learning now differ significantly from those of the past. Unlike traditional teaching methods, modern approaches allow students to learn languages in interesting and accelerated ways, as well as enhance and even assess their knowledge independently. These advantages arise from the strong competition among internet resources, which are constantly being updated and gaining relevance.

Currently, higher education specialists are also abandoning traditional methods and keeping pace with the times by thoroughly studying and implementing the latest teaching methodologies and knowledge. Additionally, Uzbekistan's expansion of international relations has increased the importance of foreign languages in social, economic fields, and intercultural communication, making language learning a fundamental principle. Therefore, there is a need to update and align existing language teaching methods, tools, and approaches with contemporary demands.

Since one of the requirements in students' professional activities is to have a perfect command of the language, the competence-based education model holds significant importance. [1] This allows for a more effective and cost-efficient learning process with the help of innovative information communication technologies.

Students' discourse competence is essentially a systematic accumulation of specific knowledge and skills. These knowledge and skills are crucial factors for achieving communicative goals and include not only lexical, syntactic, and grammatical rules but also stylistic, genre-related, cultural, social, psychological, emotional, coherence and harmony aspects. [2] It is important to note that the concepts of discourse, speech acts, and communication fundamentally differ from one another. The distinction between discourse skills and speech abilities lies in the fact that speech abilities aim to address specific communicative tasks in managing language skills: writing, speaking, reading, and so on. However, the concept of discourse is broader because it encompasses extra linguistic factors. In previous scholarly works on the development of the concept of communicative

competence, Canale further explains sociolinguistic competence, which includes discourse competence. [3] This approach allows for the analysis of written and spoken texts in various genres, examining their grammatical forms and meanings together. Such research is crucial for designing curricula based on written and spoken texts in communication. Discourse competence is a significant component of communicative competence, which is essential for students during academic writing and reading processes. It is natural that developing this competence poses certain challenges for many ESP students.

Previously, many English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers adhered to the idea that grammar was solely about how words are combined to form correct sentences. As awareness of students' competencies has significantly increased, this notion has been replaced by the new principle that grammar is relevant not only to forms and rules but also to context (Frieman-Larsen, 2001: 251). Based on this, grammar should be taught not in isolation but within the context of discourse. This perspective is grounded in the interconnection between grammar and context, which can be observed in the three-dimensional aspects of grammar, the variability of word order, modality indicating precision, and tenses that express future actions. According to Larsen-Frieman, the important three dimensions aid in the equal study of grammar and discourse. They are form and structure of the sentence, meaning and semantic position of the sentence and pragmatic interpretation of the sentences. [9]

Grammar is interconnected with context. This interconnection can be seen in the three dimensions of grammar, modality indicating precision (such as must, may, might, and could), variations in word order, and tenses that express the future. To enhance students' communicative competence, grammar should be taught not at the sentence level but at the discourse level.

The classification of discourse competence not only relates to linguistic competence but also involves the correct use of linguistic knowledge in contextual, social, and cultural frameworks. This principle of integration connects discourse competence with the concept of genre. Bruce defines discourse competence as the ability to generalize various kinds of knowledge in creating linguistically accurate and socially appropriate extended written discourse. Bruce's discourse competence encompasses complex knowledge that addresses students' challenges in academic writing and task completion, leading to the application of a genre-based principle in deconstructing discourse competence.[2] This involves a system governing three

structures of knowledge related to discourse competence (social genre, cognitive genre, and linguistic). The social genre corresponds to the classification of an entire text based on its social purpose, that is, its socially recognized structure. As mentioned above, discourse competence involves knowing how to interpret larger content and how to connect and expand sentences coherently and cohesively.

For effective communication, speakers must understand how language is used in social contexts. Each language has its own specific usage rules, meaning that speakers must know when, how, and to what extent they can impose verbal actions on their interlocutors. Those deemed knowledgeable in oral discourse can identify and interpret various functions of speech acts in different contexts: classroom discussions, interviews, and conversations with native and non-native speakers.

According to Nunan, discourse competence is not only the ability to construct complex sentences and pronounce phonological features correctly but also includes the ability to use aspects like stress, rhythm, and intonation at a high level of fluency. This implies that they should demonstrate the ability to take turns in conversation, understand the purpose of the communication, ask questions, and utilize conversational formulas and fillers. Rivers suggests that self-generated expressions are not merely empty statements; they should accurately convey what a speaker intends in any situation, allowing new language learners to express their goals correctly.[7]

#### Tense and Discourse

Tenses indicate the time of real events and establish the sequence and tone of events in discourse. For example, the past simple tense is typically used in narrative language because it expresses completed actions: "She walked into the room, looked around, and sat down." Here, the sequence of events is conveyed. However, present perfect can also be used in interviews or news: "Police have arrested a suspect in the case." — in this case, the event is still relevant.

#### Modal Verbs and Position of the Speaker

Modal verbs indicate the speaker's attitude towards an action: likelihood (might, may), obligation (must, have to), permission (can, may). In discourse, the choice of modal verbs defines the speaker's tone and position:[8]

- "You must finish this today." — command;

- "You might want to finish this today." — polite suggestion.

These can have the same grammatical structure but serve different communicative purposes in discourse.

### Cohesive Devices and Grammatical Consistency

Cohesive devices create grammatical connections between sentences or ideas in a text. This includes:

- Pronouns: he, she, it, this, that
- Conjunctions: however, because, although
- Repetition and synonymy: "The car was fast. This vehicle..."

For example:

"John was late. He missed the bus. That made him angry." — here, cohesive devices (he, that) ensure consistency in the text. Referential cohesion is also important: "She opened the door. The woman looked around." — here, "She" and "The woman" refer to the same person.

Discourse-based grammatical tools are used in the following text:

"It had been raining all night. When Sarah woke up, she looked outside and sighed. 'I guess I won't be jogging today,' she muttered. Still, she might go to the gym later."

- "had been raining" — indicates the duration and prior phase of the event (past perfect continuous);
- "won't be jogging" — future decision (future continuous, appropriate tone for discourse);
- "might go" — modal verb indicating likelihood;
- Cohesive devices: she, she, later (ensure connection).

Although tenses, modal verbs, and cohesive devices are grammatically independent units, their true function is revealed in discourse context. Factors such as the speaker's intention, audience, and communicative situation dictate the selection of grammatical tools. Thus, teaching grammar in real speech contexts is one of the important strategies for language educators.

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