PROFESORES DE ENSEÑANZA SECUNDARIA · INGLÉS · JUNTA DE EXTREMADURA

TEMA

12

The Concept of Grammar: Reflection on Language and Its Learning. From Prescriptive Grammar to Grammar in the Service of Language Use and Communication

Concepto de gramática: Reflexión sobre la lengua y su aprendizaje. De la gramática normativa a la gramática en función del uso de la lengua y de la comunicación.

§

NOVIEMBRE DE 2026

Material de elaboración propia a partir de las fuentes oficiales que se citan al final del tema. No es un temario oficial ni sustituye a la normativa publicada.

Índice

1. INTRODUCTION

2. THE CONCEPT OF GRAMMAR

3. PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR

- 3.1. The origins of the normative tradition
- 3.2. Features of the prescriptive approach
- 3.3. Value and limits

4. THE DESCRIPTIVE TURN

- 4.1. Structuralism and generative grammar
- 4.2. The great reference grammars
- 4.3. Prescriptive and descriptive: a false opposition?

5. GRAMMAR IN THE SERVICE OF USE AND COMMUNICATION

- 5.1. Communicative competence
- 5.2. Functional grammar
- 5.3. The Common European Framework of Reference
- 5.4. Grammar in language-teaching methods

6. REFLECTION ON LANGUAGE AND ITS LEARNING

- 6.1. Metalinguistic reflection
- 6.2. Grammar and the first language: contrastive reflection

7. PEDAGOGICAL AND DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS

8. CONCLUSION

Fuentes

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1762 Robert Lowth, later a bishop, wrote in the preface to his grammar a sentence that every English teacher should keep on the desk: "It is not the Language, but the practice, that is in fault." Lowth was complaining that educated people wrote carelessly, and he proposed to cure them with rules. Two and a half centuries later, we still argue about exactly the same question, although the answer has changed: is grammar a set of rules that tells speakers what they ought to say, or a description of what speakers actually do in order to mean something to someone else? This tension, and the way in which it has been resolved in modern linguistics and in language teaching, is the subject of this topic.

I will begin by defining the concept of grammar and by showing that the word covers at least three different things. Secondly, I will examine the prescriptive tradition, from the eighteenth-century grammarians to the school textbooks that shaped generations of pupils. Thirdly, I will study the descriptive turn, from structuralism and Chomsky to the great reference grammars and corpus linguistics. Fourthly, I will explain how grammar has been placed in the service of use and communication, through the notions of communicative competence and functional grammar, the Common European Framework of Reference and the evolution of teaching methods. Fifthly, I will deal with reflection on language and its learning, including the contrast between English and Spanish that is so useful for the Spanish-speaking pupil. Finally, I will consider the pedagogical and didactic implications of all this for the Secondary classroom.

Before moving on, I would like to mention the sources consulted for this topic: Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language; Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey Pullum, The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language; M. A. K. Halliday and Christian Matthiessen, Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar; Douglas Biber and others, Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English; and Scott Thornbury, How to Teach Grammar. I have also used Jack Richards and Theodore Rodgers, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching, the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) and its Companion Volume (2020), and the legal framework set out in section 7: the LOMLOE, Real Decretos 217/2022 and 243/2022, and the Extremadura decrees 110/2022 and 109/2022.