Redefining Grammar Teaching: Integrating Spoken Grammar into EFL Classrooms

[1]Eka Nurhidayat, [2]Aji Septiaji, [3]Hastri Firharmawan, [4]Yummi Budiarti

[1,2,4]Universitas Majalengka, Majalengka Indonesia
[c]Universitas Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama

Email of corresponding author (ekanurhidayat@unma.ac.id)

Abstract

This study explores the integration of spoken grammar into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom as a means to redefine traditional grammar instruction. While grammar teaching in EFL contexts has historically emphasized written, rule-based structures, this approach often fails to prepare learners for natural and authentic spoken interaction. Spoken grammar—characterized by ellipsis, discourse markers, vague expressions, and tag questions—is largely absent from formal curricula, despite its centrality in real-life communication. This qualitative case study investigates how spoken grammar can be pedagogically adapted in EFL instruction and its impact on students' speaking competence. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with one lecturer and ten students, document analysis, and audio recordings over six weeks of instruction. Thematic analysis revealed that the explicit integration of spoken grammar improved students' fluency, pragmatic awareness, and confidence in oral communication. Students responded positively to tasks involving authentic input and contextualized practice, although some required scaffolding due to unfamiliarity with informal forms. The teacher played a key role in modeling spoken discourse and designing communicative tasks. These findings support the need to redefine grammar pedagogy to better reflect real-world language use, especially in developing EFL contexts like Indonesia. The study offers practical implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and assessment reform, contributing to a more balanced and discourse-informed approach to grammar teaching.

Keywords: spoken grammar; EFL instruction; communicative competence; discourse-based pedagogy; grammar teaching

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the paradigm of foreign language instruction, particularly English as a foreign language (EFL), has significantly transitioned from a structural approach to a communicative approach that prioritizes language competence in authentic contexts (Kuntso, 2024). This change is influenced by the growing demands of globalization and cross-cultural communication, highlighting oral communication as the primary skill required for language learners (Richards, 2006). In practice, according to Wang (2024) stated that grammar instruction in EFL classes remains predominantly formal and prescriptive, emphasizing written grammatical rules rather than language use patterns in oral interaction.

The disparity between the actual use of language in everyday life and the methodology of grammar instruction in EFL programs is becoming increasingly pronounced (Satori, 2024). In contemporary professional and social environments, effective communication is contingent not just upon grammatical precision but also on fluency, authenticity, and the capacity to adapt one's speaking style to the context of the interaction (Fatih, Fauzi & Norman, 2025). Spoken grammar, a variety utilized in

everyday conversation, encompasses unique characteristics such as tags, ellipsis, discourse markers, and reformulations that are often excluded from traditional grammar curricula (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). This results in language learning graduates frequently being ill-equipped to speak in informal, spontaneous, or real circumstances, despite being deemed proficient in writing.

Numerous studies indicate the significance of integrating spoken grammar components into the EFL curriculum. Carter and McCarthy (2006) in the Cambridge corpus and subsequent research highlighted that spoken grammar differs from written grammar not only in form but also in function and distribution within discourse contexts. Timmis (2005) observed that English language learners across different countries express a preference for language that is more natural and akin to that of native speakers, particularly regarding the adoption of more flexible grammatical structures. Despite the acknowledged importance of spoken grammar, its incorporation into educational practices remains constrained, particularly regarding curriculum, instructional materials, and teacher preparation.

Various novel methodologies have emerged to meet this requirement, including context-based grammar instruction, discourse-oriented grammar, and form-focused instruction that situates grammar within authentic communication contexts (Ellis, 2006). Nonetheless, the majority of these approaches primarily concentrate on written discourse and have not explicitly incorporated spoken grammar as a central component. The current status of grammar instruction in EFL classrooms indicates that, despite progress in more communicative teaching methods, spoken grammar remains a relatively neglected aspect of formal educational practice.

The absence of empirical research on the implementation of spoken grammar in EFL classes, particularly within the educational context of developing countries like Indonesia, reinforces this gap. Current research primarily examines teachers' and students' perceptions of grammar (Tulu & Gutema, 2023) or evaluates the effectiveness of specific grammar learning methods, often neglecting a thorough analysis of the context of spoken discourse. Few studies have investigated the systematic integration of spoken grammar into teaching practices and its effects on students' speaking competence in EFL contexts. This research is urgent due to the necessity of connecting normative grammar instruction with the dynamic and contextual requirements of oral communication. In the digital age and with increased global mobility, EFL learners must possess the ability to communicate across diverse cultural backgrounds in both informal and professional settings. Thus, the redefinition of grammar instruction through the incorporation of spoken grammar is both theoretically significant and practically necessary. This research presents a novel pedagogical approach that centers spoken grammar in the context of EFL grammar learning. This method may enhance the naturalness of students' speech, improve their pragmatic awareness, and promote more authentic and meaningful communication. The integration of spoken grammar facilitates the development of corpus-based teaching materials, enhances teacher training, and informs curriculum design grounded in actual communication needs.

This study aims to investigate strategies for integrating spoken grammar into the EFL classroom and its impact on students' speaking skills. This study primarily examines the adaptation of spoken grammar within pedagogical contexts, student responses to this approach, and its theoretical and practical implications. Consequently, the subsequent section will provide a detailed outline of the problem formulation and research objectives, serving as the foundation for the development of the methodological framework.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research method with a case study approach, aiming to explore the integration of spoken grammar into EFL classrooms and its impact on learners' speaking competence. The qualitative method was chosen to allow an in-depth understanding of the instructional practices, learner perceptions, and pedagogical implications within an authentic educational setting (Creswell, 2012). The research design followed an exploratory single-case study framework, focusing on one EFL classroom as the unit of analysis. The study examined how spoken grammar was introduced and implemented by the instructor, how students responded to it, and how it influenced their oral production. Data were collected over a six-week instructional period during which spoken grammar elements were explicitly integrated into speaking activities.

Participants

The participants were one English lecture and ten EFL university students enrolled in a Speaking course at a private university in Indonesia. The students were in their third semester and had an intermediate level of English proficiency based on the institution's placement test. The teacher had over five years of teaching experience and was trained in communicative language teaching methods.

Instruments and Data Collection

Multiple instruments were used to ensure data triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings. These included:

1. Classroom observations, focusing on the instructional process, use of spoken grammar features, and learner interaction.
2. Semi-structured interviews, conducted with the teacher and a selection of students to gain deeper insights into their perceptions and experiences.
3. Document analysis, including lesson plans, teaching materials, and student speaking transcripts to identify the incorporation and application of spoken grammar.
4. Audio recordings of classroom interaction and student presentations to examine the spoken grammar features used in real-time communication.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved coding the data to identify recurring themes related to the integration of spoken grammar, teaching strategies, student responses, and changes in oral language use. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and examined for spoken grammar features such as ellipsis, discourse markers, tag questions, and vague expressions. Trustworthiness was enhanced through member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail throughout the research process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from four sources of data: classroom observation, teacher interview, student interview, and document analysis. The discussion is organized around key themes that emerged from the data, highlighting how spoken grammar was integrated into the EFL classroom and its perceived impact on teaching and learning.

Integration of Spoken Grammar into EFL Instruction

Classroom observations revealed that spoken grammar was explicitly introduced in the majority of observed sessions. Out of six lessons, four included deliberate instruction on features such as discourse markers (e.g., you know, well, so), ellipsis, and tag questions. The instructor provided contextualized examples and encouraged students to notice how grammar differed in spoken versus written communication. These findings align with Carter and McCarthy's (2006) assertion that spoken grammar requires pedagogical treatment distinct from traditional grammar teaching.

The teacher's strategies, as observed and confirmed in the interview, included modeling authentic spoken interaction, using real-life conversations, and encouraging student output through tasks like role plays and informal discussions. The teacher emphasized the communicative function of spoken grammar and scaffolded student production using guided dialogues and peer collaboration. This supports Ellis's (2006) recommendation for form-focused instruction within communicative contexts.

Student Responses to Spoken Grammar Instruction

Interviews with 10 students revealed varied experiences and perceptions. A majority (6 out of 10) had been previously introduced to spoken grammar, mostly through informal exposure rather than systematic instruction. Students cited examples such as gonna, you know, and like as familiar spoken forms, indicating some degree of awareness. In terms of affective response, four students expressed confidence in using informal spoken English, while three reported feeling shy, particularly in formal classroom settings. Activities such as role plays and video-based discussions were preferred, as they provided models of natural language use and allowed learners to experiment with informal expressions in a low-pressure environment. These results reflect Timmis's (2005) findings that students generally value opportunities to sound more natural and closer to native speaker norms.

Regarding perceived benefits, seven students stated that learning spoken grammar helped them improve their fluency and made their speech sound more natural. However, a few students noted confusion due to the lack of explicit rules or because spoken grammar deviated from what they had previously learned in formal grammar instruction. This suggests the need for careful scaffolding when introducing spoken grammar to ensure clarity and minimize cognitive overload.

Use of Teaching Materials and Authentic Resources

Document and transcript analysis supported the findings from observations and interviews. Lesson plans included specific references to spoken grammar objectives, and teaching materials incorporated authentic samples such as movie dialogues and podcast transcripts. These materials were selected to highlight naturally occurring grammar structures, including ellipsis, vague language, reformulations, and tag questions. Student speaking transcripts and recorded oral tasks indicated a gradual increase in the use of spoken grammar features. Phrases such as I mean, sort of, and you know began to appear more frequently in student speech, indicating both awareness and practical application. These findings suggest that when students are exposed to spoken grammar in meaningful contexts, they are able to adopt it into their oral language use.

Teacher's Perspective and Pedagogical Reflections

The English lecturer interviewed described spoken grammar as essential for fostering authentic communication. He emphasized that without exposure to natural spoken features, students often sound overly formal or mechanical in speech. The teacher acknowledged challenges, particularly in finding appropriate materials and overcoming students' resistance due to the mismatch with traditional grammar norms. Despite these challenges, the teacher reported positive student responses, especially when tasks were contextualized and supported with authentic input. The incorporation of spoken

grammar was seen not as a replacement for formal grammar, but as a complementary element that enhances pragmatic competence and conversational fluency.

Discussion

The findings suggest that redefining grammar instruction to include spoken grammar is both feasible and pedagogically beneficial. When taught within a communicative framework, spoken grammar can enhance students' ability to engage in authentic interactions and increase their confidence in speaking. This study supports the growing body of literature (e.g., Hughes, 2002; McCarthy & Carter, 2004) that calls for a more balanced approach to grammar teaching—one that values both accuracy and appropriacy. However, the findings also point to the importance of teacher training, curriculum alignment, and material development to support the integration of spoken grammar into mainstream EFL instruction.

Overall, the findings support the central argument that redefining grammar instruction by incorporating spoken grammar is both theoretically grounded and pedagogically necessary. Spoken grammar reflects how language functions in real communication, and its integration can help EFL learners become more effective and confident speakers in a variety of contexts. As Creswell (2012) argues in qualitative inquiry, meaningful understanding emerges when instruction aligns with learners lived realities and communicative needs. Furthermore, this study addresses the research gap highlighted in the introduction: the lack of empirical research on how spoken grammar is implemented in EFL classrooms in developing countries. By documenting the instructional process, student responses, and teaching materials, this research contributes to the growing movement toward more inclusive and realistic grammar pedagogy in EFL contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how spoken grammar can be effectively integrated into EFL classrooms and how it impacts students' oral language development. Drawing on classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis, the findings demonstrate that spoken grammar—when taught explicitly and embedded within communicative tasks—can significantly enhance learners' fluency, naturalness, and pragmatic competence. The results indicate that spoken grammar is not only teachable but also necessary for preparing learners to use English in real-world, informal, and spontaneous interactions. Students responded positively to the instructional strategies that included authentic materials, guided practice, and interactive activities. The teacher's role in modeling spoken discourse and designing meaningful tasks was also crucial to the success of implementation. In short, this research reaffirms the need to redefine grammar teaching in EFL contexts, shifting from a rigid, written-oriented approach to a more dynamic and discourse-informed pedagogy. This redefinition is essential if the goal of language teaching is to foster communicative competence that reflects how English is actually used in real-life interactions.

The findings of this study yield several pedagogical implications for EFL practitioners, curriculum developers, and researchers:

1. Curriculum Design: Spoken grammar should be incorporated into EFL curricula as a complement to traditional grammar instruction. Syllabi should include features of spoken discourse, such as ellipsis, vague language, discourse markers, and tag questions, with clear learning objectives.
2. Material Development: Textbooks and supplementary materials should be revised to include authentic spoken language samples derived from spoken corpora. Media such as film clips,

podcasts, and real-life conversations are valuable resources for highlighting spoken grammar in context.

3. Teacher Training: Professional development programs should prepare teachers to understand and teach spoken grammar. This includes training in identifying spoken grammar features, selecting appropriate tasks, and assessing spoken performance beyond accuracy alone.
4. Assessment Practices: Oral proficiency assessments should move beyond grammatical correctness to include criteria such as naturalness, fluency, and discourse appropriateness. This aligns evaluation with communicative goals.
5. Future Research: More empirical studies are needed to examine long-term effects of spoken grammar instruction, its integration across different proficiency levels, and its impact on intercultural communication competence. Quantitative studies may complement these findings by measuring gains in speaking fluency or pragmatic awareness.

Ultimately, redefining grammar teaching by integrating spoken grammar opens new pathways for making EFL instruction more relevant, effective, and responsive to the linguistic realities of learners in the 21st century. By doing so, educators can help bridge the gap between classroom language and real-world communication.

REFERENCES

Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. Longman. DOI: 10.1177/0075424202250290

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). "Using thematic analysis in psychology." Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. DOI: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Carter, R., & McCarthy, M. (2006). Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide — Spoken and Written English Grammar and Usage. Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/S1360674307002535

Creswell, J. W. (2012). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Ellis, R. (2006). Researching Form-Focused Instruction. In Investigating Form-Focused Instruction (pp. 1–46). Routledge.

Fatih, M., Fauzi, N., & Norman, E. (2025). Effective Communication in Building Healthy and Productive Relationships. MES Management Journal. https://doi.org/10.56709/mesman.v4i1.631.

Kuntso, O. (2024). Applying pragmatic approach in EFL grammar instruction. InterConf. https://doi.org/10.51582/interconf.19-20.05.2024.017

Richards, J. C. (2006). Communicative Language Teaching Today. Cambridge University Press.

Satori, M. (2024). The Interaction Effects of Language Proficiency and Language Analytic Ability on Explicit Deductive and Inductive Grammar Instruction. The Journal of AsiaTEFL. https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2024.21.1.1.1.

Timmis, I. (2005). "Towards a framework for teaching spoken grammar." ELT Journal, 59(2), 117–125. DOI: 10.1093/eltj/cci025

Tulu, D., & Gutema, H. (2023). Effect of language use through an integrated skills learners' speaking skills: a focus on vocabulary and grammar. Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching. https://doi.org/10.30743/ll.v7i2.8212.

Wang, K. (2024). Grammar enhancement in EFL instruction: a reflection on the effects of self-evaluation, teacher support, and L2 grit. BMC Psychology, 12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01504-9.