Bridging Grammar and Communication: Focusing on the Preposition *Of*

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Focusing on the preposition *of*, this paper proposes a new method of grammar instruction to strengthen students' understanding of grammar rules, as well as their communication abilities. It is important for scholars and teachers to find a way to improve grammar teaching methods because they have not changed for several decades, while methodologies for improving students' communication skills have been discussed widely. Even ESL teachers who predominantly employ communication-centered teaching techniques rely on mechanistic methods to teach grammar, requiring students to memorize grammatical rules. The new grammar instruction method consists of two processes: understanding the essence of a particular rule and applying the understanding to a film dialog to see how grammatical rules are employed correctly in communicative settings. Understanding the essence of grammatical rules enables students to improve their communication skills and abilities; it also does not require them to memorize grammatical rules. Furthermore, film dialogs enable learners to understand the importance of context and setting in the process of communication. To demonstrate how this new method works, the paper explains the essential meaning of *of* as a part of a larger whole, and shows how the essential meaning is employed in film dialog.

I. INTRODUCTION

In ESL education, communication and grammar are taught using very different approaches. Typically, communication is taught through organic processes that encourage ESL learners to actively exchange information and ideas, whereas grammar is taught mechanistically—educators almost exclusively focus on rules and correctness (Nekoda, 2015). These distinct, and sometimes mutually exclusive, approaches only serve to widen

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the gap between grammar and communication. As discussed in-detail below, while methodologies designed to improve students' communication skills have been discussed widely, the methods of teaching grammar have received very little attention. Educators and learners seem to believe that communication skills can be developed even without a sound understanding of grammatical rules. The communication-centered approach alone is not sufficient to improve learners' English competency. Therefore, it is important to overhaul the mechanical and memorization-centered to grammar education.

As for Leki (1996), focusing on only one of these two aspects amounts to instructing learners to use only their left hands, but expecting them to suddenly use their right hands for certain tasks. For example, ESL learners in Japan are typically expected to learn about and understand auxiliary verbs solely by comprehending grammatical rules; educators typically do not focus on the complexities of communicative settings in this context. As a result, Japanese ESL learners rarely use auxiliary verbs such as *would* while communicating (Peterson, 2014). Their statements tend to be inaccurate, if not completely wrong. Mechanical grammar education mainly focuses on memorization, and it does not allow students to develop their communication skills. Overdependence on memorization results in the underdevelopment of one's communication skills. Effective grammar teaching, therefore, is not mechanical or overdependent on memorization; it enables learners to develop their English competency.

To avoid forcing learners to understand comprehend and memorize a large body of grammar rules and principles, teachers must discover the essence of target grammar rules, to minimize what Nation (2001) calls "the learning burden"(p. 25). A focus on the essence of a rule or principle lightens this burden. This essence can also serve as a foundation, enabling learners to adapt to different contexts and appreciating subtle differences in meaning. To help students improve their communication abilities, teachers should encourage them to explore how grammar is applied in authentic communication settings. Of course, there are many grammar rules that are difficult, but as this paper has only limited space, the authors restricted themselves to the preposition *of* alone. As will be seen below, the importance of prepositions is often underestimated.

Using one preposition, *of*, as an example, this paper aims to propose a new method of grammar instruction that can strengthen students' understanding of grammatical rules and their ability to communicate while avoiding making students memorize grammatical rules. Grammatical rules serve as a foundation, and enable learners to adapt to various contexts and appreciate subtle differences in meaning. To improve students' communication abilities, teachers should encourage students to understand grammatical rules and explore the ways in which grammar is applied in communication.

The new method incorporates two processes; understanding the essence of a particular rule and applying the understanding to film dialog to observe grammatical rules actually

employed in a communication setting. To understand the essence of a grammatical rule or principle requires learners to do more than memorize rules, and it reduces “the learning burden.” Furthermore, as discussed in-detail later, film dialog constitutes an effective text for the facilitation of understanding because it allows learners to understand the context and setting of the observed communication and because it also enhances students’ capacity to apply grammatical rules correctly (Matsumoto, 2014). From this point of view, even simple dialog can be extremely interesting, encouraging students to explore complex grammatical principles.

In the remainder of the paper, the authors first describe how communication and grammar have become divorced in ESL learning in Japan, discussing this specific case as an example of the importance of grammar being overshadowed by communication-centered ESL teaching styles. The third section shows the challenges that teaching grammar poses for both teachers and learners, focusing on a difficult grammatical subject that ESL students must master: prepositions. Selecting among these *of* as the main theme, the fourth section discusses its various meanings, by comparing it with other prepositions, to uncover its essential meaning and function, which it does not share with other prepositions. Last, by examining the different ways in which *of* is used in film dialog, the authors put forward a perspective accounting for how understanding the essential meaning and function of a preposition can improve students’ communication skills.

II. GRAMMAR TEACHING UNIMPROVED

1. Grammar vs. Communication: A Case in Japan

The second section of this paper first provides a brief overview of ESL education in Japan to show how communication and grammar has failed to be married. By understanding how problematic the divorce between them is, the urgency of discovering new grammar instruction methodologies should become apparent.

In Japan, ESL educators typically prioritize grammar and grammatical principles over communicative aspects (Nakata, 2006). Verbal communication is not regarded as an important aspect of ESL education; in fact, it is often overlooked. Japan’s approach to ESL education is often criticized for its excessive focus on memorization and examinations; it is also typically instructor-centric. Gitsaki (2005) and Seki (2008) note that most Japanese ESL students are accustomed to a teacher-centric approach; they also claim that students typically have no specific goals other than proceeding to the next stage of education. ESL learners are expected to obey teachers’ instructions (Nakata, 2006), and this is often regarded as the best way to gain admission to prestigious high schools and universities. In

other words, ESL education in Japan is teacher-centric because this approach “is thought to pay off in terms of future career or social status” (Nakata, 2006, p. 155). Naturally, this approach has a negative influence on Japanese ESL learners. As Murasato and Orita (2008), Nakata (1999), and Ueda (2011) show, grammar-based learning demotivates learners, leading them to believe that English is a boring subject. In other words, learners are not motivated to communicate with others in English.

The revised curriculum guidelines released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2008 clearly suggests that grammar should be taught in relation to communication skills. That is, grammar must be taught to enable learners to develop their communication abilities and skills. In fact, it can be argued that the primary purpose of language education is to enable the development of learners’ communication abilities. In addition, Kimura and Wakasugi (2014) and Shirono (2014) point out that ESL learners are more motivated to learn English when they are taught using activities aimed at developing their communication skills. There have been numerous studies and reports on communicative instruction, and some have contributed to the development of innovative teaching materials, which have in turn encouraged and motivated ESL learners. Online fantasy sport games (Silsbee, 2016), *manga* books (Howell, 2014), and mobile games (Ban & Minagawa, 2013) have been found to be effective materials to motivate ESL learners. However, some have criticized the increasingly popular communication-centric approach to English education. For instance, Nekoda (2015) argues that communication-centered English education tends to downplay the importance of grammar and vocabulary. Nakahara and Nakagawa (2010) suggest that this approach does not enable learners to develop a proper understanding of the English language. Although it is important to focus on communicative activities, it is equally important to enable ESL learners to develop a good understanding of English grammar. This is important to ensure that learners learn from lexical and grammatical errors, as well as to reduce their dependence on idiomatic expressions.

The efforts aimed at bringing about a paradigm shift in English education have focused especially on communication, and the importance of grammar seems to be underestimated. A significant number of researchers and teachers have been developing communication-centered teaching methods. However, as Onishi (2014) notes, the methods used to teach grammar have not changed in a long time, and teachers have been using old, ineffective methods to teach grammar. Similarly, while methodologies for improving students’ communication skills have been discussed widely, methods of teaching grammar have generated little interest among scholars. It is rather surprising that not enough methods have been developed to teach grammar in an effective manner. As a result, teachers who predominantly employ the communication-centered approach rely on old, unimproved, and mechanistic ways to explain grammatical rules. These methods merely require

students to memorize grammatical rules and principles. Therefore, in order to improve students' communication skills, it is important to develop more effective methods of teaching grammar.

2. A Problem Ensues: *Of Course*, *Sure*, and *Of*

In the course of an investigation of communicative language teaching (CLT) in South Korea, Li (2001) notes that it is a common misconception among instructors that CLT requires the exclusion of grammar instruction. Li stresses that teaching grammar must support students as they learn a language. In short, learning grammar is a means, and the mastery of the language is the end. This idea is quite similar to the official policy of the Japanese MEXT. However, the instruction of grammar has not yet been successful as a means to that goal.

For example, when learning a common expression such as *of course*, students as well as teachers would simply memorize the meaning of *of course* without having grammatical understanding on the preposition *of*. If learners do not have clear grammatical understandings on the expression, it means that their communications skills are built upon a shaky ground, which would cause problems as followings.

Of course is well known as a very commonly used adverb in everyday conversation, and ESL learners typically have little trouble understanding it in relation to words or phrases in their native languages. Moreover, most ESL learners understand that *sure* and *of course* are used almost identically: typically, they are both used to politely express permission, agreement, or compliance. However, both these expressions are used in various contexts where one or the other may be inappropriate, and this may confuse some ESL learners and teachers. Although the two are generally used interchangeably, their meanings have a difference of nuance. This subtle, but clear, difference must be foregrounded if the two expressions are to be used properly in a communication setting. That is, without a clear grammatical understanding of the difference between *of course* and *sure*, learners will not be able to use them appropriately and authentically. Intriguing examples of the nuances of difference between them can be found in film dialog.

For instance, in the film *About A Boy* (Rosenthal, De Niro, Epstein, Bevan, & Fellner, 2002), Will claims that he has a child (although he does not). Marcus does not believe him, and aims to expose Will.

MARCUS: You don't have a kid, do you?

WILL: What?

MARCUS: You don't have a kid, do you?

WILL: ***Of course***, I've got a kid. What are you talking about?

MARCUS: No, you don't. I've been watching you, and you don't have a kid.

(Conversation 1, *About A Boy*)

To counter Marcus' accusation, Will says, *Of course, I've got a kid*. In this context, it is particularly interesting to examine whether Will could have said *Sure, I've got a kid*. If so, would the meaning or the tenor of the sentence have changed? Or is it inappropriate to use *sure* in this context, and if so, why? How, moreover, should teachers address this question?

Of course, it is possible for teachers to explain the difference with reference to dictionaries. However, the mechanistic discussions provided there are often difficult for learners to understand in how they bear on authentic communication. For instance, according to the "Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English" (2015), *of course* is used to mean "what you are saying is not surprising or is generally known or accepted" (p. 352). Swan (2016) also provides a detailed discussion: (1) its use implies that the answer to a question is something everybody will agree with or know, (2) *of course* is used in response to a request, to convey the agreeable nature of a request, or to express one's willingness to address the request, and (3) it is appropriate to use *of course* in a situation only when the questioner can be expected to know that the answer is most likely affirmative. As for *sure*, *The Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary* ("Sure," n.d.-b) and the *Collins English Dictionary* ("Sure," n.d.-a) explain that it means *certainly* and is an informal way to say *yes* or *all right*, especially in response to common questions such as *Do you know him?* the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* ("Of course," n.d.) characterizes the difference between *of course* and *sure*, as one of politeness. *Of course* is typically used to mean *yes* or to grant permission in a polite manner, and it is generally more polite than *sure*. However, *of course* may be considered impolite if it is used to respond to a rather obvious statement of fact, such as *It is cold*. This is mainly because the speaker is expressing a judgment that such a statement is rather self-evident.

These discussions are mechanistic and logical, and they do not help learners grasp how such expressions can be used communicatively and authentically. That is, learners have difficulty seeing how these expressions can be used in authentic communication or how they can be used to make a subtle yet clear distinction that depends on context.

Needless to say, these explanations do not sufficiently address whether or not it is appropriate for Will to say *Sure, I've got a kid*. In other words, questions such as this one cannot be addressed solely from the mechanistic or grammatical perspective. This is mainly because these perspectives do not enable one to focus closely on the experience of communication or contextual complexities. Therefore, teachers must clearly show the difference between these two words so that learners can use them authentically and appropriately. In other words, it is important to develop a new method of teaching

grammar—that is, it is important to go beyond the old-fashioned and mechanistic methods of citing textbooks and dictionaries.

The differences between *of course* and *sure* can easily be grasped if grammar rules are taught together with communicative activities and strategies. If learners can understand the essence of *of*, they would be able to determine differences between expressions that they encounter themselves, applying the essence of the word *of* to understand *of course*. Before exploring how to teach the difference between *of course* and *sure* with a focus on the essence of *of*, the paper examines the difficulties and challenges that orthodox ways of teaching prepositions, discussing that the development of new methods of grammar instruction is an urgent matter for teachers of English who wish to be effective.

3. Challenges Involved in Teaching Prepositions

Although the paper has chosen *of* as a core theme, there should be no inference that teaching *of* is a particular challenge. All common prepositions pose similar a challenge to teachers and learners. Not only are all prepositions considered to pose difficulty to teach and to learn, but learners are also often left alone to memorize their uses, one by one. This scenario can even deteriorate further: a teacher may view prepositions as less important than other grammar topics. This section discusses the challenges posed by the instruction of prepositions.

Teaching prepositions is one of the most challenging tasks in English education. Lorincz and Gorden (2012) note that teaching prepositions is particularly challenging because they are notoriously difficult to fully master, especially for ESL learners. Mastering prepositions is extremely difficult for three main reasons. First, there are approximately 60 prepositions in English. Second, prepositions are polysemous in nature, meaning that each preposition has multiple meanings. Third, prepositions are monosyllabic, which makes it difficult for ESL learners to recognize them in spoken communication. Moreover, the same prepositions often have different meanings in other languages, whereas some languages do not have prepositions at all. Zhen and Park (2003) have noted that Korean and Chinese ESL learners find it extremely difficult to understand prepositions; in fact, these learners rate prepositions as the second most difficult aspect of grammar, whereas verbs are regarded as the most difficult. Similarly, Japanese ESL teachers and learners also find it difficult to teach and learn about prepositions.

Moreover, the Japanese language does not equivalent words for English prepositions, such as *at*, *in*, and *of*. Japanese ESL learners, therefore, find it especially difficult to grasp the meaning of these words. However, they are very commonly used in English, and it is important for learners to understand their meanings. It is also worth mentioning that very few reports indicate improvements in learners' understanding of these words.

Kamimoto (2006) argues that prepositions are not taught with care. He also argues that not enough attention has been paid to the process of learning prepositions. Mochizuki, Koga, Sano, Kano, and Okuma (2013) show that Japanese learners of English make a lot of errors while using prepositions. Furthermore, as Matsushita (2012) shows, Japanese learners of English tend to depend heavily upon memorization-centered learning techniques. As a result, they find it especially difficult to select appropriate prepositions for a given context. In particular, they find it especially difficult to use *at* and *in* correctly. Japanese learners of English tend to pay little attention to the differences between these words; they typically translate these words into Japanese with the suffix *-de*. Furthermore, prepositions are not taught holistically, and educators have not developed effective teaching methods and materials (Kotani, 2003). Therefore, as Fuyuno (2013) found, learners tend to use prepositions in a one-size-fits-all manner.

Phrasal verbs, consisting of prepositions and verbs, are also known to be notoriously difficult for learners of English; they are syntactically and semantically complex. In general, learners are only expected to memorize phrasal verbs even though they are used frequently in everyday conversations. As Matsumoto (2014) argues, it is important to develop a good understanding of phrasal verbs to improve one's communication skills. Horiike (2003) shows that learners tend to think that phrasal verbs such as *put off* have the same meaning as single verbs such as *postpone*. In general, learners pay little attention to the meanings of different prepositions or adverbs in phrasal verbs. Takeoka (2010) states that memorization-centered instruction makes it difficult for learners to grasp how words and phrases are actually used. It is necessary to pay attention to subtle changes in meaning and grammatical properties. Using mechanistic methods to explain grammatical principles prevents learners from grasping the essence of words. In short, it negatively affects their communication abilities.

4. Erroneous Uses

According to Swan (2016), the reason why learning prepositions is difficult for learners is that each preposition can have a number of different uses. The author finds that a certain well-known dictionary lists fifteen main functions for *at*, stating that teachers tend to require their learners to simply memorize all of them. There is no denying that listing the main functions of each preposition would help some learners, but it is beyond confusing, amounting to a huge burden, for most learners, because they must discern the exact way in which each function of a given preposition varies from the others. As shown below, learners tend to misuse prepositions when they have not mastered the differences among them.

Egawa (1981) narrows down the list of functions of *of* allowing learners to grasp its essential functions. He divides those functions into the following five categories: separation, part-whole relation, modifier, theme, and time. Egawa divides the function of separation into four further uses: location, origin, removal, and cause. Similarly, other prepositions, such as *on*, *in*, and *at*, have their own varied usages, and Egawa addresses them with examples. Most discussions of prepositions and their uses hitherto are organized systematically. The inherently complex nature of a preposition seems to require mechanistic explanations as the only effective way to help learners understand it. As noted above, ESL learners typically simply memorize the different uses of prepositions. Unsurprisingly, they often misuse them as a result (Matsushita, 2012). Even if their complex explanations are memorized correctly, learners nevertheless find it difficult to use them properly.

The followings are taken from the “Online Dictionary of Misused English” (n.d.) based on Japanese university students’ corpus. These erroneous uses of prepositions show that learners simply relate prepositions to places or reasons.

- (1) Japan met with defeat in the Pacific War, and Japanese people were forced to join the democratic countries ~~in~~→*of* the world.
- (2) She accused the man ~~for~~→*of* stealing.

The prepositions *in* and *for* have been incorrectly used in these examples. In fact, the correct preposition for these sentences is *of*. However, it is only natural for learners to commit grammatical errors if they aim to understand prepositions by merely learning the rules. Therefore, it is necessary to overhaul the old, unimproved, and mechanistic ways of explaining grammar. Learners may tend to use *in* in (1) and *for* in (2) because they typically use *in* with spaces or places, whereas they mainly use *for* in statements of reason. It is impossible to avoid these errors if educators predominantly use memorization-centered methods for teaching grammar.

Given the insistence on the memorization of the meanings of prepositions, learners comprehend grammatical rules without really understanding a given communication setting. Teachers should encourage students by explaining why sentences (1) and (2) contain grammatical errors.

Each preposition has its own unique, distinctive functions, and it is reasonable to assume why learners find it hard to understand prepositions. Interestingly, focusing on the similarities between prepositions tends to make it more difficult for learners to understand them. Grammar texts often explain prepositions by categorizing them as locators of space, directions, and other similar qualities. Prepositions such as *at*, *above*, *in*, and *on* are typically used as locators of space; some of these prepositions also function as locators of

time. Learners often misuse prepositions because they cannot understand when and why a certain preposition is called for. Simply put, focusing on the similarities between prepositions only serves to confuse learners. Learners must grasp the differences between the prepositions.

Several scholars have suggested alternate ways of teaching prepositions to tackle this problem. Most of these suggestions involve the use of core spatial images associated with prepositions. However, they do not involve detailed explanations of grammatical rules and principles. For example, Fujimori and Yoshimura (2013) use digital teaching materials, including images, to teach English vocabulary and grammar. However, this kind of method is also quite ineffective, as it only enables learners to form vague ideas about a given preposition. In other words, it does not much help learners in actual communication settings.

Two main challenges confront the teacher in the instruction of prepositions. First, because of the nature of these words, their main functions must be compiled into long lists, and these only confuse learners: many of the functions of each preposition appear to be similar to other functions. This results in an inability to differentiate one from the others, and the prepositions are often misused. Second, the above-mentioned studies of prepositions mainly concentrate on techniques to strengthen learners' grammatical understanding, failing to relate that with communication competencies. Thus, it is important to explore methods of teaching prepositions that not only strengthen learners' grammatical understanding but support their communication skills and abilities.

III. OF AND OTHER PREPOSITIONS

1. The Essence of *Of*

Onishi and McVay (2006) and Tanaka, Sato, and Abe (2006) adopt a rather interesting approach for teaching grammar. They suggest that the *very* essence of a grammatical rule must be located; this essence must be taught to learners, and the learners must be supported as they develop their understanding and communication abilities. As an alternative to systematic and mechanistic explanations of grammar, in this method, teachers focus on the very core upon which learners can build their communicative abilities.

Several studies have sought to describe the essence of *of*. Although they do list the main uses of *of*, they do not provide a description of the very essence of *of*. For instance, Eto (2015) suggests that the functions of *of* can be divided into six categories: separation, material, possession, theme, origin, and affiliation. Interestingly, Eto also argues that these

six categories can be further reduced to two larger categories: affiliation and separation. For example, affiliation and separation are expressed in (3) and (4), respectively.

- (3) I was informed *of* the upcoming event.
- (4) She was robbed *of* her watch.

Affiliation and separation are contradictory notions, but they share a common element: being *within a realm*. In (3), information about *the upcoming event* is affiliated to *I* through being informed. In other words, the information is the knowledge that *I* possesses about the event. As for (4), a watch is separated from *she*. To be separated from *she*, the watch had to have been in *she's* possession to begin with. It is not *a watch* that was stolen; it is *her watch*. Her watch was in her possession. However, the essence of *of* as *within a realm* is not entirely accurate. It lacks a sense of casual relation.

As for Kondo (1984), the sense of causal relation is an important aspect of the essence of *of*. Citing the OED, Kondo suggests that *of* originally meant the origin or point of departure. Yet, this too cannot be the essence of *of*. *From* also alludes to a cause, as in *die off/from*. Watanuki and Petersen (2006) argue that, although both *of* and *from* seem to allude to a cause, they indicate two totally different ideas. They argue that *die of* typically refers to a cause of death that is internal, such as a disease. *Die from* refers to death due to external causes as (6) below shows.

- (5) He died *of* cancer.
- (6) He died *from* the collision.

In (5), the cancer is part of *he*, eventually killing *he*. On the other hand, in (6), the collision is not part of *he*, although it did cause the death of *he*.

As Greenbaum and Quirk (1990) suggest, nouns generally have two cases: the genitive case and the common case. The former is also called the possessive case, and the possessive case can be paraphrased using *of*.

- (7) There were strong objections from the island's inhabitants.
 - (8) There were strong objections from the inhabitants *of* the island.
- (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990, p. 103)

The possessive case can be replaced by *of* because it is a function of *of* to show possession. A possession is a part of its possessor. In other words, *of* means the state of being a part.

The protagonist of *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne Shirley, is an orphan, and she arrives at Green Gables from Nova Scotia to be adopted by siblings who run a farm. Anne is *from* Nova Scotia, and here, of course, *from* means origin. However, Anne is not part of Nova Scotia. Instead, Anne comes to be called Anne of Green Gables, not Anne from Green Gables. She is from Nova Scotia, but she is not Anne of Nova Scotia. The following sentence indicates the state of being part of a larger whole:

(9) Most *of* the people came to the garden.

(10) Most people came to the garden.

The *people* in (9) does not have to be specified; however, once *of* is used as in (10), the *people* must be part of a specific group to clearly indicate the larger whole to which a part belongs. With the use of *of*, *most* no longer refers to a large amount of people in an unspecific group; rather, it indicates a large amount of the whole. Therefore, *people* must be *the people*, a specific group denoted by the definite article.

2. Differences Between *Of* and Other Prepositions

Of, in essence, indicates the state of being a part of a larger whole. This is clear from a comparison of the functions of *of* with the functions of other prepositions. Additionally, the use of *of* must be compared with other prepositions, because a reason why learning prepositions challenges learners is that the differences among prepositions are not clear to them; as a result, confused by similarities, they often misuse prepositions. Before discussing how *of* is used in the authentic communication settings of films, some differences between *of* and other prepositions, namely, *at*, *with*, *from*, and *in*, are discussed.

Firstly, *at* is one of commonly misused prepositions, and it is mostly used in place of *of*.

(11) I am a teacher *at* this school.

(12) I am a teacher *of* this school.

(Ishibashi et al., 1995, p. 819)

According to Ishibashi et al. (1995), (12) is grammatically incorrect, because the teacher is not a part of this school. The *at* in (11) represents a place where a *teacher* works. Interestingly, *of* can be used in the following sentences.

(13) Tom is the President *of* the United States of America.

(14) Tom is the Chair *of* Tokyo Junior High School.

Examples (13) and (14) are grammatically correct since both the Chair and the President are parts of a larger whole. Evidently, a Chair and a President are positions within an organization; however, a teacher, like a worker, does not hold a real position in his or her organization. A teacher is an agent noun, and it means one who teaches; it is derived from the verb, *to teach*.

Secondly, as Leech and Svartvik (2002) explain, prepositions such as *at*, *with*, and *of* are typically used to describe or report emotive behavior.

(15) I was alarmed *at* his behavior.

(16) I was furious *with* him¹.

(17) He was resentful *of* the successes of others.

(Leech & Svartvik, 2002, p. 163)

Leech and Svartvik (2002) suggest that *at* is used to express an emotive reaction to a thing, whereas *with* is used when a person or an object is the cause of an emotive reaction. However, the authors are silent on the use of *of* and the difference between the uses of the prepositions, especially in terms of expressing emotive reactions. Nonetheless, the subtle differences expressed in (17) are evident if one regards the essence of *of* as the state of being a part of a whole. *The successes of others* are parts of *he*, causing *he* to become resentful. Furthermore, *being alarmed* is an external reaction to something, as alarm can mean *a call to arms* and *warning* (Onions, 1966, p. 22), but *being resentful* is an emotion; it is internal. This, as can be seen, is similar to the difference between *die of* and *die from*.

(18) He died *of* cancer. (=5))

(19) He died *from* the collision. (=6))

At this juncture, it is important to analyze the common errors made by ESL learners.

(20) Japan met with defeat in the Pacific War, and Japanese people were forced to join the democratic countries ~~in~~ *of* the world. (=1))

(21) She accused the man ~~for~~ *of* stealing. (=2))

The errors in these sentences can be easily noticed if *of* is understood as that which denotes a state of being a part of a larger whole. Sentence (20) is not about the whereabouts

¹ The original sentences for (16) and (17) are *I was furious with him for missing that penalty* and *As a former champion, he was annoyed about his own failures, and resentful of the success of others*, respectively. In the examples, they appear in a slightly modified form to clarify the point at issue.

of *the democratic countries*; rather, it expresses that they are parts of a larger whole, namely *the world*. Furthermore, (21) may be understood by many ESL learners as stating that the *stealing* was the reason for *being accused*. However, this reason could be either internal or external. If *stealing* is an external reason, detached from *the man*, there is no reason for *she* to accuse *the man*. *She accused the man* because of his *stealing*, his act; therefore, *stealing* is part of him, according to the accusation of *she*.

Additionally, there is one more crucial point concerning a part and the larger whole. In (22), *the president* is a part that belongs to *the United States of America*, the larger whole. In contrast, in (23), *the upcoming event* is a part of *I*, the larger whole.

(22) She is (A) the president *of* (B) the United States of America. (= (13))

(23) (A) I was informed *of* (B) the upcoming event. (= (3))

Hence, in (22), A belongs to B (a part is followed by *of*). In (23), B belongs to A (a whole is followed by *of*). In other words, it is important to identify the part and the whole in a given sentence. A subject, a verb, and relations among words in a sentence are all keys to do so. It is necessary for learners to understand that *of* means the state of being part of a larger whole, and this represents the essence of *of*. To some extent, *of* is only a mark learners can use to locate a part and a whole.

As stated above, scholars have sought to list the main uses of *of*. It is typically used to indicate such aspects as separation, materials, possession, themes, origin, affiliation, causes, etc. These uses are not meanings of *of*; rather they are meanings which typically manifest from the essence of *of*. Eto (2015) points out that *of* has two contradicting functions: affiliation and separation.

(24) I was informed *of* the upcoming event. (= (3))

(25) She was robbed *of* her watch. (= (4))

Affiliation and separation are not in fact functions of *of*. Instead, the meanings of these movements, affiliation, and separation, are natures of verbs used in (24) and (25). In other words, affiliation and separation are embedded in the verbs *inform* and *rob*, respectively. *Of* does not mean affiliation or separation: it only indicates that a certain part is affiliated to a certain whole, or that a certain part is separated from a certain whole. A manifestation varies depending on the sentence, but the essence remains the same no matter what a given sentence means. After all, communication is the process of conveying a message that emerges from the relations between the words in a sentence.

IV. VARIOUS USAGES OF *OF* IN COMMUNICATION SETTINGS

1. Using Film Dialog

Film dialog, which can be authentic and meaningful, is suitable as texts for learners to concretely explore how grammar rules and principles work. Hirano (2014), focusing on understanding the essence of the English present perfect, gives an illustration of how to teach its grammatical function by using film dialog. Matsumoto (2014) also proposes a method of teaching phrasal verbs that depends on the use of the contextual knowledge that can be obtained in film dialog. Naturally, it follows that film dialog is as useful as illustration of subtle changes in preposition meanings. This section examines the use of *of* to express certain ideas, calling attention to the essence of *of* as indicating the state of being a part of a larger whole.

As noted, the method discussed here has two parts. First, learners come to understand the essence of a grammar item. The other is that learners explore the expression of this essence in authentic dialog. Once a teacher, for example, has ensured that the learners have grasped the essence of *of*, the teacher may ask them to characterize what nuances of may have in everyday conversations. Here are some intriguing uses of *of* in film dialog.

The following dialog has been taken from the television show *Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel* (Sullivan, 1987). Here Anne is bringing a piece of news to Brooke about two men who might become Brooke's boyfriend.

ANNE: You're so rosy and healthy. Your hair looks so attractive like that instead of all pulled back. Besides, I happen to **know of** two eligible young men who've asked about you.

BROOKE: Really?

(Conversation 2, *Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel*)

Anne says, *I happen to know of two eligible young men*, and the use of *of* here makes this subtly different from the simpler *I happen to know two eligible young men*. A similar example can be found in *Charade* (Donen, 1963).

INSPECTOR: We discovered your husband's body lying next to the tracks of the Paris-Bordeaux railroad line. He was dressed only in his pajamas. Do you **know of** any reason why he might have wanted to leave France?

REGGIE: Leave? No...

(Conversation 3, *Charade*)

In this scene, the Inspector asks Reggie questions about her husband to solve the mystery surrounding his death. The Inspector asks, *Do you know of any reason why he might have wanted to leave France?* The preposition *of* could be omitted in both these cases, and grammatically speaking, its omission makes little difference; there is nonetheless a difference in what is communicated.

Here is another example taken from *The Devil Wears Prada* (Mckenna & Frankel, 2006). Here Andrea is calling supposedly her superior, Emily, to ask a favor.

ANDREA: Hey, Emily, it's Andy. Don't hang up. I have a favor to **ask you**.

EMILY: You have a favor to **ask of** me?

ANDREA: Yeah. The thing is, I have all these clothes from Paris, and I don't have any place to wear them.

(Conversation 4, *The Devil Wears Prada*)

Intriguingly, Andrea does not use *of* in her request. She simply says, *I have a favor to ask you*, but Emily does use *of* in her reply. Emily is in fact attempting to convey a certain message by using *of*. If learners can understand the essence of *of* as expressing a state of being a part a larger whole, teachers can encourage them to determine the meaning of *of* in this, as well as other dialog.

Teachers can also ask learners to identify the parts and wholes in the sentences.

(26) I happen to **know of** two eligible young men who've asked about you.

(27) Do you **know of** any reason why he might have wanted to leave France?

In both these sentences, *know* is the verb, and its respective objects are *two eligible young men* and *any reason*. A larger whole is knowledge itself; the *of* in (26) and (27) indicates that knowledge of *two eligible young men* and *any reason* is partial. In (26), Anne is indicating *I happen to know two eligible young men*, but *I do not know them that well*. The *of* in (26) expresses the second half. In (27), the inspector is attempting to convey, *I believe it comes as a surprise to you*, when he asks, *Do you know any reason why he might have wanted to leave France?* The *of* in his question conveys the first half. This can also be applied to understand the message Emily is trying to convey in (29).

(28) I have a favor to **ask** you.

(29) You have a favor to **ask of** me?

On the one hand, in (28), *I* and *you* are both wholes, and there are no parts that belong to either whole. In other words, *I* and *you* are equal. On the other hand, in (29), *you* is a

part of a larger whole, and *me* exists as a whole. In other words, *me* is bigger than *you*, and, to some extent, *you* belongs to *me*.

In (28), Andrea states, *I have a favor to ask you*, which indicates that she believes that the entirety of *you* is available for her to ask a favor, regarding *I* and *you* as equal. Emily thinks otherwise. In (29), Emily seems to convey that *you* is only a part of *me*, and that *me* is not always available for *you* to ask a favor, emphasizing not only that *you* and *me* are not equal but that *me* is superior to *you*. In effect, by using *of*, Emily is really asking Andrea the following: *Are you asking me a favor? Who do you think you are?*

Next, let us consider the common expression, *speaking of which*. The verb, *speak*, can be followed by *about* or *of*, as in *I speak about the tragedy* and *I speak of freedom*. However, *of* cannot be replaced with *about* in the expression *speaking of which*. An example from *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) follows.

JOKER: That's okay. I came prepared. It's a funny world we live in.

Speaking of which, you know how I got these scars?

BATMAN: No, but I know how you got these.

(Conversation 5, *The Dark Knight*)

Learners are often unable to memorize a common phrase without, e.g., understanding why *about* cannot be used in the examples above. However, if teachers can help their learners grasp the essence of *of*, and if the learners can develop a clear understanding of it, it might be possible for them to discover why *of* cannot be replaced with *about* here. Not only that, they might be able to transfer their understanding to other contexts. In this way, learners can build a better grammatical understanding while also enhancing their communication skills. Before the reason that *of* in *speaking of which* cannot be replaced with *about* is explained, here is another interesting use case of *of*.

MARILLA: Ah, Lord.

ANNE: Oh, what a worry my red hair used to be! Um, I'm afraid I've never been able to endure personal criticism very well. Gilbert gave his honest **opinion of** my story this afternoon. Why, my temper, it always gets the better of me!

(Conversation 6, *Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel*)

The noun *opinion* cannot be followed by *about* but must be followed by *of*; the reason for this is the same as the reason why *speaking about which* is ungrammatical. It relates, of course, to the essence of *of*, which denotes a part of a larger whole.

In particular, *opinion* does not simply mean view or idea; rather, an *opinion* is something that one obtains only after careful consideration. An *opinion* cannot be *about* something because *about* means *around*, as in the phrase, *Don't beat around/about the bush*. The word *about* can never reach the core of things. For this reason, *opinion* and *about* are by their natures contradicting terms. *Of*, for its part, denotes a part of a larger whole. *Gilbert gave his honest opinion of my story*. If Gilbert gives an idea about Anne's story, this means that his idea is relatively vague, and he did not spend much time examining the story. The reason that Anne does not use the word *idea* here is that Anne believes that Gilbert carefully examined her story and constructed his views with honesty and diligence.

Speaking about which is ungrammatical because, again, *about* means *around* something. *Speaking of which* refers to a specific topic or theme that was mentioned immediately preceding the present moment. Therefore, *which* indicates something that everyone who is involved in the present conversation recognizes. In other words, whatever the topic is, it is part of shared knowledge.

The preposition *of* consists of only two letters, but it has several meanings, and its impact is far greater than learners anticipate. The complexity of this preposition cannot be understood by mere memorization. Grammar can be taught to enable learners to develop their communication abilities. Learners can be taught the essence of a particular rule; they can be encouraged to discover how the essence of a given rule is applied in different communication settings to express different meanings. In this way, learners can put their understanding to practical use. As Matsumoto (2014) suggests, learners tend to simply memorize the uses of prepositions, disregarding the fact they are crucial for effective communication. It is not surprising, then, that learners often treat *know of* and *ask of* as different idioms when they memorize them. Learners must be guided to discover the meanings of these idioms. If they are taught the essence of *of*, they may be able to guess, not memorize, the meanings of these idioms. Furthermore, film dialog is effective materials; they are like everyday conversations, or, at the very least, they are realistic and easily accessible conversations.

2. The Difference Between *Of Course* and *Sure* Revisited

Here, the subtle difference between *of course* and *sure* is explained as an example of the divorce that may occur between communication and grammar. Each expression is fairly easy for learners to use, but it is hard for them to understand the clear differences between them. Many teachers also have a hard time providing a simple explanation. Let us revisit the difference between *of course* and *sure*.

MARCUS: You don't have a kid, do you?

WILL: ***Of course***, I've got a kid. What are you talking about?

(Conversation 7, *About A Boy*)

If a student requests his or her teacher to explain the difference between these two words, the teacher may provide a systematic explanation, much like the ones found in textbooks. The teacher may ask the student to memorize certain principles, or he or she may suggest another route. For example, a teacher may guide learners to notice the *of* in *of course*. The teacher can then ask the students to identify the part and the larger whole in relation to *of course*.

In the scene given above, the part is represented by the statement *I've got a kid*, and the larger whole is *course*. Here, *course* could be considered to be something akin to destiny, something designed by a god or another higher power. By stating *Of course*, Will emphasizes that *I've got a kid* is a part of a course and cannot be doubted by anyone. Here, Will cannot reply, *Sure*. If he has a kid, he has a kid. He is not *sure* about having a kid. Simply put, the difference between *of course* and *sure* can be understood via such notions as subjectivity and objectivity. These are short versions of the sentences *It is of course* and *I am sure*. *Of course* is used to express that there is no room for judgment. The thing has been decided. It is the way it is, and everyone must agree with it. By contrast, *sure* indicates a strong sense of objectivity. It is *I* who is telling you that things are the way they are.

If we were to substitute *of course*, for *sure* in the context below, the scene would ring false. In this scene, the film's antagonist Joker is threatening a woman with a gun, and the protagonist Batman is trying to save her.

JOKER: A little fight in you. I like that.

BATMAN: Then you're gonna love me. Drop the gun.

JOKER: Oh, ***sure***. You just take off your little mask and show us all who you really are.

BATMAN: Let her go.

JOKER: Very poor choice of words...

(Conversation 8, *The Dark Knight*)

Joker cannot reply *Oh, of course* instead of *Oh, sure* because that dropping the gun as requested is not destined or already decided: instead, it remains within Joker's choice. Thus, *of course* does not fit. If Joker were to say, *Oh, of course*, it would mean that Joker agrees that his holding the gun is inappropriate, and furthermore, everyone, including a god, believes this. Joker clearly does not think in this way, as seen in the fact that his actions undercut this idea. If he were to reply *Oh, of course*, it would mean that Joker

himself thought his actions were evil and was on the cusp of reforming. However, after saying, *Oh, sure*, Joker gives the condition that must be met. Joker will happily drop his gun, but Batman must reveal his identity.

The difference between *of course* and *sure* is a specific case. If learners understand the generalized meaning of *of*, namely its essence, then, they only must apply the essence in the specific case. By doing so, they can identify the part(s) and the whole. Doing so also throws light on the difference between *of course* and *sure*. A sentence consists of several words, and they are organized according to more than one grammatical rule. Teachers may try to explain these rules by listing all the main uses of prepositions, just as many textbooks do. However, in this method, learners may not be able to see how the rules are related to one another.

V. CONCLUSION

The study of grammar should not be mostly full of painful memorization: rather, it should be constructive, effective, and interesting. However, this issue has been largely ignored, and teachers must depend on unimproved, orthodox, and mechanistic grammar instruction methods that have not kept pace with research. As a result, students are required to refer to materials that are organized systematically and to commit all grammatical rules and principles to memory. It is clear that this method cannot help learners fully understand grammar rules or develop their communication abilities. To accomplish this, a sound knowledge of grammatical rules must serve as a firm foundation to linguistic understanding and expression. Once students develop a sound basis in grammar, teachers can then more easily guide them through examples and actual communicative settings.

Additionally, teachers must also discuss the implications of their teaching methods to enable learners to explore how the essence is applied in actual communication settings, as well as how it takes on various meanings. Using film dialog is just one way of enabling learners to understand how grammatical rules are applied in actual communication settings. By examining the inherently nuanced nature of actual communication settings, learners can improve their understanding of grammar, as well as their communication abilities.

The paper proposes a new method of teaching grammar that focuses on the essence of a grammar rule, using film dialog as learning material. The most fundamental meaning of *of* is to be part of a larger whole. Learners are not required to go pass through systematically organized materials and memorize all the functions of each preposition. Instead, they can learn the fundamental meaning for grammatical elements such as the preposition *of* as the smallest yet strongest foundation for learners to brush up on their communication skills and abilities.

It should be noted that the authors do not assert that this is the only way to teach grammar; rather, this is one possible way among many. As Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011) note, “There may be generally recommended ways of teaching EFL grammar..., but it would not be proper to adopt them universally without looking at the possible difficulties that might go with those methods suggested” (p. 82). There are many grammar rules, language elements, and linguistic principles that are equally difficult to understand. The use of film dialog may not be the best means to illustrate or develop some grammar rules. Further detailed research must be undertaken to improve methodologies of grammar instruction. The one thing to remember while doing so is that grammar and communication are by no means oil and water: they are the inseparable ingredients of English competency.

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