

www.galaxyimrj.com

ISSN: 2278-9529

GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol. 3, Issue-IV July 2014



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Role of Grammar in Teaching English as L2

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Abstract:

Grammar proves its prominence in language teaching, especially in teaching English as second language and it is concurred by the English teachers that without the gain of proficiency in grammar, learner's language development will be severely constrained. This paper deals with the essentiality of teaching grammar in the development of language fluency, particularly in the case of L2 learning and suggests some alternative pathways for the effective teaching of grammar.

Keywords: Modern methodologies, Necessity of Grammatical competence in CLT Rules for integrative grammar teaching, Traditional.

Introduction

Grammatical competence is viewed as an integral part of all language skills, which learners have to master *progressively* to arrive at a high degree of accuracy, specifically within higher levels (3).

Grammar is the sound, structure, and meaning system of any language. Especially in the case of English, even the native speakers of this universal language, who could recognize the sounds of English words, the meanings of those words, and the different ways of putting words together to make meaningful sentences, need proper guidance in the attainment of grammar knowledge to become effective writers. They need to learn how to transfer their knowledge of grammatical concepts from oral language to written language. Hence teaching of grammar to non speakers of English (as L2) becomes more challenging and intricate one.

Essentiality of Grammar in Language Teaching

However, it cannot be ignored that grammar forms the basis for a set of language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Grammar plays an indomitable role in gaining all these four language skills. In listening and speaking, grammar plays a crucial part in grasping and expressing spoken expressions, since grammar learning is considered necessary to acquire the capability of producing grammatically acceptable utterances in language (6). In reading, grammar enables learners to comprehend sentence interrelationship in any written form. More of all, in the context of writing, grammar helps the learners in forming intelligible sentences so that they can successfully communicate in a written form.

Effective grammar instruction begins with what students already know about grammar, and it helps them use this knowledge as they write or speak (9). By connecting their knowledge of oral language to written language, teachers can throw light on abstract grammatical terminology so that students can write—and read—with greater competence and confidence. Researchers say that it is more effective to teach punctuation, sentence variety, and usage in the

context of writing than to approach the grammar topics by teaching them as isolated skills (1,2 and 4).

Traditional Vs Modern Teaching Approaches

Traditional grammar teaching was based on a formal notion of competence: *the underlying knowledge of concepts and rules stored in the minds of speakers* which equated grammar with *syntax* and *morphology*, considering *meaning* as totally different linguistic level. Traditional grammar teaching is deeply teacher-centered. It is based on the “traditional view of education, where teachers serve as the source of knowledge while learners serve as passive receivers” (7). This idea corresponds to the simile of Jim Scrivener, who claims that “traditional teaching [is imagined to work as] ‘jug and mug’ – the knowledge being poured from one receptacle into an empty one.

Unlike traditional methodology, modern methodology is much more student-centered. According to Jim Scrivener, 1994, the teacher’s main role is to “help learning to happen.” Since in modern methodology, English is aimed at fulfilling communicative purposes, the way to achieve the goal has also changed in accordance with it. As pointed out by Jack C. Richards, “attention shifted to the knowledge and skills needed to use grammar and other aspects of language appropriately for different communicative purposes. Teachers’ methods, courses, and books had to be adjusted to new needs of the learners to fulfill their expectations. Instead of grammatical competence, today, communicative competence gained its predominance. Instead of memorizing grammatical rules and isolated vocabulary, modern methodology prefers to present contextualized language and to develop the language skills. In words of Ronald V. White the three principles of modern methodology are - firstly, “the primacy of speech”; secondly, an emphasis on “the centrality of connected text as the heart of teaching-learning process”; and thirdly, an “absolute priority of an oral methodology in the classroom.

Significance of Grammar in Communicative Language Teaching

There is a widespread belief that Communicative English Teaching does not include any grammar. Even today, the role of grammar within any communicative approach is controversial, due to the misconceptions in the name of New Natural Approaches, which ascribed no grammar role in language learning. Here comes the need of explaining the two main types of CLT. i.e., the shallow-end approach and the deep-end approach to CLT (8). The shallow-end approach to Communicative English Teaching is based on the thought that in order to make the learners use L2 in a communicative situation it is necessary first to learn the grammatical rules and then apply them in that communicative situation; on the other hand, the deep-end approach to CLT is based on the belief that grammar is acquired unconsciously during the performance on those communicative situations, so it would be useless to teach English grammar previously and explicitly (8). However, it is quite evident that irrespective of the methodologies used, grammar has its own indomitable role in a language learning because the avoidance of grammar in English teaching resulted in lack of language proficiency.

Hence, the important question is not whether teaching and learning grammar is necessary and/or sufficient for English learning, but whether it helps or not. A positive answer is inevitable for this question both by teachers and learners of any language, since the knowledge of Grammar and vocabulary is the base of English language. Also, it is not to be denied in any way that English grammatical competence is the main factor in the attainment of communicative competence. It is because communicative competence involves knowing how to use the grammar and vocabulary of the language to achieve communicative goals, which are the main focus and

ultimate target of learners of English language (as L2) and hence grammar teaching is necessary to achieve their goals.

Rules for Teaching Grammar

Unlike traditional approach, in modern methodology, an integrative grammar teaching, aims for (a) *exploration*, (b) *explanation*, and (c) *expression (EEE)*, incorporating the following rules:

- Grammar should be taught in context. Teaching the grammar topics in isolation does not solve the main purpose of effective learning, which must be stimulated by complete understanding. Similarly, grammatical forms can be taught in association with their meanings.
- The main aim of teaching grammar cannot be ignored, i.e., it should be taught in order to facilitate the production of real language, by providing opportunities for learners to put the grammar to the much needed communicative use.
- It should be remembered that grammar is an integral part of any language and hence in teaching it, we should start from known to unknown. It is because English grammar is not completely different from the learner's mother tongue.
- It is widely accepted that, while teaching grammar, learners should be provided with meaningful input through context and given opportunities to put grammar to use, and relate grammar instruction to real life situations.
- The needs, interests, expectations and learning styles of the students should be of primary concern in teaching grammar, as it is quite obvious from all the approaches, both traditional and modern, that no method is simply the best for everyone and in every situation. (Henson). It is to be well remembered that grammar must be the central factor in the choice of methods which vary with the learners' needs and interests.

Conclusion

Till date, with the emergence of every new approach in English learning (especially as L2), it is best proved that the value of grammar teaching is very important in English language teaching field, as grammar—the set of language rules—is the base of English language. When it is not acquired naturally (as in the case of learning English as L2), grammar teaching needs to be more practical instead of having it more analytical—the reason why—the L2 learners are unable to use English accurately and fluently.

In order to make English grammar teaching effective, teaching needs not only to be mere descriptions of grammatical rules but should show the learners, how grammar is a resource for making and exchanging meanings in context. Also, grammar teaching needs to be integrated into the teaching of all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing. Above all, grammar needs to be taught by involving learners in meaningful and motivating activities. Moreover, with the advent of communicative language teaching, the necessity of grammar instruction has become the core of communicative competence, which is the very need of this hour in English learning today and hence grammar teaching becomes very essential in English language teaching.

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