

CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING TO LEARN GRAMMAR AND PRACTICE DISCOURSE: EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The debate on the discrete use of grammar is a matter of conflict and controversy among the students in language education. Still, one cannot deny the importance of grammar in language for its eventual use in interactional communication. Structural units of language like grammar, lexis and phonology are prerequisite for learning a language. Communication cannot be done in an erratic language and without appropriate grammar in expression. Mere learning and understanding grammar rules is not sufficient, rather one should acquire these language units in an interactive use of the language. This paper discusses on the importance of learning grammar for developing discursive skills and the authentic use of language in communication.

KEYWORDS: Error Correction, Explicit Learning, Grammar Translation Method, Implicit Learning, Linguistic Competency, Structural Tasks

INTRODUCTION

English grammar has been a prime and prerequisite subject of teaching today in all the English as a Second language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses found throughout the world. Grammar remains to be the stable unit of any language course. It constitutes to be the main component of the syllabus content in all the levels of education and found even in spoken English courses too. Its role is thoroughly emphasized in all the Educational Testing Services (ETS) of state, national and international English proficiency examinations. A student is put to learn grammar from the age of five to nineteen, from primary education to till his graduation. Still, the student lacks adequate grammatical knowledge in English (Ellis, 2006). But, still the use of grammar as a discrete item in interactional classroom remains to be the question of debate that is really unresolved even by the literal community. Learning grammar in discrete items can be ineffective, if the grammatical contents are not appropriately used in practical oral and written communication (Nunan, 2005). It is widely acknowledged that just knowing the theoretical aspect of grammar in discrete items is not adequate rather it should be followed up in expressions in real practice (Widdowson, 1983, 90). This paper focuses on the problems and perspectives of teaching and learning grammar in an advanced interactional classroom.

Remedial Measures to Teach and Learn Grammar

The adverse effects of both Grammar-Translation method and Communicative Language Teaching are that it has been passively adopted in all the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. Teaching grammar was formally done through grammar translation method and the students learn the form and meaning of the content in their vernacular languages and then try to frame the sentences in English. Students are literally unaware about sentence construction as they are not able to relate their thought with the grammatical component of the language. In CLT, grammar teaching is aimed at

its appropriate use. Grammatical error correction is not emphasized as it will hamper the continuity in spoken discourse (Truscott, 2007). And rather committing errors is considered as a step to use the language without any grammatical or structural breakdown. To learn a language is to murder the language and committing grammatical and spelling errors rather means to use the language (Otto Jespersen, 1904 cited in Stern, 1983). Mere editing the mistakes or encouraging committing mistakes without any measure to acknowledge their linguistic knowledge are not really commendable. Structural based language learning should ensure and focus on their linguistic knowledge in knowing, understanding and using grammar in discourse. As Nunan (2007) commends for developing good English without any structural errors, it is inevitable that the grace of communication lies in the use of flawless language. The display of error free language skills is vital in personal, social, formal and technical communication.

The teachers who are very confident about their knowledge on grammar truly rely on lexico grammatical method and they eventually orient to become typical language teachers by teaching grammatical items and lexis, and the teachers who assume that learning language is to communicate; they wish to practice language through interaction, facilitate students to display better interaction skills (Murdick, 1996). Little or no importance has been given for the appropriate use of grammar. Nowadays radical English teachers claim to teach English without teaching grammar and can make the students to speak fluently without completely learning it. However one cannot deny the significance of teaching grammar as effective authentic communication could be done only through adopting appropriate grammatical forms.

The legacy of grammar teaching has been always witnessed through intensively practicing any single methodology and leaving the eclectic approach all in air. Most of the teachers strictly follow either grammar translation method or CLT. The teacher who wants to teach language strictly teach through structures, fails in an attempt to practice communication skills; and a teacher who is able to facilitate effective communication skills, fails in an attempt to practice linguistic skills. The students' level of perception is too low, that they always aim at passing the examinations and they seldom anticipate displaying effective English communication skills with adequate syntax, lexis, stress, accent, pronunciation, tone and style.

Language teaching can be effectively done with explicit instruction of the structures (Hu, 2011). Students learn and acquire language in both implicit and explicit way (Ellis, 1993). They have the ability to construct sentences implicitly, but when they are extended to generate sentences of their own using discrete forms they are not able to follow the linguistic rules. English faculties teach grammar in descriptive and prescriptive forms. They focused the students to generate language and ask them to attempt explaining the errors with the correct answers. Students are asked to create new ideas and write individually and originally. Oral tasks like presentation, interview, pair and group discussion is conducted to make the students to communicate in discourse. They are clearly instructed about the what, why and how of the use of grammar in both oral and written communication. They are given the tasks of reading comprehension, functional writing, and report writing. Grammar teaching and learning is done through inductive, deductive and interactional approaches to make the student clearly understand about the usage of items but it can be very successful when it is practiced in interaction.

Teaching grammar is inevitable and it is a basic structural component of language pedagogy. Grammar-translation method is the basic of all the teaching methodologies in structural based language learning. We bent on grammar translation for language learning from the very beginning of our schooling but through knowing the discrete elements of syntax, do we really able to communicate when the language is put in use? Knowing and understanding structures is good but it is often found that the students are not able to use it in real or classroom context (Klapper, 1997).

It can also be witnessed that the students do have innate ability to use the language but they are not given an opportunity in the classroom learning and even if it is given, it may not be for all the students. It can be also restated that even if they are given a chance, it cannot be assumed that all the students have voluntarily performed communicative tasks or all the students would have been performed but due to the lack of time and confidence, they may not.

In the present scenario, grammar teaching through grammar translation, audio lingual, audiovisual, communicative and task-based approaches have been vividly witnessed. But still then, it has been uniformly felt that the teaching and learning of grammar has not produced adequate results in both oral and written communication. Students should be given adequate knowledge and practice in teaching grammar, lexis and phonology (Heikki, 1995). The basic knowledge of grammar will help the students to use distinctively the parts of speech. Students can be given adequate practice to frame the sentences with varied structures; they will be able to understand the grammatical functions of the same word; they will be able to use appropriate verbs, tenses, subject verb agreement, conditionals, linkers, co-ordinators and cases. The students will be able to use simple sentences to complex sentences. Students' level of language proficiency can be examined by their use of varied types of sentence construction, word power and good pronunciation.

The product and process of language learning can be imported by any nation without the interference of social and ethnic values of the speakers. Psycholinguistic influence can be purely evinced through structural syllabuses as it attributes to develop linguistic competency through the learning of innate structures (Krahnke, 1987). Psycholinguistic influences can be generally traced in selecting and grading the content as the learners' preferences, interests, lacks and difficulties shape the ordering of the linguistic content. Metalinguistic influences and natural order of acquisition is also prevalent in sequencing the grading of the content. As the teacher or language syllabus design expert can assume the easy and difficult areas of students performances, generally consider in what level, what to teach. They visualize the standard of students, their educational background and the ability to understand and perform linguistic activities with the given language items.

Learning language is learning grammar. The content of any language course is exclusively taken from the linguistic items, as the structures, 'can be used for a variety of functions, situations and meanings' (Krahnke, 1987). But, still it is not predictable that how far the language knowledge can be transferred in real communication. Forms can be instructed and practiced through guided learning in both discrete and comprehensive approach. The utility purpose of language is undetermined as the innate or ingrained or instructed knowledge is seldom best reflected in actual practice in classroom or in real situations. But still, it can be also witnessed the vast content of every level of ESL/ EFL textbooks stimulate grammar learning and the students tend to learn grammar but the ultimate results of error-free language use is not found. The criteria for grammar learning has the notion of 'accuracy' shifted from 'accuracy' to 'appropriacy' for producing better language but the standard of students and their degree of interest and involvement and the intensity of cognitive skills are found to be unconvincing. 'How far the students are able to be productive with little constraints in grammar learning?' is still a matter of enigma as achieving complete mastery is indefinite.

Formal syllabuses focus more on the textual accuracy rather than promoting 'fluency' or 'competency' in communication. It primarily aims at 'language accuracy' and 'linguistic competency', but its indulgences in invoking semantic and pragmatic use of language are very minimal. The principles, methods and approaches of language learning are systematically organized and sequenced for the gradual study of grammatical forms and patterns (White, 1988). It can be practiced through inductive &/ deductive approaches and can be put into formative and summative process of evaluation. It can be realized through systematic learning, providing a strong tune to the voice and tone of the teacher to do

his/her authentic teaching business in the language classroom, grammar can be really learnt. How far the students are ready to conceptualize structures to meaning and use? Still needs to be explored. Mere assumptions and predictions do not really help to resolve language learning issues.

Grammatical and lexical use is genuinely underpinned with the state of 'accuracy' and 'appropriacy' and it articulates the intense use of language with disciplinary content and style. Students often become bored when they are exposed to grammatical units as they feel that it helps for their practical communication. Still, one cannot deny the importance of grammar in language. Structural units of language like grammar, lexis and phonology are prerequisite for learning a language (Kamimura, 2000). One cannot interpret his expressions in an incorrect/false language without adequate grammar in his expression. Mere learning and understanding grammar rules is not sufficient, rather one should acquire these language units in an interactive use of the language. Some of the students are practically so poor that the immense effort put forth by the teacher really means to end in nothing doing. The grammatical units like parts of speech, articles and cases are taught to the students in their primary and secondary level itself but they are not able to correlate the grammatical form as noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjectives etc.

Teachers should be able to discriminate the use of grammar in oral and written communication. The communication system dominates in the written communication. Adequate standard of structural components of language needs to be thoroughly emphasized explicitly in writing as the authentication of any language remains in its written form (Lam, 2009). In written form, grammar is inevitable and indispensable. Students need to explicitly learn the grammatical concepts and should be able to frame good sentences (Wongsothorn, 2002). They should possess good vocabulary skills to employ better word power to express their ideas. Teaching, learning, exercising and evaluating written composition remains to be a Hercules task for both the teachers and students and the output is never seen to be a satisfactory one. Still, the teachers need to patiently resolve the linguistic queries of the students.

Linguistic teaching can be made feasible through comprehensible terms, if not by discrete language learning. Vast vocabulary and grammatical forms can be acquired through the intensive or extensive learning of the informative content where the prime concern is on the use of specific skills, task, topic, and content. Structural tasks need to be constructed through exercising meaning, discourse, vocabulary and syntax (Storch, 2007). The semantic use of language is examined in the first phase of skills based instruction and consequently, in the second phase error-free, appropriate fluency is essentially required both in oral and written discourse. The students generally attempt to refresh the fundamental grammar that they have studied for the past twelve years. They are able to understand the importance of structural components like grammar, lexis and sentence construction and the phonological units like stress, accent, tone and style. But still, they are not able to apply these theoretical concepts into real practice. Emphasis should not be given just to inculcate the rules of the structural components like grammar, lexis and phonology, but to use it in terms of real communication.

The use of grammar, syntax, stress, accent, pronunciation and style are highly essential for acquiring linguistic competency (Hu, 2007). The appropriate use of structural units manipulates the strengths of standard writing. The written form of grammar cannot be strictly adhered in speaking too. The structural units of language like grammar, lexis and phonology play a significant role in both speaking and writing. The importance of grammar in language is inevitable as it has its root in the building of the language itself. Grammatical units are the structural components that construct sequence and order in a sentence and reflect semantic and pragmatic sense to the language. The grammar of any language may vary

according to the station and situation, time and action of the user. Grammar may vary and change both in the spoken and written form of any language. Students need to distinguish the use of grammar in both the forms and should literally be able to use it.

CONCLUSIONS

The academic environment of language education should be inclined to emphasize to enrich new approaches, methods and techniques to be incorporated in language teaching. The implications of language pedagogy are led to stimulate and ingrain knowledge of the language items and to mobilize the practical effects of cultivating communication skills. The pragmatic role of the structures embarks realistic interaction and in displaying language and communication behaviour. Adequate language learning strategies need to be followed to gain competency in structures and to deliberately use it in both formal and social contexts. Grammar teaching should facilitate the students to excel in seeking linguistic competence and should be able to display language skills in both discrete and discursive activities.

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