

GRAMMAR AS A KEY ELEMENT OF MASTERING A NEW FORM OF EXPRESSION

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Annotation: In the current age of communicative language teaching, whereas some language teachers and learners suppose that grammar is not really essential for communication, other scholars agree that grammar still plays an important role in developing the language system of learners. The propensity of this study is to define what grammar is and what its importance in second language. Grammar provides the rules that govern sentence structure, word order, tenses, and agreement, which helps learners construct meaningful and accurate sentences. Without proper grammar, communication can be unclear or misunderstood. From the recent perspectives and findings of different researchers, a critical evaluation is conducted to explore the importance of grammar in language teaching and learning as well as how to effectively apply grammar instruction into language teaching. The findings show that grammar is beyond a set of rules or structures and having knowledge of grammar can support learners to enhance their EFL learning progression.

Keywords: grammar, teaching grammar, grammar instruction, language instruction.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, a great debate has taken place among theorists as to what is the role of grammar. Certain notions and approaches to teaching languages started to emerge that neglect the role of grammar in acquiring a second language. These sorts of notions were based on the grounds that children didn't have to learn grammar to pick up their first language. These notions, however, were proven later on impractical as grammar plays an irreplaceable role in breaking down the language for kids and facilitating it to adults.

This research is an attempt to highlight the vitality of grammar in teaching and acquiring a second language. The role grammar plays can take many dimensions. Some of the roles discussed in this paper are its ability to convey unambiguous meaning, having the capacity to create an infinite set of sentences and a substantial enabling skill. Additionally, grammar forms an important subject in almost all the syllabuses all around the world. Be it English grammar or any other grammar, be it a native or a bilingual, a person cannot write or speak eloquently bereft of this key factor.

The purpose of this study is to explore how grammar can be defined and how grammar is useful for language learning progression. In this paper, different thoughts, teaching practices, and experience from a wide variety of research articles are systematically synthesized and evaluated in order to investigate the importance of grammar in language teaching and learning in current years. Furthermore, a thorough discussion is conducted to translate the nature of grammar into language teaching. Following that, some recommendations about teaching grammar will be suggested.

What is grammar? A question we rarely ever ask ourselves when we speak our native language. However, when it comes to learning a second language, it's the first thing we are introduced to.

When we contemplate this question, the first answer that comes to our minds is a set of rules that govern a language. Yes, it is true, but there is more to grammar than that. Grammar is a system composed of many interconnected components that ensure accuracy and meaning. It is the art of writing and speaking a language correctly. It is “the mental system of rules and categories that allows humans to form and interpret the words and sentences of their language.” There is no escape from using grammar if we want to improve our English or learn a new language. Just as the latter, grammar is a living entity that evolves and undergoes a great deal of change over time. Grammar of the 19th century is by no means the grammar of today. These changes are due to several factors such as time, culture, literature and so on.

As a result, it can be seen that there is a wide variety of direct and indirect approaches to present different definitions of grammar. Based on different perspectives of many language scholars, grammar can be generally considered the knowledge concerned with types of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and the internal rules of how sentences in a language is constructed. Following that, the teaching of grammar concentrates on the methods in which language users learn and apply grammatical rules to build sentences in for meaningful purposes in specific contexts. The philosophy of teaching grammar of each teacher of English differs from what grammar concepts the teacher has knowledge of, the teacher’s personal experience of a language as both a learner and a teacher of that language and the teacher’s own belief about the level of effectiveness of their language teaching.

Definitions of grammar vary greatly according to one’s knowledge and expertise in the realm in question. A laymen’s definition of grammar would be much distinct from a grammarian’s or a linguist’s. This distinction is primarily on account of the extent of knowledge one possesses over the field or the orientation one has chosen to pursue. A laymen’s definition would only scratch the surface of grammar while a grammarian’s definition would delve into more elaborate aspects like word class and part of speech. As for a linguist, he would tackle the linguistics components of language such as phonology, semantics and so on. Grammar is a tremendously vast field which could be approached from a myriad of ways.

Main part: Pedagogical-grammatical representations must be simple in terms of language and suitable for students in order to meet the first two criteria. The images provided should be concise, specific and descriptive. Purely verbal descriptions are of no use to students because they understand structure better when they can relate that structure to an image. Color, symbols, tables and diagrams enhance ease of understanding. The complex structures of the language should be presented as simply, clearly and understandably as possible. It is also very important that only the main one be highlighted with color or underlining. With regard to the criterion of applicability, it is well known that many students fail to translate their theoretical knowledge into practical skills. Because of this problem, it is important that there is a slight psychological distance between representation and reality. When teaching foreign languages, it is very important to develop the so-called grammatical competence. Grammatical competence is defined as knowledge of the grammatical means of a language and the ability to use them in practice. In foreign language classes, a distinction is made between productive and receptive grammar. Productive grammar is a term used to refer to structures that learners can create themselves.

Conversely, receptive grammar is a term used to describe structures that learners can only understand but cannot create. Blazewicz also writes about the “grammar of message” and the “grammar of understanding”. Mastering a foreign language means that grammatical skills can be acquired unconsciously in real life situations. The study of grammar is a conscious action that develops in formal situations [6]. Knowledge of grammar is an important requirement for mastering a foreign language. Students should be able to correctly express their thoughts in a foreign language. Grammar skills are acquired in close connection with knowledge of the language. Working on grammar should be an integral part of learning a foreign language. Every speaker must master grammar, and every language teaching must include grammar, whether it happens (explicitly through rules or indirectly through patterns), when it happens, and to what extent it is necessary.

And last but not least, grammar is considered to be a prerequisite factor for effective communication. The role of grammar in communication comes in organizing words, clauses and phrases into meaningful sentences. The exchange of these sentences results in a conversation. In this respect, the importance of grammar here resides in making it possible for each person to say exactly what they want to and be able to understand the other. It serves as a mechanism against ambiguity and confusion. On the other hand, however, when grammar is lacking in a conversation, there is a good chance for misunderstanding and disagreement. Imagine going to a foreign country and using a dictionary of the local language to communicate. You may pick the right word but the way you put them together can be funny, maybe even dangerous. The purpose of grammar in communication is to be able to convey your thoughts through language. If you are not understood, then the whole point of the conversation is lost. The roles grammar play are multiple and diverse.

Grammar, as the set of rules governing the structure of sentences, plays a pivotal role in second language (L2) teaching and learning. While communicative language teaching (CLT) has gained prominence in recent decades, focusing on fluency and real-world interaction, the role of grammar remains indispensable. This section will provide an academic overview of the importance of grammar in second language teaching, drawing on various theoretical frameworks, research findings, and educational practices.

Several theoretical frameworks in second language acquisition (SLA) highlight the critical role grammar plays in language learning. Key theories include:

- The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH): The CAH suggests that the differences between the native language (L1) and the target language (L2) can influence the learning process. Understanding grammar helps learners identify these contrasts and avoid errors caused by L1 interference. For example, learners may struggle with L2 grammatical structures that do not exist in their L1, making explicit grammar instruction essential for overcoming such challenges.
- Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972): Interlanguage refers to the transitional state between a learner's L1 and the target language. It is during this stage that learners produce language that is neither entirely correct nor incorrect. Grammar instruction helps learners refine their interlanguage and reduce errors as they progress toward native-like proficiency.
- The Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985): While Krashen's theory emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input for language acquisition, grammar plays a crucial role in making input more understandable. Learners benefit from structured grammatical input, which provides them with the tools to decode and produce accurate language, especially in more complex contexts.

Grammar is central to the development of linguistic proficiency in both receptive and productive skills. Research indicates that:

- Sentence Formation: Grammar allows learners to construct grammatically correct sentences. Without knowledge of syntax, morphology, and tense usage, learners might struggle to create coherent and contextually appropriate sentences. For example, incorrect verb tense usage can distort the temporal meaning of a sentence, leading to confusion.
- Accuracy and Fluency: While fluency is the ability to communicate effectively and spontaneously, accuracy refers to the correctness of language use. Research by Ellis (2002) suggests that both accuracy and fluency are necessary for effective communication, and grammar is crucial for ensuring accuracy. Grammar instruction, particularly explicit grammar teaching, allows learners to internalize rules and produce accurate language even in spontaneous conversations.
- Error Reduction: Explicit grammar instruction has been shown to reduce error rates in second language learners. By understanding grammatical rules, learners are more likely to self-

correct and avoid recurring mistakes. This is particularly important for formal writing, academic communication, and professional contexts, where accuracy is critical.

One of the key debates in second language teaching concerns the balance between grammar instruction and communicative competence. Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, which includes not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts.

- **Grammar as a Tool for Communication:** Although communicative approaches emphasize fluency and social interaction, grammar is still necessary for effective communication. Without grammatical knowledge, learners may produce language that is understandable but lacks precision or appropriateness in terms of formality, politeness, or register. For instance, knowing when to use the subjunctive mood or understanding conditional sentences can shape the politeness and clarity of a message.
- **Integrated Approach:** Modern approaches to second language teaching suggest an integrated method that combines grammar instruction with communicative practices. According to Long and Robinson (1998), focused instruction on grammar, when combined with communicative activities, enhances learners' language proficiency by providing both explicit understanding and meaningful practice.

Several teaching strategies have been developed to incorporate grammar into communicative language teaching:

- **Explicit Grammar Instruction:** This involves direct teaching of grammar rules, typically through explanations, examples, and practice exercises. Research supports the effectiveness of explicit instruction for improving learners' grammatical accuracy, especially in beginner and intermediate stages of language learning (Norris & Ortega, 2000).
- **Implicit Grammar Instruction:** This approach involves providing learners with opportunities to notice and deduce grammatical structures through exposure to language input. While less focused on formal explanations, implicit instruction encourages learners to derive rules from context. Studies have shown that implicit instruction can be beneficial in promoting long-term language acquisition by encouraging learners to internalize grammatical structures naturally (DeKeyser, 1998).
- **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):** In TBLT, learners engage in real-world tasks that require the use of language in context. While the primary focus is on communication, tasks often provide opportunities for learners to apply and reinforce grammar in authentic situations. This method helps integrate grammar instruction within meaningful communication.
- **Focus on Form:** This pedagogical approach involves highlighting specific grammar points during communicative activities. Rather than teaching grammar in isolation, focus-on-form strategies draw attention to grammar during task-based interactions or while learners work on language problems. This strategy has been found to be effective in enhancing both fluency and accuracy (Doughty & Williams, 1998).

Numerous studies have examined the impact of grammar instruction on second language learning outcomes. Findings indicate that:

- **Grammar and Academic Achievement:** Research consistently demonstrates that students who receive explicit grammar instruction perform better in academic contexts, particularly in writing tasks that require syntactic complexity and accuracy (Spada & Lightbown, 2008). Grammar instruction also supports reading comprehension and listening skills by providing learners with the tools to decode and interpret complex language structures.

- **Grammar and Learner Motivation:** Some studies suggest that learners' motivation to learn grammar may vary depending on their attitudes toward language learning and their perceived relevance of grammar. In general, learners who understand the value of grammar in achieving communicative competence and academic success are more likely to engage with grammar instruction and show improved learning outcomes (Skehan, 1998).

Despite its importance, teaching grammar in second language contexts can present challenges:

- **Learner Resistance:** Some learners may view grammar as tedious or irrelevant, especially in communicative classrooms where fluency is prioritized. Teachers must find ways to make grammar instruction engaging and relevant by connecting it to learners' communicative goals and real-life contexts.
- **Overemphasis on Grammar:** On the other hand, focusing exclusively on grammar can lead to an overemphasis on form rather than communication, potentially stifling fluency development. Teachers must strike a balance between grammar instruction and opportunities for authentic communication.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Variability:** Grammar teaching must also consider the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners. For instance, learners from different language families may struggle with certain grammatical structures that are not present in their L1. Tailoring grammar instruction to these differences is crucial for effective learning.

Among the multiple functions grammar has, its ability to convey and clarify meaning is the most important. A language is futile and doomed to perish if it's ineligible of constructing meaning. Communication constitutes a central part of human activities, and meaning is a pre-requisite factor for the former to occur. There are many ways in which grammar determines the meaning of the sentence. Each grammatical rule serves a particular purpose. Conjugation to express an action in a certain time, modals to express obligation, probability and certainty, even the intonation while speaking says a lot about what the person wants to say. In addition to this, correct grammar enables us to articulate the same thought in so many ways and in so many different structures. Once the person learns how to efficiently employ these rules, he/she becomes able to use the language to convey any thought he desires.

One way in which grammar brings about meaning is the way it brings the words together. Words grouped together randomly have little meaning on their own. For instance, if father would like to know where his son is and the mother answers "with friends cinema go".

In this instance, the father is highly unlikely to get the message and even if he somehow managed to infer the meaning of the sentence, the latter is still ambiguous and open to different interpretations. Unless they occur accidentally, like in "go study". Words may have lexical meaning at the word level, but they convey no grammatical meaning as a group. However when a special order is given to these words, grammatical meaning is created because of the relationships they have to one another. The subject verb agreement, or to take another example the difference between the past, present and future forms of verbs. The meaning of a sentence is determined partly by the meaning of the words of which it is composed and partly by its grammatical meaning.

Conclusion: Grammar instruction serves also as an accelerator of the learning process. Grammar helps students and learners learn the language much faster than those who don't receive an explicit grammar instruction. Long (1983) reviewed eleven relevant studies, six of which clearly showed faster development in children and adults who received ESL instruction and concluded that instruction does effect acquisition. Due to this prior instruction of grammar, students need not tire themselves by having to notice and understand the inflection of words and verbs because they study them and when they notice them in use, they fully comprehend them and become able to apply in different contexts. This saves them a considerable amount of time and effort plus it affects the accuracy of their learning. A student, should he have to notice and understand all

these grammatical rules and forms on his own, may get perplexed or make wrong deductions that could ruin his learning process. This is precisely why grammar should be taught explicitly. Grammar remains an essential component of second language teaching and learning, as it provides the rules and structures necessary for effective communication, accuracy, and language proficiency. While communicative approaches have shifted the focus towards fluency, grammar instruction is vital for helping learners understand and produce language correctly. An integrated approach that balances grammar with communicative practices is most effective in developing well-rounded language skills. Theoretical insights, empirical studies, and pedagogical strategies all emphasize that grammar is not just a set of rules but a key to mastering a second language and achieving communicative competence.

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