

Grammar Teaching and Learning at the Secondary Level



Linguistics

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Abstract

Grammar is the precondition of language. After learning grammar, one can be more alert to the strength, flexibility and variety of the language and thus can be in a better position to use it and evaluate others' use of it. In case of learning Second Language, the environment is much different than L1 acquisition. Without knowing the grammatical rules of using English, learners will not be able to utilise it with confidence and perfection. English is a compulsory subject at the secondary level in any country of the globe. Learners get enough time and opportunity to learn English for several years. There are some fixed items of grammatical rules to teach students in different education levels. In the syllabus of grammar the topics and themes have been introduced as vehicles for practicing the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, the question is whether the students are able to acquire the skills of English language or the teachers are able to teach them properly. Though English is a compulsory subject in school level, there is question whether the students are able to produce correct written production or the teachers are able to teach them grammar properly. The present research paper is designed to investigate the evaluation of grammar teaching and learning in the secondary level. Regarding the main reasons lack of awareness and interest for teaching and learning English Grammar among teachers and students, use of traditional methods of teaching, lack of teachers' training is mentionable. Effective grammar teaching in a communicative way can be ensured through the right kind of attitude towards teaching and learning it. Interesting communicative practices should be applied. Moreover, awareness should be created regarding teaching and learning English Grammar in an effective communicative method.

Introduction

English is the lingua franca. The demand of English language is on the increase day by day around the world. All the well-reputed books of the world have been written in English; and all Nobel laureates are expert in English. They have contributed to different fields of human knowledge for which they have been selected for Nobel Prizes every year. For instance, we can mention a Pakistani teenaged girl Malala Yousafzai. Now she reads Economics as her choice at the University of Oxford. As a result, she has to learn English conversantly and in many international organizations, including United Nations she has to deliver her speech in English; when she is called for interview she speaks English. We cannot deny the contribution of English language. Since we cannot imagine our existence without English knowledge, each learner and teacher must give priority on English Grammar. The suitable time of learning grammar is the secondary and higher secondary level of any education system of the world.

English is one of the most used languages in the world. Because of its international status, English is taught and learnt throughout the world. English is used as a foreign language in the non-speaking countries of the globe. Non-English speaking students study English from the primary to the tertiary level of education as a compulsory subject. Grammar is considered to be the basis of learning and using a language. Without learning grammar, it is not possible to use a language appropriately and correctly.

Without learning English Grammar, no student and/or teacher can be able to develop his or her general commanding on English language. Generally, we know, to learn a second language, grammar is a must for all sorts of non-English speaking people in the globe around. The proper time to learn a second language along with its grammar is young age or early stage of studious life. But if it is too late, it becomes hard for the growing learners to learn Grammar. Anybody wishes to learn a foreign language, at the same time he should practice equally: Grammar +Language=Foreign Language. In this study, we would like to examine grammar teaching and learning at the secondary level in any non-English speaking countries of the globe.

Background of the Study

Grammar is an essential part of language. Grammar is needed to use, to understand and to master a language. Language is very important as human being cannot live without language. Learning grammar provides a basis for learning language. After studying grammar, one can be more alert to the strength, flexibility and variety of the language and thus can be in a better position to use it and evaluate others' use of it. The students of Bangladesh learn English as their L2. In case of learning L2, the environment is much different than L1 acquisition. Without knowing the grammatical rules of using English, students will not be able to use it with confidence and perfection. English is a compulsory subject in schools and colleges of the non-English speaking countries of the world. Students get enough time and opportunity to learn English for several years. There are some fixed items of grammatical rules to teach students in different education levels. In the syllabus of grammar the topics and themes have been introduced as vehicles for practicing the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, the question is whether the students are able to acquire the skills of English language or the teachers are able to teach them properly. That is the question we would like to examine in this study.

Analytical Model

This paper is devoted to define the theoretical framework under which the relationship among the variables (dependent and independent) is intended to measure. Since, it is an exploratory design of research and not tended to test hypothesis or experiment any theory, researcher endeavour to conduct the study under the constructed flexible framework to explore the grammar teaching and learning of English language at the secondary level of the non-English speaking countries of the globe through the following simple structure. Here the variables under the study are operationally defined, a theoretical model is framed and then, it is explained how this structure guides the study and analyse the findings of the study.

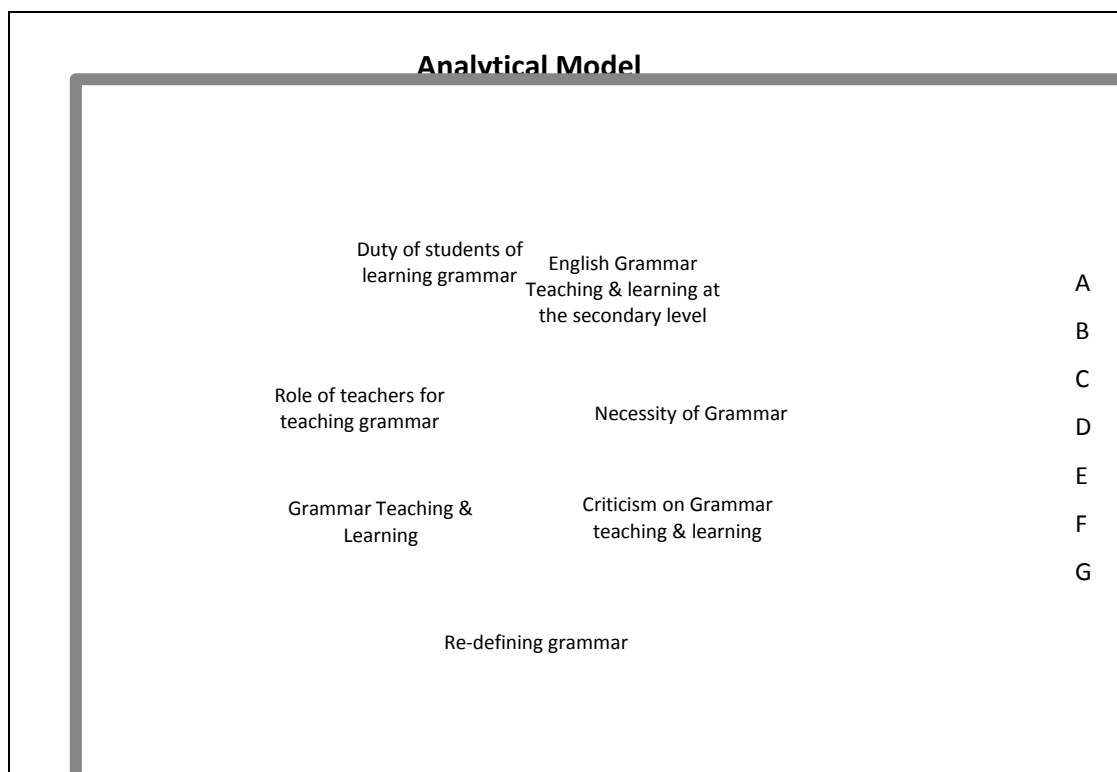


Figure of Simple Design of Theoretical Framework

Re-defining Grammar

Grammatical competence is the mastery of the linguistic code. It is the ability to recognize lexical, morphological, syntactical, and phonological features of a language and to use these features effectively to interpret, encode, and decode words and sentences. In this study, we would like to highlight some critical comments made by different critics and scholars as written below:

According to the Linguistics, *grammar teaching and learning* means the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, phonology, and semantics of a language. In short, grammatical competence is the ability to recognize and produce the distinctive grammatical structures of a language and to use them effectively in communication.

In the most general form, grammatical (linguistic) competence was defined by N. Chomsky, as theoretical and practical knowledge of a limited number of grammatical rules, which allow generating an unlimited number of correct sentences (Chomsky, 1965). It can be assumed that the grammatical competence in the context of learning a foreign language is a set of theoretical knowledge (rules) and language skills that are necessary and sufficient for students to construct correct sentences, to understand them, to monitor grammatical errors, to pass judgments about right and wrong linguistic forms, and to perform language testing tasks.

In the 1980s, the American linguist R. Langacker put forward the idea of “space grammar”. He claimed that the grammatical structures are closely related to lexical semantics and together constitute a single space of interrelated elements (Fodor, 2010).

At secondary level in a non-speaking country, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) began its journey with the slogan of emphasizing on the learners. Communicative competence is opposed to linguistic competence. It claims to be something more than grammatical teaching. In other words, CLT is the method that is concerned with learners’ needs of communication. Its teaching techniques reflect the choice of language content and materials, with emphasis on role-play, pair and group work etc. The method suggests that the learners need to understand as well as express rather than merely describe the core of language by grammatical interpretations and vocabulary.

For a long time, grammar has been considered as being of primary importance in language teaching. It is regarded as structure-based and formal activity. This attitude, however, is no longer maintained and as a result direct grammar teaching has been eliminated from today's second language classes. In 1980s an anti-grammar movement was experienced, perhaps influenced by Krashen’s idea that grammar can be acquired naturally from meaningful input and from opportunities to interact in the classroom. In other words, grammatical competence can develop in a fluency-oriented environment without conscious focus on language forms (Tricia Hedge 1982, p.143).

The easiest and simplest answer of this question is grammar is a set of rules of a particular language. Different linguistics has defined grammar in different ways. Thornbury (1999) defines grammar saying that grammar is partly the study of the structures that are possible in a language. In this sense grammar is the description of the rules that govern how the sentences of a language are formed. To define grammar, Islam (1997) writes that grammar is a set of rules of a specific language. Every language has some peculiarities. They are established by usage and grammar is a direction to such usage. Islam mentions Chomsky’s words cited by Palmer (1971, p.3), “Grammar is seen as a device that.....specifies the finite set of well-formed sentences and assigns to each of them one or more structural description.” Penny Ur (1988, p.4) says,

Grammar may be roughly defined as the way a language manipulates and combines words in order to form longer units of meaning [...]There is a set of rules which govern how units of meaning may be constructed in any language: we may say that a learner who ‘knows grammar’ is one who has mastered and can apply these rules to express him or herself in what would be considered acceptable language forms.

Grammar is the structural foundation of users’ ability to express them. If they are aware of grammar, they can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way to use language.

Necessity of Grammar

Grammar is an essential part of language. Grammar is needed to use, to understand and to master a language. Language is very important, as human being cannot live without language. In this study students need to practise some important grammar like- Parts of Speech, Sentence with definition and classification, Tense, Voice, Narration, Transformation of Sentence, Right Form of Verbs, Combination of Sentences, Correction, Use of punctuation marks and Capitalization, and so on. Besides learning grammar students must practise in a practical way so that they can apply any sorts of grammar while doing exercise. At the same time they must practise creative writing and free hand practise.

As Crystal (1995, p. 119) writes, *To understand the linguistic dimension of our existence would be no mean achievement. And grammar is the fundamental organizing principle of the language. Our grammatical ability is extraordinary [...] There is no limit to what we can say or write, get all of this potential is controlled by a finite number of rules. Nevertheless, our language can let us down, we encounter ambiguity, imprecision and unintelligible speech or writing. To deal with these problems, we need to put grammar under the microscope, and work out what went wrong.*

Learning English grammar provides a basis for learning other languages. After studying grammar, one can be more alert to the strength, flexibility and variety of the language and thus can be in a better position to use it and evaluate others' use of it. The students of Bangladesh learn English as their L2. In case of learning L2, the environment is much different from L1 acquisition. Without knowing the grammatical rules of using English, students will not be able to use it with confidence and perfection.

However, we can't describe the necessity of grammar in words. There is no definite limit of learning grammar, anybody can learn grammar if he has tendency, sensibility, and mentality. Many people think that only teachers should learn grammar, because they have to teach the students in the class as their usual responsibility. In the developing countries, many teachers earn money through teaching grammar. Whatever the case is, we should not lag behind in learning grammar if we want to be expert in English language.

Duty of Students for Learning Grammar

The first and foremost duty and responsibility of the students is to learn grammar very carefully and conscientiously. If they fail to develop their grammatical knowledge, they hardly come out successful in learning English language. They must commence this task very at the very early stage of studious life at the school level. Their parents must be conscious of the duty of students while they are devoted to acquiring grammatical knowledge. The reason is that without learning grammar, they cannot write creatively and critically. If a student is conversant with the grammatical knowledge, he would certainly cut a good figure in the examination.

To foster out the hidden treasure of knowledge, the students should learn grammar. For instance we can say that at the very outset, a student must practise articles, sentence, tense, parts of speech, word, phrase, and sentence- structure. There is a very popular notion around the globe: Tense is the father of grammar. So a student must carefully try to develop definition of tense, classification of tense, structure, examples, and use of tense. The reason is that voice, narration, and right use of verbs are deeply dealt with tense. Moreover, to speak English, tense is a must for all sorts of practitioners. Through this tiny research project, we can suggest that practice makes a man perfect, and he shouldn't put off his lesson even for a single day. He must carry on his grammatical practice until he is cable of understanding grammar properly. He must follow the advice of his teachers while he is devoted to grammatical knowledge.

Role of Teachers for Teaching Grammar

Teachers have to play a major role model to teach the students grammar at the secondary level. They must receive training from training institute how to teach grammar in the easiest way. They must follow the strategies and techniques of postmodern methods in the classrooms. They should participate in the national and international conference, symposium, workshop and mini-talks which are dealt with ELT and CELT methods. Teachers themselves should practise and study English grammar, especially written the foreign writers in place of the native writers. They of course motivate their learners so that they can be able to develop their commanding of English language through grammar practice. Now-a-days many teachers and students are very eager to participate in TOEFL & IELTS test with a view to acquiring higher education in the English speaking country of the world. To cut a good score in such competitive test, both teachers and students will have to be expert in English language skill. To study in any subjects of epistemology, everybody needs to practise English grammar very attentively; in the 21st-century age, many teachers and students are very much interested in carrying out their scientific research project on their chosen fields. For this they must be good at grammatical commanding. The main duty of the teachers is to teach the learners grammar very carefully so that they can be properly benefitted in learning grammar in the class rooms; teachers must emphasize upon supplementary task, assignment each day, and they must take weekly test to develop students' knowledge of grammar.

Criticism on Grammar Teaching and Learning

Grammar teaching means different things to different people. To some people, grammar teaching is simply teaching a grammar syllabus. Outside the syllabus, there is no mention of grammar in the classroom at all. To others, it is teaching a communicative syllabus and dealing with grammar questions that arise in the course of doing communicative activities. It is known as covert grammar teaching. But traditionally, grammar teaching means teaching a grammar syllabus and explicitly presenting the rules of grammar, and using grammar terminology. This is known as overt grammar teaching.

About the status of grammar Thornbury (1999), mentions that the purpose of the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching is to give emphasize on experimental learning and purely communicative goals. In case of CLT, there is tendency to equate grammar with accuracy. In this regard, Thornbury also quoted Prabhu's idea about deep-end version of CLT, which was hostile to explicit grammar teaching. Nevertheless, this condition was relatively short-lived. In this theoretical perspective, it seemed to have little or no influence on global classroom practice.

In this regard, Scott's argument is that without attention to grammatical form the learners cannot progress beyond the most basic level of communication. He also explains that grammar should not be the goal of teaching and the focus on form alone is not enough. The goal of the communicative movement includes not only grammar but also a focus on meaning. Thornbury (1999) says: "Communicative competence is best achieved through communicating, through making meaning, and that grammar is a way of tidying these meanings up." (p.25)

Ellis (1994) also expresses his view about implicit and explicit grammar teaching. In case of implicit treatment, learners are required to induce rules from examples given to them. On the other hand, in case of explicit treatment learners are given a rule which they then practice using.

In CLT, a teacher pays more attention to enable students to work with the target language during the lesson and communicate in it by the end of it. What makes this kind of lesson different from the traditional is that the teacher tries to make the language used in the lesson real and true. The teacher creates real or real-like situations in which the language can be used. This enables students to communicate in English outside the classroom. During the CLT lesson, the teacher often plays important role of facilitator who facilitates activities to work with the target language.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Finally, we can express that grammar is the precondition of learning English language. To develop English each and every student as well as teacher ought to increase his knowledge on grammar elements. We have already learnt that without grammar, we cannot imagine our sense of English language since we are the parts of non-English speaking country. We should bear in mind that the demand and value of English in the world around is on the increase day by day rapidly. The more we practise grammar the more we increase our knowledge of English creatively and critically. We think at the secondary level English grammar ought to be prioritized to enhance students' potentiality and capability in English language skill.

This research paper has designed the theoretical framework under which the relationship among the teachers and students at the secondary level of education system has been measured. Here the researcher has tried to construct a flexible framework to explore the grammar teaching and learning of English language at the secondary level. The teachers should follow the

postmodern teaching as well as learning method in place of traditional methods while they teach in the class rooms.

- ESL teachers in the sample believe that formal study of grammar is of crucial importance to language learning. That is, the results of the present study further confirm those of previous studies in terms of the overall role of grammar in the language classroom. Studying and practicing grammar in the classroom help improve students' communicative ability most quickly. It can be inferred that the teachers see grammar learning as an important component to help their students achieve communicative ability.
- Clearly, their goal of helping their learners to attain a good ability to communicate does involve the formal study of grammar in the classroom.
- The effective teaching of English grammar at the school level may be ensured by the right kind of attitude towards teaching and learning it.
- It has to be ensured that teachers implement their knowledge achieved through proper training.
- New teaching methods have to be introduced.
- A suitable classroom environment is to be built.
- Classes should be interesting so that the students get motivated to learn English grammar.
- Moreover, awareness should be raised in teaching and learning English Grammar.

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