

New Techniques for Teaching English Grammar

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Abstract: There can be debate whether the teaching of English grammar is essential to learn the English language or not, but there is no scope for disagreement in the fact that the knowledge of English grammar, intuitively or explicitly, is essential to enable a person to use it. In spite of teaching grammar for about a decade during school education majority of people have been making mistakes in using the English language correctly. Therefore it is desirable to ask if the contents, the teaching materials, teaching methodologies adopted, and the techniques used by teachers to teach English grammar are appropriate. The major causes for it must be identified, and steps must be taken accordingly to address the problems. The present paper is an attempt to show that in addition to teachers training it is also necessary to accept and introduce some of the new techniques of teaching English grammar so that it may provide a strong foundation to use other skills efficiently. English grammar teaching techniques also use grammar exercises that mimic uses of the English language in real-world situations. This paper also discusses different new techniques for teaching grammar that focus on refining a student's structural English skills, and over time increasing his/her confidence using English in social situations. At the same time it seems desirable to utilise digital resources, ICT, language laboratory, internet etc. to make language learning innovative, enjoyable and effective.

Key Words: ICT, grammar, language laboratory, CLT, Inductive method, Deductive method, learner-autonomy

Introduction: It is a basic fact in India that in spite of learning the English language for more than a decade in schools majority of the people are unable to learn and use it properly for practical communication purposes. English is not a compulsory language in the country but it is certainly a language desirable for all those who aspire to move upward in their educational and professional career; therefore, people from different social and economic levels want their wards to learn the language. Before taking up other issues it is necessary to understand the basic components of any language.

Every language has two basic components: the lexicon (words) of that language and the grammar of that language. One must understand the meanings of the words, and also know how to combine these words to form higher units like phrases, clauses and sentences. In the absence of these two no one can use the basic skills of language, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Grammar is not visible on the surface but it is the very essence of every language; it is like water to animal life. In the absence of which one can neither decode what he listens / reads nor he can speak / write meaningful sentences. This is called 'competence' in Noam Chomsky's terminology. It is possessed by all the native speakers of a language. The challenge before us is: how

can we acquire this knowledge in case of a second or foreign language? It can be planned properly only by understanding the tasks before us objectively. They will be discussed in the following sections.

Discussion: The term ‘grammar’ is understood differently in different contexts. The intuitive knowledge of the working of the mother tongue is a ‘native speaker’s grammar’; it is without any nomenclature and overt knowledge of the subject. Grammar is also studied as an autonomous discipline like mathematics and physics in which languages are described and various theories are proposed to generalise their findings. Such grammars contain tags, labels and various technical terms to indicate various concepts explicitly and uniquely. There is a third variety of grammar called pedagogical grammar which is used by teachers and educators to teach a language formally. It usually tries to describe the language so that the students may learn the working system of the target language, and be able to use a language. In fact, we are primarily concerned with pedagogical grammar.

The majority of the teachers in India use the lecture method even to teach a language class. They talk about the language and pass on information related to the facts about the language; they rarely focus on how to use the language for communicative purposes. Therefore in spite of their knowledge about the language, the students fail to use it in real contexts. As a result they get demotivated and lose interest in language learning. Apart from the traditional teaching materials, there are plenty of other resources which include electronic media, the internet and various gadgets which can be used to revolutionise the learning and teaching activities. Therefore organisation of teacher training programmes to use these tools for practices purposes is essential.

Various researches on the psychological and pedagogical aspects of language learning have been going on, some new innovative methods and techniques have been proposed for this purpose, and many of them have already been proved to be useful. During the last fifty years a lot of changes have taken place around us in all the spheres of life, our food habits and living styles have changed, our ideas have been changing and accepting the new ideas. Even the students have changed. Therefore, it is the demand of the time that the language teachers should become ‘professional teachers’ keeping pace with time.

Teaching methods also play an important role in the success of teaching. Methods are not prescribed in the syllabus. A modern teacher must be familiar with the traditional as well as the new methods of language teaching. Ultimately it is the teacher who decides which of the methods is suitable for teaching a particular topic of grammar. Now let us come to the central issues of teaching English grammar.

English grammar may apparently seem to be very complex and difficult but, in fact, it is comparatively simpler than the grammars of many other languages. All the intricacies of English grammar cannot truly be learned by rote, they must be really understood – and understanding is most easily achieved when students are engaged, interested and having fun during a lesson. The goal of grammar instruction is to enable

students to carry out their communication purposes and not memorising various rules. This goal has three implications:

- Students need overt or covert instructions that connect grammar points with larger communication contexts.
- Students do not need to master every aspect of each grammar point; they need only those that are relevant to the immediate communication task.
- Error correction is not always the teacher's first responsibility.

Deductive Approach to Teaching Grammar: Adult students appreciate and get benefit from direct instruction that allows them to apply critical thinking skills to language learning. Teachers can take advantage of this by providing explanations that give students a descriptive understanding (declarative knowledge) of each point of grammar.

- Teach the grammar point in the target language or the students' first language or both. The goal is to facilitate understanding.
- Limit the time you devote to grammar explanations to 10 minutes, especially for lower level students whose ability to sustain attention can be limited.
- Present grammar points in written and oral ways to address the needs of students with different learning styles.

An important part of grammar instruction is providing examples. Teachers need to plan their examples carefully around two basic principles:

- Be sure the examples are accurate and appropriate. They must present the language appropriately, be culturally appropriate for the setting in which they are used, and be to the point of the lesson.
- Use the examples as teaching tools. Focus examples on a particular theme or topic so that students have more contact with specific information and vocabulary.

Relevance of Grammar Instructions: In the communicative competence model, the purpose of learning grammar is to learn the language of which the grammar is a part. Instructors therefore teach grammar forms and structures in relation to meaning and use for the specific communication tasks that students need to complete.

Compare the traditional model and the communicative competence model for teaching the English past tense:

Traditional: grammar for grammar's sake

- Teach the regular *-ed* form with its two pronunciation variants.
- Teach the doubling rule for verbs that end in *d* (for example, *wed-wedded*).
- Hand out a list of irregular verbs that students must memorize.
- Do pattern practice drills for *-ed*.
- Do substitution drills for irregular verbs.

Communicative competence: grammar for communication's sake

- Distribute two short narratives about recent experiences or events, each one to half of the class.
- Teach the regular *-ed* form, using verbs that occur in the texts as examples.
- Teach the pronunciation and doubling rules if those forms occur in the texts.
- Teach the irregular verbs that occur in the texts.
- Students read the narratives, ask questions about points they don't understand.
- Students work in pairs in which one member has read Story A and the other Story B. Students interview one another; using the information from the interview, they then write up or orally repeat the story they have not read.

Error Correction: At all proficiency levels, learners produce language that is not exactly the language used by native speakers. Some of the differences are grammatical, while others involve vocabulary selection and mistakes in the selection of language appropriate for different contexts.

In responding to student communication, teachers need to be careful not to focus on error correction to the detriment of communication and confidence building. Teachers need to let students know when they are making errors so that they can work on improving. Teachers also need to build students' confidence in their ability to use the language by focusing on the content of their communication rather than the grammatical form.

Teachers can use error correction to support language acquisition, and avoid using it in ways that undermine students' desire to communicate in the language, by taking cues from context. When students are doing structured output activities that focus on development of new language skills, use error correction to guide them. When students are engaged in communicative activities, errors should be corrected only if they interfere with comprehensibility. Respond using correct forms, but without stressing them.

Inductive Method of Teaching Grammar: The inductive method of teaching grammar does not teach the rules directly, but it presents several examples related to a topic so that the students may notice various concepts at work. Either description or explanation of the concept is not provided beforehand. It is expected that the learners would be able to identify the underlying rules in a natural way. In fact, in this method the learners themselves discover the rules and experience how they are used in real contexts. Main purpose of this method is to enable the learners understand and retain such rules for a longer period till they fully internalise these working principles. In this method, the students are actively engaged in the process of learning; hence they are more attentive and motivated. It inculcates in them a sense of achievement and gives them pleasure of becoming successful. It also helps them to become self-reliance leading them to become autonomous learners.

Application of Technology: Nowadays, the integration of technology into the foreign language teaching becomes popular. As more and more technological advances with their resources become available, it is necessary that teachers become aware of how those advances might be used to enhance foreign language teaching and learning. As Chapelle (2001: 1) states,

“As we enter the 21st century, everyday language use is so tied to technology that learning language through technology has become a fact of life with important implications for all applied linguists, particularly for those concerned with facets of second language acquisition.”

A lot of teachers may wonder what we need technology for or why the familiar background and chalk should be placed by an LCD screen and a mouse or a stick simply because

- (a) What you can do technologically cannot be done in traditional setting classroom with only chalk and board;
- (b) Technology, from the functional viewpoint, opens a number of enhancements supporting educational processes.

Technology not only facilitates the teachers’ tasks and saves their time and effort but also gives immediate, accurate and individual feedback which interests students and benefits students who are not confident doing their tasks in front of the class. Together with computer, technology with the present of the Internet also provides teachers and learners with a tremendous resource in which the materials required can be retrieved and with some simple manipulations as Warschauer (1996) puts it,

“Using the World Wide Web (WWW), students can search through millions of files around the world within minutes to locate and access authentic materials exactly tailored to their own personal interests.”

Not only students, but also teachers can benefit much from the Internet because,

“Media materials can lend authenticity to the classroom situation, reinforcing for students the direct relation between the language classroom and the outside world.” (Brinton, 2001: 461)

In short, the use of technology is fast developing in language teaching and learning. Language educationists have been integrating the use of technology, most particularly computer in teaching. Educational software is creatively developed to help teaching and learning of English. However, it is best to remember that computer is not a substitution for teachers but rather it is an enabler to help both teachers and students have more opportunities to experience various innovative methods in teaching and learning.

Songs: Repetition is a key to mastering grammar as it helps the brain remembering patterns. Using songs is therefore a wonderful tool to practice grammar. Music conveys feelings, emotions and by singing the lyrics students learn a lot without even noticing it. You need to choose your song carefully according to what you want to teach. Have a worksheet ready to give to your students. Depending on the level of your class you may have a filling gap activity, a matching up or lyrics to reorder. Wait before you hand out the worksheet; get your students to listen to the beat, to sing if they know the song. Only then do you give them the worksheet. After that you can quiz them on the tense used in

the song. You could even try to change the tense and to have your students to sing. Songs are usually great fun and a wonderful way to practice grammar while avoiding boredom.

Story telling: We wrongly tend to believe that story telling is only valuable for children. As adults we keep on telling stories all the time: We tell our colleagues about our weekend, we tell jokes to our friends, we tell our families about the way we spent our day, we tell about the latest movie etc. Story telling is an efficient technique to bring grammar to our students in an authentic way. We may use pictures as stimuli to have them imagine the background of the story or predict what is going to happen, jokes they will share among each others, stories cut down in puzzles to reorder or even videos. Whatever the type of activity you chose don't underestimate this tool that can allow introducing a grammar point or review some previously taught language.

Games: Playing games makes learning easier. Whatever the level, ability or age students absolutely love playing games. Games have a strong motivational impact on learning and if you can instil some competition that is even better to stimulate your students' minds. Not only will games stimulate your students it will also create and reinforce a feeling of community. Playing helps to develop social skills and therefore it has a double purpose in lessons. Using games will allow your students to use grammar in a real communicative context and by practising they will internalize the grammatical rules. You have a wide variety of games available depending on what you want to teach your students. Board races, card games, dice games, memorizing games, scrabble, bingo, role plays, gap-fill information tasks, detective games among others can be used to reinforce the use of language.

However, to use games in classrooms, it is equally important that before playing, the rules of the games are clearly explained and well understood by the students. There should be only a few, well-explained rules. Demonstrations also can be very helpful because it can help students understand the game and help them follow the rules.

In a nutshell, as mentioned by Caillois (1957),

“A game is as activity that must have the following characteristics:

- *fun*: the activity is chosen for its light-hearted character
- *separate*: it is circumscribed in time and place
- *uncertain*: the outcome of the activity is unforeseeable
- *non-productive*: participation is not productive
- *governed by rules*: the activity has rules that are different from everyday life
- *Fictitious*: it is accompanied by the awareness of a different reality”.

There are many kinds of games designed for different levels as well as topics, so that students with different language proficiency levels can enjoy and gain the best results from them.

More Grammar Teaching Techniques to try:

Grammar Mind Maps: Grammar mind maps can make teacher's grammar lessons more visual. The goal of grammar mind maps is to appeal to both the left and right sides of your brain and hopefully thus enable students to learn concepts more successfully.

Writing Assignments: The writer made the case for teaching grammar through more active writing assignments. Let students write first, and then use their writing as examples for focused grammar instruction. Authentic practice is a more powerful tool for learning effectively than any other.

X- Word Grammar: It is meant to help students learn grammar rules. The idea behind it is that our language has a number of key terms (the "x words") that play an especially important role in understanding the grammar in any sentence. By focusing on the x-words and the part they play in each sentence, you can come to better understand sentence structure and the relationships between parts of speech.

Use Existing (Fun) Text: Analysing sentence structure can become immediately more entertaining if you start with sentences that students have a reason to care about. You could take a clip from a popular TV show, children's book, or even comic book and pull out sentences for your students to analyze. Grammar will be a little more entertaining for your students if they get to talk about the Avengers or Dora the Explorer in the process.

Physical Games: They recommend gathering your students into a circle for a part-of-speech challenge. Throw a beanbag toward a student chosen at random and name a part-of-speech that they must provide an example of. If they get it right, they stay in the game. If they get it wrong they leave the circle until the next game.

The most important thing to remember when you are coming up with ways to teach grammar creatively is that grammar doesn't have to be dry and boring. If you teach it in context and incorporate grammar into stories, games, and other fun activities, your students will pick up on grammar usage and structure relatively painlessly – and they will probably even have a lot of fun doing it.

Conclusion: All education on language teaching depends on the foundation of good grammar. If students cannot understand grammar, they will struggle to read, write or speak clearly in any other area and level of education, from mathematics and science to history or geography. Good language is the base on which all other education has to stand. Teachers can use a variety of ways to make their grammar lessons memorable and enjoyable for students. Students who enjoy their lessons will pay closer attention, and the teacher will then have an easier time while teaching. Introduction of innovative techniques, making teacher professional by training, use of technology and computer assisted programmes, and commitment of teachers and learners to make learning enjoyable are some of the basics which deserve to be adopted for a successful programme of teaching English grammar.

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