Trends in Teaching Grammar

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ABSTRACT

There is and has always been much debate regarding its position within language teaching methodology; indeed this debate can be shown to have started at least 4,000 years ago, in Greece. Its importance may be ascribed to the fact grammar is one of the most significant aspects of any language. The present paper is an attempt to argue for and against the teaching grammar. To do so, this paper provides a sketchy overview of definition of grammar, different types, and its importance.

KEYWORDS*:* Grammar, Inductive instruction, Communicative approach, Traditional grammar.

INTRODUCTION

Different scholars and researchers have defined grammar differently. Grammar is defined as "the entire system of a language, including its syntax, morphology, semantics and phonology" (Chalker & Weiner, 1994, p. 177). Other definitions, often popularly used, include the structural rules of a language, but exclude vocabulary, semantics and phonology. Based on Purpura's view (2004), in a number of ways, the term "grammar" has been explained by language educators and grammarians which have affected and been affected by diverse approaches to teaching grammar. Linguistically, grammar is defined as the set of structural rules governing the composition of clauses, phrases, and words in any given natural language. He states that educators often assume that this will provide the generative structure on which learners can build their knowledge and will be able to use the language eventually. For them, prescribed rules give a kind of security.

Also, Grammar may be roughly defined as the way a language manipulates and combines words (or bits of 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 acceptable language forms (Ur, 1988, p. 4).

THE IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMAR

Based on Palmer's (1972) view, the core component of a language is its grammar, and it should be of crucial interest to any smart educated person. It is right that acquiring specific syntactic distinguishes need a great deal of time even for the most proficient students. Therefore, a significant question is whether it is possible to facilitate learners' natural acquiring of grammar through instruction. Research results can be brought to bear on this question from various sources, for instance, Larsen-Freeman & Long's (1991) Second Language Acquisition and Research. Paying attention to whether instruction can assist students learn grammar they would not have acquired on their own, some studies, however not clear, point to the value of form-focused instruction to enhance students' accuracy over what normally transpires when there is no focus on form. As Larsen-Freeman (2000) suggests details in his Form, Meaning and Use. Moreover, Jingjing (2002) claims that there is efficient impact of grammar instruction on the learners' ability in reading skill. Teaching explicitly is viewed as a major section of grammar teaching and it can be simpler if the pupils already have some comprehending of how their first language works (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

She adds that explicit awareness of grammatical structure possibly assists learners to enhance their competence to encompass lots of grammatical structures which are required in adult life but not found in learners' casual conversation and a shared meta-language permits instructors and learners to have communication about their performance and to discover complicated associations like as those between syntactic forms and genres.

Also, the grammar significance is according to the fact that it is because of grammar of the language that makes it probable for us to talk about language. Grammar names the kinds of words and word groups that make up sentences not only in English but also in any language. As human beings, we can put sentences together even as students--we can all do grammar. But to be able to talk about how sentences are built, about the types of words and word groups that make up sentences--that is to know about grammar. And also knowing about grammar assists us to

comprehend what makes sentences and paragraphs clear and interesting and precise. Grammar can be a section of literature discussions when our students closely read the sentences in poetry and stories. And to know about grammar means finding out that all languages and all dialects follow grammatical patterns.

TEACHING GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE METHODS

Teaching grammar based on the language methods are classified into two major types: a) traditional grammar; and b) communicative grammar. In the following sections, they are elaborated.

TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR

Based on a traditional approach to grammar teaching and learning, According to Newby (2000), grammar is defined basically as a set of structures and forms, which its basic attention is on the textbook syllabus. The basic section of analysis and grammar which is de-contextualized is the sentence. In traditional grammar, accuracy is important, therefore, the focus on the ability to form correct sentences. Learning is viewed as a conscious process, and often grammar is taught deductively. Commonly, a PPP (presentation, practice, production) method is utilized, with the basic foci being on presentation and practice. Typical tasks are gapped-sentences, pattern drills and sentences for transformation. The instructor, who plays a very important role in the EFL classroom, controls the practice, and the tasks are easily controllable (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Often, traditional grammar is declarative knowledge, instead of procedural knowledge, that is tested. In the following part, the methods based on the traditional grammar is briefly discussed.

THE GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD (GTM)

In the grammar-translation method (GTM) the foreign language teaching included basically of analyzing the grammar and translating written forms in to and out of the foreign language. The fundamental purpose of this method was to utilize the literature of the foreign language and enhance the intellectual mind, and grammar was so important in the learning process. In the grammar-translation method, it was important to learn about the forms of the foreign language. Grammar was taught deductively and explicitly, and grammatical paradigms should be committed to memory through drills (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Learners should be so conscious of the grammatical rules of the target language. Grammar had a vital role in this method, as did translation. Similarities between the native and the foreign language were emphasized and if a pupil could translate into and out of the foreign language he/she was successful in his/her language learning.

THE DIRECT METHOD (DM)

Unlike GTM, within the direct method, a prominent tenet was that language basically is speech (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). The native language should not be applied in the classroom, and this was different from the practice in the former grammar-translation method where the language utilized was basically the first language, and the teachers would display the word meaning, instead of explaining, for instance by applying various objects. It was asserted that vocabulary was learned more naturally when it was utilized in sentences rather than memorized in isolation (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Direct method had a stronger focus on communication, basically pronunciation and conversation. Unlike grammar-translation method, grammar in direct method is taught inductively, that is, the learners studied a grammatical phenomenon in a text, and formulated a rule from what they found in the examples given.

THE AUDIO-LINGUAL METHOD (ALM)

The audio-lingual method was established and developed in the United States during World War II. American structuralism influenced this method. A branch of descriptive linguistics aimed at describing the languages as they were spoken, with a strong focus on morphology, phonology and syntax. Learning to communicate was the whole end, and therefore the spoken skills were given the most attention in the audio-lingual method (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). With the influence of American structuralism and behaviorism, automatic learning of the language, imitation and drills of everyday conversation, and the structures of the EFL were emphasized. Grammar was not taught explicitly in the audio-lingual method, but grammatical forms were rather induced from the examples given (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Simensen (1998, p. 50) states that "in the audio-lingually inspired approaches, grammar teaching consisted normally of pattern practice drills only, and had no explicit explanation of grammar. At the time this was usually called an implicit approach to the teaching of grammar".

COMMUNICATIVE GRAMMAR

According to Newby (1998), in communicative grammar language is observed as a tool for communicating in real contexts. In this view, the role of grammar is the way in which it assists people to express particular kinds of meaning. Meaningfulness and contextual appropriacy are stressed, while formal correctness is given less prominence (Newby, 1998). As Newby (2000) states that communicative grammar brought benefits to the area of language teaching, but it failed to integrate grammar in a coherent way. The communicative grammar is directly related to communicative competence. In the following section, it is explained.

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Hymes (1972) borrowed the term of communicative competence in 1966, as a reaction to Chomsky's views on language learning published the year before. Communicative competence (CC) is what speakers require to know in order to be competent in communicating (cited in Richards& Rodgers, 2001). As Hymes (1972) defined communicative competence as knowledge of "when to speak, when not to, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner" (Hymes, 1972, p. 60). Competence is based on implicit language knowledge as well as the ability to apply it. When learners acquire a language they can enhance knowledge not only about grammatical correct language, but also about acceptability. Both grammatical competence and acceptable performance are important in order to be a competent speaker.

Focus on form is the outcome of the communicative teaching approaches which overtly draw learners' attention to linguistic forms by teachers or other students through lessons focusing on meaning or communication (Long & Robinson, 1998). Focus on form is an analytic approach which is viewed by the students. On the other words, the learners must learn English by analyzing the patterns and form through conversation and tasks by themselves. Focus on form is a basis of Interaction Hypothesis and it emphases the importance of interaction between learners and other speakers in order to develop their language knowledge. Also, noticing and attention is significant in focus on form. Noticing is the intended outcome of focus on form. By noticing the target forms in the input promotes learning and noticing promotes attention.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST GRAMMAR TEACHING

Many researchers depend on studies of the acquisition of English morphology to claim that language learning is not conscious, but unconscious. He took his evidence from cases where speakers of different mother tongues learnt English morphemes in a similar sequence. According to this result, it can be said that the same process lies behind both L1 and L2 learning. Consequently, if learners do not need formal instruction to obtain L1 but can acquire it through nature exposure, they also do not require grammar lessons to learn L2.

In the light of UG, other researchers point out that L2, like L1, can be acquired by supporting UG principles with input and, as a result, formal instruction does not affect language learning. Moreover, the assumption that learners can use their knowledge of grammar in real-time communication is not always true. It is claimed that learners may be unable to apply grammatical knowledge effectively in their own use of language, because grammar is deployed from one moment to another in communication. In addition, There are some reasons for the claim that the significant role given to grammar is disappointing, although some grammatical information is useful. These reasons are:
- Much of the grammar that is taught is inaccurate or plain wrong.
- The rules which are taught are frequently incomprehensible to the students who are taught them.
- Failure to understand abstract meta-language and rules produces unnecessary failure.
- There is no research evidence that explicit knowledge of grammar aids acquisition of the grammatical system.
- Most tellingly, grammar is not the basis of language acquisition, and the balance of linguistic research clearly invalidates any view to the contrary.

ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING GRAMMAR TEACHING

It is a fact that the communicative approach constituted a revolution in both theoretical and applied linguistics, and teaching grammar was not part of it. This revolution gave rise to a phenomenon known as 'grammar phobia' . Nevertheless, grammar teaching has enjoyed renewed interest in recent years; indeed, it has never left the classroom.

Many researchers support grammar teaching, particularly in L2 teaching. Ur (1988), for instance, argues that there is a difference between L1 and L2 learning, in terms of time offered and motivation. Learners of L1, regardless of 'natural learning', usually have more time and obtain more motivation, so they do not need to consciously plan the

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learning process. In contrast, L2 learning occurs in situations where time is limited and the motivation might be less. This assumption leads to two arguments: first, that a syllabus should consist of systematic gradual steps, which students should not tackle all at once; and second, that classroom plans should be arranged to strike a balance between aspects of L2, grammar being one of the significant components of any language. Such an arrangement is necessary to prepare for effective acquisition, considering the limitations of time and weak motivation.

In addition to such evidence supporting grammar teaching, Learners' knowledge of the grammatical system might be improved by focusing on particular forms of grammar and their meaning, which is what grammar teaching usually does. Four other reasons for the reconsideration of grammar are also cited:

- There are problems in the hypothesis that language can be learned without consciousness. Moreover, they cite that a conscious attention to form, or what he calls 'noticing', is required in order to understand well all components of L2. This point of view is supported by most SLA researchers.
- Depending on evidence from German learners of English, there are some structures which gain an advantage from being taught. This suggestion, known as the *teachability hypothesis*, leads to another claim, in which if grammar teaching corresponds with learners' readiness, it might be possible to influence sequences of development and to move to the next developmental step of linguistic proficiency. Such considerations are taken into account in recent studies regarding the place of grammar in second language acquisition.
- Communicative language teaching alone might be defective in some situations. For instance, some linguists have conducted research into teaching outcomes in French immersion programmes, and found that in spite of substantial long-term exposure to meaningful input, learners could not attain accuracy in the use of some grammatical forms. Therefore, certain grammatical forms need a particular kind of focus, in order to achieve a high level of accuracy in L2.
- During a period of more than 20 years, a large body of evidence has appeared to demonstrate the fact that grammar teaching has a positive impact. Such evidence is taken from the laboratory, extensive reviews of studies and classroom-based research.

It seems that these different arguments will continue as long as linguists disagree as to whether language learning is a conscious or unconscious process, and while cognitive psychologist argue over the role of explicit versus implicit language learning .

However, there is a growing conviction that the significant question is not whether the teaching and learning of grammar is needed or not, but whether it helps or not (Ur 1996), and if so, how? It is suggested that a combination of these opinions may be suitable to promote effective learning. Among the various approaches to grammar teaching, the P-P-P model, according to is very popular with many teachers. It first appeared in the 1970s and is considered to be easy to understand and apply. P-P-P, otherwise known as 'the 3Ps', stands for Presentation, Practice and Production. Each of these three elements is explained below.

i. Presentation is the first stage, where the teacher is supposed to present new items in clear contexts. Considering what the learners already know, the teacher attempts to introduce forms and their meanings in a variety of suitable ways (e.g. pictures, dialogs or situations), taking into account whether an inductive or a deductive model is more likely to be used. Thus, due to the nature of this stage, correction plays an important role.

ii. Practice. Learners are gradually led, individually or as a group, to use grammatical items correctly. By the use of grammar games, gap exercises or some other appropriate means, the teacher guides the students towards greater familiarity with the new concept, in which the controlled practice activities are applied.

iii. Production. At this stage, learners are supposed to be more fluent. They are moved from a focus on form to paying more attention to meaning (Ur 1996), by providing suitable practice. The teacher's role is limited, unless the situation requires his/her facilitation.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF P-P-P

On the grounds of the features described above, this approach has a positive function. For instance, Ur (1988) considers the 3Ps as part of her framework. Further support comes from who claims that this approach has its strengths, among which are the following:

- It allows teachers to work within a clear framework.

- It permits learners to gain motivation by giving them a strong sense of direction.

- It attracts learners' attention to specific aspects of the language system, in which the class does not need more real-time language use.

- P-P-P provides an opportunity to obtain a high level of ultimate achievement, since this approach promotes the learning of explicit grammatical forms.

- It offers a flexibility of use, since the teacher is able to focus on either forms or meaning in the light of the learners' needs and the situation of the class. He can, moreover, choose between association and discovery activities, depending on the circumstances.

SOME OPINIONS AGAINST P-P-P

As with any approach, P-P-P has its weaknesses. The following are some of the criticisms that have been made of it:

- It is claimed that although learners may study and practice grammar items, this does not mean, necessarily, that they are able to apply their knowledge in real-time communication.

- He also cites many researchers as finding that P-P-P seems to miss its impact in terms of spontaneous language use, because it focuses on selected and separate items.

- Considering learners with high marks in grammar exercises, Ur (1996) mentions that some of them make many mistakes in their free speech, due to their dependence on the device of conscious monitoring.

CONCLUSION

According to Celce-Murcia (1997), a communicative classroom provides a better environment for second language learning than formal instruction. It is an opportunity for students in the classroom to use language to communicate ideas and not just listen to their teachers.

Learning deductively and inductively is among the communicative approaches that encourage students to communicate fluently. For example, teachers who are using the inductive method take more time to perceive that a grammatical point it is not useful for their purpose. Corder (1973) in his investigation claimed more than thirty years ago that it most useful to use a combination of inductive and deductive approaches.

Richard (2001) found that CLT is the concept of grammatical competence. Grammatical competence concerns knowledge which can be used to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences (e.g. parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, and sentence patterns) and how sentences are formed. Many grammar practice books focus on grammatical competence, which expresses a rule of grammar on one page and also provides exercises which allow students to practice using the rule on the other page. Communicative competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

(1) Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
(2) Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g. Knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
(3) Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g. narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
(4) Knowing how to maintain communication, despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g. through using different kinds of communication strategies).

The principle of a communicative methodology is useful for teachers and English material writers have found ways to develop classroom activities. The CLT materials are still very popular tools in language teaching today. I will now briefly discuss the main activity types in CLT.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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