

RECONCEPTUALIZING GRAMMAR TEACHING THROUGH LEARNER CONTEXT AND COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

Dr. Shaik Khader Nawaz

*Associate Professor & Head, Department of English
Islamiah College (Autonomous), Vaniyambadi, Tamil Nadu, India*

Introduction

Teaching grammar usually gets contested responses from teachers and students. It is important and challenging for teachers whereas suffering and boring for students as quoted by Cindy Gunn & Ann McCallum. Looking back at the ELT (English Language Teaching) history of this unpopular component, the attention has clearly shifted from convex to concave focus. Teaching Grammar originated with translation followed by drilling exercises and eventually to CLT (Communicative Language Teaching). CLT is widely used and agreed upon by most language practitioners. CLT with focus on grammar is further endorsed in the form of task-based teaching. ELT or any science for that matter demands that research findings are blended with classroom practices. ELT researchers insist that teachers derive inspiration from students' own context and practice with authentic materials. In this paper, I would like to discuss certain practical approaches to fit our non-native tempo: identifying errors - building the sentences and corrective and additive feedback techniques. These approaches are effective and they based on learner's own context as David Nunan suggests an organic and non-linear method to teaching second language.

Teaching grammar has a celebrated history when it started from translation to pattern practice methods to communicative approach and finally evolved to the task based communicative approach. It is essential to quote Ms. RadmilaPopovic (SIT, World Learning) who said that idea of 'easy' or 'complex' grammar structures are related to the learning ability of our students. Hence, it is effective to work around this ability and make it robust for the easy grasping of *form, meaning and use*.

Every language teacher enjoys this prerogative where he/she gets to re-invent, re-discover on strategies, materials with his/her students. Language components include teaching reading, listening, speaking, writing coupled with grammar skills. As the learners are exposed to these components and exclusive deliberation of language *forms, meaning and use*, they absorb some grammar skills which will only need mending and elaborate use. David Nunan (1998) says that adopting a non-linear approach to teaching grammar is effective among non-native learners of English as the linear approach expects a learner to have gained in one grammar item before progressing into the next. This is quite hard to practically achieve and to put it to good use rather. He suggests an organic way of teaching/learning grammar.

Strategies Based on Student's Own Context – Experimental Analysis

Error correction or corrective feedback is one of the debatable processes and how to treat it remains with the discretion of the teacher. Diane J. Tedick and Barbara G (1998), in her article '*Research on Error Correction and Implication for Classroom Teaching*' suggest that the learners should be encouraged to self-repair.

Teacher often do the corrections during non-teaching hours. Usually the corrected scripts are distributed the next day. The job is to be done professionally and certain gaps are to be filled academically. The collected scripts by the students are accepted as marks oriented rather language focussed. This work is suggestive of capitalizing on the knowledge already gained by our students and mending from their own productions. Moreover, students have acquired their grammar whether it is acceptable or unacceptable but they are not alien. (They receive all instruction in English except Tamil or Urdu hours)

Scenario 1 and Inference

As part of the classwork students were asked to recall a few interesting things about their friend/ team partner. Then they were asked to write a passage.

He go to .. Boys Higher Secondary School. He dont have a job.

He loves Meap class very much. His favourite game is Badminton.

He lives near Masjid-e-Siddique. He studies at..Boys Higher Secondary School. He don't have a job. He likes his school. [Student Writing Sample 1 – Appendix]

He studies at gateway Public School. He don't have a job.

He's a student. He goto school. He study in 9th A2. He don't have a job. He like to play cricket.

He like to play Cricket and Badminton. No, he does not have a job. He live in Vaniyambadi.

In responses 1-4, 'He go..', 'He like..' and 'He don't..', the subject and verb agreement condition are to be corrected. Explaining the form alone will be of little help to the students. Instead of teaching them the perfect form, it could be more appropriate to mend the current imbibed form of the student.

In response 5, the student was incorrect in 'He like..', 'he live..', but has given the correct form 'He+does+not'.

Teaching students from their current imbibed language will help them to re-process their language. This could be done during the teaching hours to make learning more natural. These errors could be corrected with few grammatical explanations and re checked while conducting other activities.

Scenario 2 and Inference

Students were asked to write about their mid-term exams.

From the written script of students the question were framed to understand the process of mental framing of question (capturing the moments) while writing the passage.

1. [Student Writing Sample 2– Appendix]

In sentence one, the student was able to tell what exam. It was answering to the question *WHAT*.

In sentence two he answers to the question *HOW*- and word *ALSO* cripples his thought process into one idea.

2 The student has answered to the question *What* –paper (name of the exam)

- HOW IT WAS LIKE- world war
- HOW DID YOU-prepared well
- HOW IT WAS LIKE- very tough
- WHAT DID YOU DO-went to the class
- WHAT DID HE (TEACHER) DO-gave the papers
- HOW WAS THE EXAM-very easy
- HOW DID YOU WRITE-very well

Hence, writing his experiences was possible only in one word answering. To exploit his language resources, one of the ELT experts, Ritchhart and Perkins (2000) suggested a method *say what, say why, say other things to try*, to help students to recall the situation.

Same writing exercise was done after three days. This time, students were asked to elaborate with minute details based on Ritchhart's technique.

Now they recalled the situation in a mini-narrative form. [Student Writing Sample 3 – Appendix]

The student now has to answer the *WHY*-

1. *is not his mother tongue*
2. *not used in his locality*

Moving from one word short responses to answering *HOW* turned the production into narration.

1. *going to tuition*
2. *tuition teacher helped*

Conclusion

Bringing research findings to classroom practices results in significant changes to language teaching/learning environment. Language acquisition is a cognitive process, hence requires involvement of familiar knowledge to build upon. At the same time, it allows us to reap the collateral benefit of learner autonomy and uphold learner identity. The perspective to teaching grammar needs a paradigm shift such that learners are able to retain, extend and apply language skills to newer contexts.

References

1. Canale and Swain (1980). *Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing*. Applied Linguistics, 1(1), 1–47.
2. Corson, D. (1993). *Language, Minority Education and Gender: Linking Social Justice and Power*. Multilingual Matters.

3. Cummins, J. (1996). *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*. California Association for Bilingual Education.
4. Dolson, D. (1985). *The Effects of Bilingualism on Academic Achievement*. National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
5. Gándara, P. (1995). *Over the Ivy Walls: The Educational Mobility of Low-Income Chicanos*. State University of New York Press.
6. Gibson, M. A. (1995). *Promoting Academic Success among Immigrant Students*. Teachers College Press.
7. Krashen, S. (1981). *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Pergamon Press.
8. Nunan, D. (1998). *Teaching Grammar in Context*. *ELT Journal*, 52(2), 101–109.
9. Popovic, R. (2005). *Grammar Teaching in ESL Classrooms*. SIT World Learning.
10. Reyes, M. D. L., & Fránquiz, M. E. (1998). *Reframing the Debate on Language Diversity*. *Educational Researcher*, 27(6), 15–24.
11. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
12. Ritchhart, R., & Perkins, D. (2000). *Making Thinking Visible*. Harvard Graduate School of Education.
13. Ruiz, R. (1991). *Orientations in Language Planning*. *NABE Journal*, 8(2), 15–34.
14. Tedick, D. J., & Barbara, G. (1998). *Research on Error Correction and Implications for Classroom Teaching*. *The Bridge Journal*, 2(1), 1–7.