

The Importance of Grammar in Language Teaching and Learning

Khanh Cong Ly

khanhlc@hufi.edu.vn

Ho Chi Minh University of Food Industry

Abstract

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 it is good for. 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

1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent epoch of communicative language teaching, a number of language learners tend to assume that learning grammar when learning English language is not necessary any longer. Even though some native teachers suppose that teaching grammar is not really essential for communication, numerous language scholars support the opinion that grammar still plays an important role in developing the general language system of learners.

The fundamental aim of this article is to investigate the nature of grammar as well as various philosophies of grammar instruction in English language teaching. From the different viewpoints about grammar definition, this paper is going to discuss how grammar is necessary for language learners in addition to how grammar is reflected into teaching process.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It seems to be complex to comprehend, clarify, and describe what grammar is as well as how it should be taught in English language teaching (Ellis, 2006; Brown & Lee, 2015;

Richards, 2015). Grammar can be generally defined as “a knowledge of what words can go where and what form these words should take” (Harmer, 2015, p. 22). Following that, Harmer (2015) presents some vital factors of grammar that learners of English need to pay attention to which involves sentences and clauses, verbs, nouns and noun phrases, adverbs and adjectives. In a similar way, Ur (2012) explains that grammar is “the way words are put together to make correct sentences” (p. 76). On the other hand, Ur (2012) also remarks that the definition of grammar needs to be expanded in order to include all important features of grammar and the way teachers need to instruct their learners. Meanwhile, Ellis (2006) does not directly define grammar but clarify the term *grammar teaching* which “involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it” (p. 84).

Instead of straightforwardly describing what grammar is, Burns (2009, p. 76) considers grammar as “a nourishing resource” which helps students reinforce their language learning. According to Burns (2009), there are three main theoretical concepts of grammar that have affected the English teaching practice. First of all, traditional grammar considers language as a set of rules and learners need to identify as well as classify the words or phrases in a sentence into their part of speech. Secondly, formal grammar treats language as a cognitive progression happening in the brain and human beings have predisposition for it at birth. Thirdly, functional grammar is descriptive and this approach are concerned with how people actually use a language to communicate effectively with each other in everyday activities.

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 (Burns, 2009).

3. METHODOLOGY

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.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Grammar has played an important role in English language teaching with a wide variety of supportive evidence to prove the benefits of grammar teaching. For instance, Norris and Ortega (2000) conduct an extensive analysis of 49 studies and conclude that a focus on grammar leads to the overall effectiveness of language teaching. Another example is the study of Scheffler and Cinciała (2011) concentrating on the ways that the teaching of grammar can foster L2 acquisition. Because grammar structures facilitate the attainment of a learner's grammar output, grammar rules make a contribution to a sense of confidence as well as to the general learning process of the learners (Scheffler & Cinciała, 2011, p. 22). Another recent study conducted by Jones, Myhill, and Bailey (2013) examines the relationship between grammar and writing. From their research, a positive effect of a contextualized grammar teaching on students' writing is found out.

In Vietnamese contexts, many EFL teachers tend to separate grammar from the four language skills to teach independently. For example, Do (2013) investigates the growth and the current status of grammar teaching in high schools in Vietnam. According to Do (2013, p. 35), high school students are provided with isolated sentences out of the context of the lesson, then the students have to internalize the grammar points through grammatical

examples and exercises. Consequently, it is obvious that explicit grammar remains popular and the Grammar Translation as well as PPP (Presentation-Practice-Product) are still dominant teaching approaches in Vietnam.

Discussion

As far as it is concerned, what grammar teachers should teach as well as when and how teachers teach grammar will depend on goals of the language program, learners' variables including learning objectives, ages, level of language proficiency, learning styles. Among a wide variety of grammatical models to select, curriculum developers and teachers prefer to count on modern descriptive grammars because this type of grammar establishes links between form and meaning of the language (Ellis, 2006).

In addition, we should avoid teaching grammar in separation because the integration of grammar and other skills can effectively promote language learning (Burns, 2009). Besides, teachers need to consider the students' ages and proficiency level to decide to teach grammar inductively or deductively. Inductive grammar is better for intermediate or advanced learners, and deductive grammar is suitable for adults but not for young students (Do, 2013).

In general, if grammar is taught at the right time, at the right place, and with the right way, it can help students efficiently scaffold their language learning. Grammar needs to be integrated into other languages skills so that grammar knowledge can be developed harmonically with different aspects of language. Moreover, grammar lessons need to be put into purposeful situations instead of separate and unrelated sentences. This can support students to confidently use grammar rules and structures in their real life contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, grammar is not just a set of rules or structures, and teaching grammar can help learners of English speed up their English language learning process. Unfortunately, some teachers may not have a positive look about teaching grammar because they think that grammar is not very necessary to teach learners in the age of communicative language teaching nowadays. In addition, some teachers may not know how to make grammar lessons become lively and exciting. As a result, the boredom of teaching grammar in traditional ways cannot be avoided in language teaching and learning progression.

In order to teach grammar effectively, teachers need to input the grammar lessons into specific contexts or communicative situations instead of focusing on separate sentence structures. It is also necessary for the teachers to integrate grammar into other language skills and to inspire learners to be aware of the benefits of learning grammar. When grammar is taught with meaningful purposes together with other English language skills, students will inevitably recognize its importance. Consequently, students can see that they can apply the useful grammar knowledge into their everyday activities instead of just focusing on fixed and boring sentences in a textbook.

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Appendix A. An example appendix

Authors including an appendix section should do so after References section. Multiple appendices should all have headings in the style used above. They will automatically be ordered A, B, C etc.

A.1. Example of a sub-heading within an appendix

There is also the option to include a subheading within the Appendix if you wish.