

## METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING GRAMMAR TO EFL LEARNERS



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### ABSTRACT

*In this article we intend to demonstrate the sources and results of the appearing of the intersected areas in grammatical and lexical word formation. How to teach English as a second or foreign language has been heatedly debated as long as the subject has been taught. One of the many issues regarding the teaching of English as a second or foreign language is the issue of whether or not to teach grammar, and if we teach it, how should we go about it?*

**Keywords:** *approach, L2 acquisition, explicit knowledge, skill, EFL teaching, FL/SL, ppp approach.*

The role and type of grammar instruction in foreign language learning with particular reference to EFL has been the subject of SLA research and discussion for decades. In recent times, we should say, grammar instruction has been recognized as an essential and unavoidable component of language learning and us [Doughty, C., & Williams., 1998]. It is seen as valuable, if not indispensable, within the context of EFL teaching and learning.

Previous studies on students' and teachers' attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction in the context of language learning suggest a disparity between students and teachers. While students favor formal and explicit grammar instruction and error correction, teachers favor communicative activities with less conscious focus on grammar.

The term “grammar” has been defined in the number of ways by language teachers and grammarians who have influenced and been influenced by different approaches to teaching grammar [Doughty, C., & Williams., 1998].

Different approaches to looking at the language, from syntactic descriptions to attempts to show the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of grammar, are reflected in a different ways grammar has been taught. In EFL/ESL teaching, grammar has been viewed in 3 different ways: grammar like rules, grammar like form, and grammar like

resource. In some cases, grammar instruction has meant learning the rules; in the others, practicing the form; in others understanding how grammar helps to convey the meaning and intention of a message. The best approach is perhaps to see grammar like one of many resources that we have in language which helps all of us to communicate. We must see how grammar relates to what we want to say or write, and how we expect others to interpret our language use and its focus.

The teaching of second-language grammar in higher education is a topic of widespread concern to both teachers and students alike. From time to time, very strong positions are taken, for example, “At any time, at any stage and in any circumstances, grammar teaching can’t be diluted. It ought to be the important part in foreign language teaching in China”

Many students and teachers tend to view grammar like a set of restrictions on what is allowed and disallowed in language use – „a linguistic straitjacket“ in Larsen-Freeman’s words , but some may consider grammar as something that liberates rather than represses: " ... grammar isn’t a constraining imposition but a liberating force: it frees us from a dependency on context and the purely lexical categorization of reality"[Widdowson, 1990:86.]. The implications of that statement for our understanding of the nature of grammar and the role it plays in communication are explored, and how this understanding might inform approaches to teaching grammar in 2 language classrooms is discussed.

Besides the place/role of grammar in language teaching, the factors involved in the teaching and learning of grammar and specific practices in the grammar classroom and several current research on grammar structures have added to the discussion on how best to teach grammar in ESL/EFL contexts. A lot of the books claim that they carry/include cognitive, affective and drama activities and games for EFL students which are directed towards stimulating their imagination and creativity.

The hard fact that most teachers face is that learners often find it difficult to make flexible use of the rules of grammar taught in the classroom. They can know the rules perfectly but are incapable of applying them during language use.

The importance of grammar within the FL/SL syllabus has been under discussion for a lot of years. Until the Communicative Approach in the 1970s, it was at the core of learning and teaching. The syllabus, a structural syllabus, was organized around the grammar to be taught. “The theoretical model that underlies the (cognitive) approach is that a language consists of a “set of rules” with an associated lexicon. It follows logically from the model that foreign language students must learn

rules of grammar. The suggested sequence is: study the rule (usually with instructor explanation), practice the rule (in grammar exercises), and then apply a rule in meaningful interactions in the target language”.

Since the 1970s, however, attention has shifted from ways of teaching grammar to ways of getting learners to communicate, and grammar has been seen to be the powerful undermining and demotivating force among L2 learners. In terms of motivation and students success with languages, grammar has been seen to be the problem and to stand in the way of helping learners to communicate fluently. As a result, teaching grammar has become unfashionable.

Statements such as “. . . the study of grammar as such is neither necessary nor sufficient for learning to use a language”[ Scheffler, P., & Cinciala, 2011] and definitions of communicative competence became widely quoted and accepted. The need for the shift in focus in teaching from language form to language in use was expressed, placing grammar within context and with content. It was felt that by concentrating on communication and communicative language practice, students would naturally “acquire” the language.

Models of communicative competence, with particular reference to FL/SL speakers, include grammatical competence like one of the core dimensions of communicative competence. Such kind of proposals led to the questioning of an importance of the role of grammar in the language learning syllabus. The syllabus must guide the learner in moving from knowledge of form to grammatical competence within the total communicative competence. It was suggested that “communication may generally be achieved most efficiently by means of the grammatical sentence or by a series of such sentences logically related” and this grammar was an essential resource in using language communicatively.

The discussion of learning and acquisition was led by Krashen, who proposed the model of 2 language acquisition where the processing of input, rather than grammar instruction, plays the pivotal role. Krashen and Terrell [1983] claim that if language input is provided over the wide variety of topics with communicative goals, an input would automatically include the necessary grammatical structures. Carter points out that „acquisition“ is the natural and unconscious process that takes place as the result of meaningful exposure to language that occurs naturally and using it for the purpose of meaningful communication. That natural process of 'acquisition' is in contrast to a conscious process of language learning, which occurs when explicit knowledge about language forms is provided regularly. The explicit knowledge of

grammar by adults is told to be useful in only one way – as a “monitor” for self-correction under certain circumstances.

In relation to FL/SL learners, the grammar pie was suggested showing the proportion of form, meaning and use. Teachers can alter the portions of the pie as appropriate for the lesson and for the students also. The syllabus attempting to move beyond form to grammar in use in communication was proposed by Yalden.

It was, though, observed that, despite an impact of the communicative approach on language teaching methodology (i.e., adopting learner-centered and task-based teaching methods), the majority of ESL and EFL learners had continued to learn from materials organized and presented in terms of grammatical items. An approach continued to be mostly one of presenting and explaining grammar points followed by controlled production practice.

Grammar instruction has thus been on the pendulum of language teaching methodologies swinging back and forth one extreme of grammar-driven methods to the other one of communicative methodologies. The thinking seems to be that learners’ attention should be concentrate on form within content-based curricula. These changes in methodologies are thus summed up: “The research on teaching methodology was concentrated on the relationship between language knowledge and practice and went through a U-shaped course – [it] first stressed, then unstressed, and finally re-stressed the language knowledge” [T.D.Terrell, 1991:54].

Two methods have been suggested for teaching grammar within an EFL/ESL context: Implicit/Inductive and Explicit/Deductive. 'Inductive' suggests a 'bottom up' approach, where students discover grammar rules while working through exercises/tasks, while 'Deductive' suggests the 'top down' approach, which is a standard teaching approach that has a teacher explaining rules to the students. There is still, though, controversy over the relative effectiveness of explicit and implicit grammar teaching. The complex relationship between teaching and learning, and the fact that how something is taught isn't directly related to how it is learned could be the reasons for that controversy.

On the one hand, there are researchers like Krashen who have persistently denied an importance of some explicit grammar instruction in second language acquisition. Other researchers have objected to traditional grammar teaching methodology where the teacher presents grammatical structures explicitly in a de-contextualized manner. In traditional methodology, the assumption has been that learners will develop the knowledge they need for communicative language use

through conscious presentation and manipulation of forms through drills and practice. An inductive approach to grammatical rules and principles is encouraged rather than the exclusive reliance on the presentation-practice-production approach of many traditional grammar books.

Explicit or we may say deductive grammar instruction, which draws learners' attention to linguistic form and structure, is characterized by 2 conflicting approaches: interventionist and non-interventionist. Supporters of the interventionist approach state that “given the low number of input/interaction hours in the typical foreign language college (70-150 hours) or high school (100-300 hours) instruction, explicit grammar instruction can serve to speed up parts of the acquisition process”. The non-interventionist approach supports the idea that explicit grammar instruction need not be given if enough comprehensible input is provided in the low anxiety environment. It's also argued that “the ability to demonstrate grammatical knowledge on a discrete-point grammar exam doesn't guarantee the ability to use that knowledge in ordinary conversation, be it spontaneous or monitored” [S.D. Krashen & T.D. Terrell, 1983].

The language acquisition process could be affected by explicit grammar instruction in 3 ways:

- 1) “as an „advanced organiser” in order to aid in comprehending and segmenting the input;
- 2) as a meaning-form focuser that aids the learner in establishing a meaning-form relationship for morphologically complex forms; and
- 3) as a means for monitoring, which in turn, will be available for acquisition in an output.”

Grammatical knowledge is viewed by many researchers like a significant component in second language acquisition. Most agree that the certain degree of grammar instruction is necessary to develop learners' language proficiency. No current research or theory, though, seems to advocate a return to traditional methods of teaching grammar or to a focus on grammatical features for their own sake.

Based on the results of the empirical study focusing on the ways in which explicit grammar teaching can facilitate L2 acquisition, Scheffler and Cinciata (2011) recommend that EFL/ESL teachers “should invest some classroom time in explicit grammar instruction”, as “at least some grammatical phenomena may be successfully taught as simple rules” [Scheffler, P., & Cinciala, 1983]. They refer to two kinds of benefit. First, simple descriptions of rules may lead to learners noticing the input structures exemplified by the rules, which can in turn lead to increased

comprehension. So conscious noticing of L2 features is necessary for implicit language development, according to many SLA researchers. Simple grammar forms help learners understand their own output and contribute to a learning process in general by increasing the learners’ sense of confidence, security and achievement. Thus the implicit-versus-explicit debate has been raging for over a century, the positions varying from an outright rejection of grammar instruction in a strongly communicative approach to a return to explicit, discrete-point grammar along a continuum. A lot of materials meant for classroom use encourage the inductive approach, probably because teachers are there to guide the learning process, while those meant for self-study usually adopt the deductive approach.

Though there are a lot of approaches to teaching methodology, 2 teaching methods are most commonly taught. Methodology taught in certification and training programs is generally either “PPP” (present, practice and production) or “ESA” (engage, study and activate). That doesn’t mean they are the best approaches. They are just the most well-known approaches and more likely to be requested by employers or Directors of Studies (DOS).

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