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Role of Grammar in Communicative Language Teaching

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Introduction

In countries like India where many languages exist, learning English as a second language is a challenging process and involves a lot of practice. English Language Teaching helps the learners of non-native speakers to learn English step by step. There are many methods followed in ELT and one among those is the famous Communicative Language Teaching which plays a vital role in English language teaching.

“Communicative Language Teaching has a greater concern with capacity for communication rather than repertoire of communication with the activity of learning a language viewed with a focus upon... predetermined objectives, all indicate priority of process over content” - Breen 1989

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Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching is a method of teaching a language through meaningful, spontaneous interaction in pair and group works in which meaning is paramount. In this method of teaching, dialogues play the communicative function and learners are urged to explore and experiment with their English.

There is no doubt that knowledge of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of a language. The aim of grammar is to describe the way the sentences in a language are constructed. There is a mixture of beliefs regarding grammar instruction in Communicative Language Teaching. Some scholars support the exclusion of grammar learning, as the ability to use the second language would develop automatically if the learners focus on meaning in the process of using language to communicate. Some researchers emphasize the need to include grammar teaching in CLT as the learners learn grammatical rules only to monitor the correctness of the language use which is in addition to what has been acquired. On considering these mixed beliefs, the complicated role of grammar in the process of CLT is discussed in this paper.

Role of Grammar in Communicative Language Teaching

Grammar prescribes the rules that are to be followed while speaking or writing a language. These set of rules govern how units of meanings may be constructed in any language.

“Grammar may be roughly defined as the way a language manipulates and combines words in order to form longer units of meaning” says Penny Ur. We know that Grammar of one’s mother tongue could be unconsciously imbibed whereas learning grammar of a foreign language like English is a conscious process which demands much attention. The learners need not memorize the rules but should acquire it by doing numerous activities.

Interaction, Contextualization

In Communicative Language Teaching, students have plenty of interaction for a period of time on massive amount of inputs like letters, newspaper extracts, picture stories, recipes, photographs, shopping lists, street maps, postcards etc. In CLT, contextualization is the basic premise and through this approach effective communication is sought. Attempts to communicate

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are encouraged from the very beginning even with minor mistakes. Students are expected to interact with other students through pair work and group work. In CLT, language is learned by the individual often through trial and error, with fluency and acceptable language as its goal. The fundamental goal of CLT is to develop learner's communicative competence in second language through communication and interaction with others.

Requirements to Achieve Communicative Competence

To achieve communicative competence the following four competences are required.

- ❖ Linguistic competence which in other words called the Grammatical competence concerns learner's use of lexis, syntax and structure.
- ❖ Sociolinguistic competence that concerns learner's appropriate use of language in different situations and settings.
- ❖ Discourse competence that refers to the speakers' ability to form oral and written language appropriately and meaningfully.
- ❖ Strategic competence which relates to the use of strategies that can be used to make up for the inadequate abilities in other aspects of competence.

Each of these competences plays a significant role in the acquisition of communicative competence. Though some teachers seem to deemphasize grammar accuracy in CLT classrooms which is a crucial one in the process of learning a language, various implications show the importance of grammar learning which is responsible to achieve a higher level of communication.

Grammar Teaching versus CLT

There exists a great controversy between grammar and CLT. Some believe that teaching grammar in CLT classrooms may have harmful effects. Montaigne says, "*Without methods, without a book, without grammar or rules, without whip and without tears, I had learned Latin as proper as that of my schoolmaster*". From this, one gets the idea that there is no need for teaching grammar separately in classrooms and by practice one can speak language correctly.

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One way to prevent grammar in CLT classroom is through structured input activities. The structured input activities help learners to encode grammatical forms through meaningful context. The main drawback is that sometimes the learners' utterances contain grammatical mistakes and as a result of excluding form focused instruction, the learners' output lacks accuracy. So some scholars argue that form focused instruction and communicative activities should be combined. If students learn from context by combining grammar in CLT they pay more attention to target forms and this results in successful language learning.

Data Analysis

Data was collected regarding the role of grammar in CLT in various circumstances. The study from the below given Data shows how grammar plays a vital role in CLT. Audio clippings of Pair works were given as Data. A telephonic conversation (Audioclip1) and a meeting of two friends after holidays (Audioclip2) were given as samples. Differences between two clippings show the progress of students after learning grammar separately in classroom. Mistakes and inhibition of students are evident in first audio clipping whereas in the second we can find much progress.

[Audioclip1.m4a](#)

[Audioclip2.m4a](#)

Proof that Shows that Grammar is Not Necessary in CLT

- In spoken English classes held for some High school students, Communicative Language Teaching approach was followed and considerable progress in the students' spoken English was observed. No grammar rules were taught to them during the two-month course and they started speaking the language (English) in a better way than they were speaking earlier. The drawback of the result is that fluency and confident usage of language was obtained but it lacked accuracy of grammar usage.
- A newcomer to a state (let it be Tamilnadu) who does not know a single word in that state's regional language (Tamil) learns the language within a few months and communicates fairly well. The accuracy of the native speaker cannot be expected from

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this person and the language may be acquired after some rigorous practice of language usage. He/she learns the language not by learning grammar but by communicating with other native speakers which is equal to the CLT class tasks.

Proofs that Show Grammar is Necessary in CLT

- Students' conversation when tested in CLT classroom without teaching grammatical rules shows that they speak somewhat fluently and their individual performance may depend upon his/her competence, previous exposure to the language and confidence level. However some inaccuracy is seen in their language use. Students utter the sentences only with the aim of completing the given task. These mistakes would have been prevented if he/she has been exposed to grammatical rules. In CLT classrooms, even when mistakes are corrected by the teachers at times, the students will not be able to correct all their mistakes they are likely to commit in future. However, these corrections may save the learner when he/she talks in the classroom but all their mistakes will not be corrected by the teacher in all situations and therefore he/she may become the laughing stock in future when he/she makes the mistakes. If he/she is taught grammatical rules along with the CLT classroom tasks, he/she may be alert and keeping the rules in mind he/she may prevent their mistakes.

Conclusion

Through various studies, it is evident that grammar drills are important in language teaching and learning which, along with communicative activities, enhance their speaking ability. All believe that grammar plays an important role in second language learning. However perceptions regarding grammar instructions in CLT differ from one another. Some believe that teaching grammar explicitly is not helpful for students' Second Language Acquisition (SLA) process, while other teachers disagree with this belief. They indicate that some amount of grammar teaching can be helpful only because it soothes the students' learning anxiety.

The teachers' beliefs about the importance of grammar instruction vary. Their perceptions of an effective way to instruct grammar reflect their beliefs about the importance of grammar teaching. Some teachers think that an effective way to teach grammar is to provide

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students with explicit explanations, examples and activities related to the grammar points. Some teachers clearly express that a communicative way of teaching such as introducing grammar points through examples and activities, as well as using structured input is an effective method for grammar instruction. Thus most teachers who believe that language teaching should include both communicative activities and grammar instruction, practice these ideas in their classes. Some believe that explaining grammar rules to students before asking them to do activities is an effective way to teach a second language. Thus we find the role of Grammar in CLT to be vital and both grammar and CLT can be considered as being interdependent for successful second language learning.

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