



# SRI RAMAKRISHNA ENGINEERING COLLEGE

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## Grammar and Grammar Teaching: Changing Perspectives Volume 2

**Editor**  
**Dr. Vathana Fenn**

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### Significance of Prescriptive Grammar

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#### Prescriptive versus Descriptive Grammar

The difference between prescriptive grammar and descriptive grammar is a matter of great concern for the young learners of English. Generally, various rules in grammar usually make a few learners of English consider that English is their *bête noire*. This initial obstacle in school leads to tangible inaccuracy in the use of English language. As ‘Well beginning is half done’, the focus in the teaching of grammar has to be on acquiring comprehension of the dichotomy between prescriptive grammar and descriptive grammar.

Prescriptive grammar refers to the actual rules laid down for the users of language by the grammarians. It results in one’s accurate use of language. As stated in the book “Introduction to the Grammar of English” by Rodney Huddleston, “Prescriptive grammar aims to tell its readers

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what grammatical rules they should follow: Descriptive grammar aims to present the grammar that underlies the actual usage of speakers of the language.” (P.47) Descriptive grammar deals with the actual utterances of the language by the native speakers of language. The supporters of prescriptive grammar consider the following sentence correct: “My friend is taller than I am”. On the contrary, instead of the above stated example, the supporters of descriptive grammar usually convey the similar idea through the sentence: “My friend is taller than me” This kind of tangible dichotomy between prescriptive grammar and descriptive grammar may impede the spontaneous learning of grammar.

### **Preference for Prescriptive Grammar**

In such a scenario, the teachers should clearly make the students understand that it is advisable to follow prescriptive grammar since there is perspicuous proof for every correct utterance linked with prescriptive grammar usage. The descriptive grammar may have more variation. Teaching examples of descriptive grammar may be a penelope’s web, since there may be more variations in descriptive grammar. But teaching examples of prescriptive grammar can be within the learning limit, since the learners of English are supposed to adhere to the grammatical rules in British English. So, the teachers who teach English either in school or college should focus their attention on prescriptive grammar to make the teaching –learning process perfect and interesting. The following practical ideas may be followed for the successful teaching of grammar.

### **Motivating Statements**

Like in the teaching of any part of language, the teachers who want to teach grammar should initiate their teaching with the motivating statements like ‘English grammar can be easily fathomed.’ After teaching any concept very clearly with many examples, the teacher should check how far the students have understood. Here, one novel way of evaluating the students is that the students may be asked to write rules themselves after they are taught. When the students are elevated to the level of writing the grammar rules from their excellent understanding, their joy usually knows no bounds. Once, I conducted a chart preparation competition as a follow-up activity to evaluate primarily the students’ understanding of my teaching content and secondarily the students’ creativity. This venture resulted in unexpected positive response from every student.

### **Exactness of Expressions**

Whenever grammar teaching is followed, the teacher may give paramount importance to the exactness in the expression of views. Some scholars are of the view that the focus on accuracy inhibits the spontaneity of expression. Allowing the students to use incorrect English

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right from the beginning of their learning attempt may be continued to justify the adage: “Old habits die hard”. This catch 22 section of the teachers of English has been rightly observed in <http://bathrubber.hubpages.com/hub/ESL-coachingtechniques-error-correction>

“There is a fine balance needed to maintain lesson flow and develop student’s confidence. It is easy to tip this balance and the results are disastrous for your students. Over correction will result in students losing confidence and then always speaking hesitantly under correction will result in students developing bad habits & not learning proper grammar, forms, usage.”

So, the teachers should involve in a balancing act. The students may be asked to express spontaneously whatever they feel. If there is any solecism on the student’s utterances, the teacher may correct the errors without hurting the student’s psyche.

### **Some Novel Ideas**

The following novel ideas may be followed to maintain accuracy in the students’ use of language.

1. Collecting various readymade erroneous sentences.
2. Categorising the sentences into various categories of errors like tautological, generalization, concord and so on.
3. Asking the students to write a few sentences with their equivalent mother tongue.
4. Collecting them and discussing the errors in the sentences without telling the name of the students who have committed the mistake.

As school is the place where the foundation of any concept in learning has to be laid, it is important to provide solid foundation to the young learners in schools. For the solid foundation, the teacher should think out of the box to arrive at many novel ways of teaching grammar.

### **An Example**

The following novel method of teaching has been followed successfully.

Mandatory doubt clarification system has been proved beneficial in the teaching-learning process of grammar or any element of English. According to the system, the name of all the students should be written on the separate piece of paper. As soon as the teacher enters the class, the teacher may take two or three pieces of papers and ask the students to express their doubts in English grammar. The doubts may be related to any level.

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The advantage of this system is that the students may cultivate the habit of learning at least a grammatical rule themselves at home and of learning a few grammatical rules in school. The students may be apprised of receiving any lucrative prize for their unanswerable grammar doubt from the teacher. To create more curiosity, the teacher may deliberately not answer any question and award a student. The advantage of this system is that it offers a challenging as well as exciting learning atmosphere both for the students and the teacher.

To make this system more memorable, the teacher should acquire complete knowledge of English grammar. The teachers who are extremely knowledgeable can find this system more interesting. Besides, the teacher who wants to be more knowledgeable with more broad minded inquisitiveness can adopt the system. The important reason to focus on the prescriptive grammar is that there is an indelible proof for every utterance. The students may not ponder over whether they use correct English or not.

Grammar teaching can be made fun through a few innovative thoughts like teaching English grammar through newspapers, camps, cricket and a novel organization. Instead of cursing the darkness, lighting the candle should be prioritized. It is apposite to end the article with a positive thought: Where there is will, there is a way.

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### References

1. Rodney Huddleston : Introduction to the Grammar of English : Cambridge University Press
2. <http://bathrubber.hubpages.com/hub/ESL-coachingtechniques-error-correction>.

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