Teaching English Grammar: Teacher's Perception and Practice

Shashirekha S M

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Introduction

English language is considered as a global language. It is necessary to give importance to this language, because to communicate, exchange their ideas, feelings and also information from one person to another. English language is used both in written and spoken form and it aims at mastering four basic skills of language. Students are expected to master those four skills to communicate in English language effectively. In order to achieve the aforesaid aim language teacher has to consider important components of language. Grammar is one of the essential components, it is necessary to stressed by the language teachers in the secondary school.

Meaning of *Grammar*

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Thompson and Wyatt: "Grammar presents the facts of a language under certain categories and deals only with those which can be brought under general laws and stated in the form of general rules"

Sweet: "The practical analysis of a language, its anatomy".

Chomsky: "Simply a system of rules that in some explicit and well defined ways assign structural descriptions to sentences".

Need and Importance

Grammar will enable people easily to express information, feelings, and ideas to others. It is also essential to use English appropriately. According to Richard, Platt and Weber in Nunan (2005: 2), grammar is a description of a language and the way in which units such as words and phrase are combined to produce sentences in the language. From this we can say grammar plays an important role in combining units of language to form sentence. The grammar is the means through which linguistic creativity is ultimately achieved and an inadequate knowledge of the grammar affect the communication. Without the knowledge of the grammar of the language, one's learning of the language process will not complete. Due to this grammar is important it is reflected in communicate purpose functions of language and also in speaking and writing.

Teaching grammar at secondary school level is an issue and is an on-going debate. Such an inconclusive debate about how to teach grammar in the best way has had a great influence on the development of language pedagogy (Ellis, 2006). Teachers gain more experience and get more familiar with different views of teaching grammar; their personal theories are shaped and reshaped. Later these personal views of English teacher about grammar teaching form the basis for their personal knowledge and also influence their planning instructional decisions and classroom practices. Since teachers are decision-makers in the classrooms and since they are mainly responsible for students' learning, they should know the issues regarding grammar. This will help them to know the relevant practical views.

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Review of Related Literature

Grammar is one of the important areas, which is affected by teachers' perception. Teaching of grammar at secondary school level is greatly influenced by teacher's perception. Research reveals shifting paradigms regarding the importance of teaching grammar seems to have largely affected teachers' perception, however despite the fact that the importance of research into the psychological context of second language teaching has been pointed out over the years (Borg, 1999; Barnard and Scampton, 2008). Only in the past two decades the influence of second language teachers' cognitive process on their classroom instruction has been taken into consideration (Barnard and Scampton, 2008). Some research on English language teaching teachers' beliefs shows reveals the belief system of teachers of English grammar in terms of its influence on teaching practice in resistance to change (Farrels, 1999). In the same way Richards, et al., (2001) examined the beliefs of a group of in-service course teachers about grammar. The findings revealed that many teachers followed a communicative approach to teaching in its strong form, while others showed a strong commitment to the direct grammar teaching in language learning.

Research reveals that there is now agreement in general education studies that teaching is a cognitive activity and that teachers' beliefs greatly impact their instructional decisions in the classroom (e.g., Shavelson and Stern, 1981; Tillman, 2000). Second language education teaching is now viewed as a complex cognitive activity (Borg, 2003). As Borg (2003) suggests "teachers are active thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically oriented, personalized, and context sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, beliefs" (p, 81). Indeed, research has indicated that teachers possess a vast array of complex beliefs about pedagogical issues students and classroom practices (Berliner, 1987, Borg, 1998, 2003, Burns, 1992; Shavelson and Stern, 1981).

Teacher Beliefs

These beliefs are said to form structured set of principles and are derived from a

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teachers' prior experiences, school and practices, and a teacher's individual personality (Borg, 2003). Furthermore and as noted by Shavelson and Stern (1981), what teachers do in the classroom is said to be governed by what they believe and these beliefs often serve as a filter through which instructional judgments and decision are made. Teacher beliefs consist of tacitly held and learning beliefs (Kagan, 1992) that they are generally stable and they reflect the nature of the instruction the teacher provides to students (Hampton,1994).

Teacher Beliefs Relating to Language Teaching

In the area of language teaching, teacher beliefs have been examined to see how personal beliefs and knowledge of the pedagogical systems of teaching have informed the instructional practices' and decisions of teachers of English as a second language (e.g., Borg, 2003; Burns, 1992; Golombek, 1998). In addition the study of teacher beliefs, as Richards, Gallo and Renandya (2001) have pointed out, "forms part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualize their work" (p, 42). Studies by Ng and Farrels (2003) and Yim (1993) investigated the extent to which teachers' theoretical beliefs influenced their classroom practices, and found evidence to suggest that what teachers say and do in the classroom are governed by their beliefs.

The present study reveals English teachers' perception and practices about grammar teaching and it also offers some suggestions based on their perception and practices.

Objectives of This Study

1. To find out the secondary school English language teacher's perception on grammar teaching.

2. To examine classroom practices of grammar teaching.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative case study. To identify and examine the perception of teachers about grammar teaching and to know the classroom practices of teachers, the

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investigator prepared and used two tools: interview and observation. Investigator collected data from ten different secondary school English teachers (including male and female teachers) and the collected data was analyzed qualitatively.

Sample

In this study there were ten participants who are teaching English in a secondary school situated in Bangalore. The participant-teachers had varied levels of teaching experience.

Tools

To know the perception and practices English teachers about English grammar teaching at the secondary school level, the investigator used the following tools.

1. Interview

2. Observation

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Data Collection

Investigator collected data from secondary school teachers through non-participant observation and interview. Two classroom observations were conducted for each participant in order to capture the details of how they carried out grammar instruction in their classroom. Observation was recorded in field notes, which included what was happening in the class, the teachers' behavior, the students' responses as well as questions, and relevant thoughts that came up during the observations.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed and compared with the participants' actual teaching from the observation and response from the interviews. The investigator analyzed the collected data qualitatively.

Findings of the Study

These are the major findings of the study:

1. All participant-teachers said that grammar instruction is very important in English language learning. But the classroom observation of the teaching conducted in the classrooms by the investigator showed that the teachers do not give much importance to grammar teaching.

2. Most of the teachers do not teach grammar regularly. The investigator observed that there were many opportunities to present grammar in functional way but no teacher concentrated on functional grammar.

3. The participant-teachers taught only formal grammar.

4. All participants said that they used inductive method while teaching grammar. But this was not true.

5. They said they provided opportunity for learning grammar, but actually they gave less opportunity to learn grammar.

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6. All the participants said that they presented grammar item in different ways and combinations. Only some of them created relevant situations, used charts, pictures, etc.

7. No participant provided opportunity to students for explicit discussion of grammar rules.

8. Some of the participants gave practice to learn grammar items. A few gave oral and written practices.

9. All the participant-teachers presented only one item at a time.

11. Every participant-teacher evaluated his or her grammar ability in different ways.

12. No participant-teacher set objectives to teach grammar.

13. Individual correction was used by the participant-teachers to correct the grammar items of their learners.

14. Almost all the participant-teachers taught grammar as prescribed in the textbook.

Suggestions

It is necessary to orient every English teacher about the importance of grammar in language learning. Encourage them to teach functional grammar in the class by using inductive method. Orient teachers to provide opportunity to students to learn grammar in a natural way. Organize workshops for teachers about varied ways of presenting grammar and on how to explain the rules with the help of examples. Grammar is one of the important aspects of language; teacher has to give more practice. Teacher has to use different tasks, activities, and exercise for the grammar item under practice and they should present only one item at a time. Every class teacher should set certain objectives and after the class they have to check whether they achieved those objectives. For effective teaching, orient them to use technological aids in the class. They should give multiple opportunities to learners to learn grammar in addition to what is required in the prescribed textbook.

Conclusion

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Grammar is one of the important aspects of language learning. It is necessary to give importance to grammar instruction in secondary school. Teacher perception is a base for their classroom practices. So, it is important for us to find out about the teachers' perception. Based on their perception and practices it is essential to give some suggestions, which help to improve the grammar instruction and classroom practice. This should help the learner to learn the language in effective and efficient ways. So it is the need of the hour to know the English teacher perception and practice and suggest to them to incorporate suitable methods in their regular grammar instruction.

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