The Importance of Grammar in English Language Teaching - A Reassessment

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Abstract

The Word *Grammar* means different things to different people. To the ordinary citizen, it connotes to correctness or incorrectness of the language that he or she speaks. To a school student, it means an analytical and terminological study of sentences. Knowledge of grammar helps the student in the correction of mistakes and improvement of written work. A person can't learn a foreign language accurately only through a process of unconscious assimilation. Grammar is a sure ground of reference when linguistic habits fail us. So grammar is indispensable for the student. In this paper my aim is to bring the attention of the language teacher as well as the learner about the real utility of grammar in teaching English language. Hence, let's discuss some given statements below.

Role of Communication

Now-a-days communication has become the heart and soul of the human life. The process of communication chiefly deals with speaking, listening, reading and writing. No one really learns grammar. It has become natural phenomenon that we start speaking what everybody speaks around us. We gradually develop a better sense of understanding with the passage of time. We don't study grammar of our own mother tongue to use it for daily speaking, but when we need to polish our own mother tongue or we want to learn a foreign dialect, we have to study its grammar and we usually do that. When we come to learn a new language like English language, we need to study its grammar; the importance of grammar cannot be ignored or neglected, and before we do that we need to understand what grammar is.

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What is Grammar?

Grammar is the study of words and the ways words work together; an invisible force

that guides us as we put words together into sentences. Any person who communicates using

a particular language, consciously or unconsciously becomes aware of the grammar of

that language. But in this context I would like cite a wonderful example as described "A

writer has given a beautiful analogy to illustrate the use of knowledge of Grammar. Imagine

two car drivers. The first driver knows only driving and nothing about the working of the

engine. He feels helpless whenever there is some trouble with the machinery. The second

driver knows driving and also understands the working of the machinery. The person who

knows grammar is like this second driver. In case he doubtful about the correctness of a

particular thing, his knowledge of grammar comes to his rescue (Kohli, 116)". Therefore, to

speak in a clearer and more effective manner we have to study grammar. For the person who

has unconscious knowledge of grammar, it may be sufficient for simple language use. But the

persons who wish to communicate in the artistic manner with well-defined structures must go

for the greater depth of understanding and proficiency what the study of grammar offers.

Genesis of Grammar

It is certainly worth studying about the genesis of Grammar. What else might be the true

definition of grammar? I am sure that my title might be misleading. I am not going to speak

much about good grammar or bad grammar. My focus is on the chronological development and

usage of grammar by writers, scholars and teachers of English.

Let's have a close study of the statements that clearly express different types and

interpretations, which is the focal point of my discussion. In this connection, let us consider

some of the claims made by one of the most outstanding Grammarians of English Language

acclaimed widely stated below:

Latin has a good deal of Grammar, but English has hardly any. (Quirk, 78)

It is probably a correct saying that there are very few inflexions in English grammar. It

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has grown up as an easy and simplified language. Thus, Sir Philip Sidney towards the end of his essay *The Apologyie for Poetrie* states that "Nay, truly, it hath that praise, that it wants not grammar; for grammar it might have, but needs it not; being so easy in itself, and so void of those cumbersome differences of cases, genders, moods, and tenses; which, I think, was a piece of the tower of Babylon's curse, that a man should be put to school to learn his mother tongue" (Sidney). And he has accepted the criticism that English has little grammar. On such an issue, George Perkins Marsh, American philologist, in his *Lectures on the English Language* (1866) which was published more than a century ago is of the opinion that English language as "having no grammar" (Marsh,73)

French has a good logical Grammar but English is full of irregularities and idioms. (Quirk, 79)

The aforesaid statement clearly shows the distinction between French & English. The former shows the consistency and the latter seems more idiomatic. During teaching-learning process we explain to the EFL students the rules and regulations of grammar and its structural approach. But the idiomatic usage often point to the understanding of the learners to a greater height. It is also further to match with the said statement given below.

French has a good, well-defined Grammar, but in English you are free to speak as you like. (Quirk, 80)

We know that English speakers generally have freedom to devise new words or borrow word, and even add new innovative constructions. Indeed, we have the strong notion that where a language academy exists, there is usually a strong tradition for an insistent teaching of the rules. Thus French usually follow some strict rules of grammar. On the other hand flexibility characterizes use of English as per one's full-fledged autonomy. So this is the difference that a speaker of English avails himself of speaking English.

Jespersen wrote a good Grammar but Nesfield's is boring. (Quirk, 81)

It is comprehended from the above criticism that some grammars are written for mature scholars; some are for the immature school children; some are for foreign learners;

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some for native speakers; some have the aim of giving the history of every construction; some are concerned with the contemporary language, too. All these are written with a purpose which can bring results with positive value for the learners. Thus, these two Grammarians are evaluated as per their theory propounded by them.

Chomsky has devised good Grammar, but Traditional Grammar is unenlightening. (Quirk, 82)

A strong contradiction arises when we think of the grammatical approaches made by Chomsky against the traditional notion of grammar. Though we are concerned with the fundamental theories of conforming to study language, the understanding of the use of the word "grammar" does not merely require that we comprehend the nature of the relation between a theory and the material it needs to express. It means one requires a faire amount of knowledge of a specific theory. We also find teachers eager to reject *Traditional Grammar* and try to replace it by the new grammar. There is not one new grammar but many different aims. In my view, there is no new one but the reproach to the traditional one by a new style.

Grammar challenges but brings more benefit

- For teaching concepts on subject, verb, clause and phrases.
- For teaching the translation method.
- For teaching bilingual method.
- For teaching structural approach and traditional Methods.

Hence, I would like to state my opinion that knowing a language is not the same thing as knowing about it. Knowing a language means mastering over its four basic skills, viz., "(a) Listening, (b) Speaking, (c) Reading and (d) Writing" (Kohli, 32). Here, the listening and the reading are passive skills whereas the speaking and the writing are active skills. The Knowledge of the language makes us to know the meaning of isolated words or sentences or the rules of grammar. Talking about the language does not mean knowing language and using it. If we consider language as speech, as the linguists do, then knowing a language means to use its grammatical patterns as well as proper usage.

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