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Inductive and Contextual Approaches to English Grammar Teaching

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Abstract

This paper highlights that, for the acquisition of the second language, a learner requires to internalize grammar, for that it, essentially, should be taught in inductive and contextual approaches. However, in Bangladesh, English grammar is taught separately and deductively through rules memorization. Due to learning grammar in the deductive approach, a learner merely develops a receptive skill rather than the productive one. On the other hand, the inductive approach is a rule discovery, self-directed, learner centered and bottom-up teaching in which the new grammatical items are presented to learners in carefully selected intelligible linguistic data, in the context, illustrating the use of the particular grammatical point. Through this controlled and freer practice, on the basis of the model, learners try to arrive at some generalizations which

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assist them to recognize the underlying regularities in the data and to formulate their own explanation of the rules governing the material presented.

The paper also focuses on some lesson plans and classroom activities to show how the teachers can help the students to use the productive skills by generalizing the grammatical rules. For the study, the present paper will collect primary data from some of the renowned private universities of Bangladesh. The paper will obtain secondary data as well, that is already collected by some researchers, passed through the statistical process and published in various publications and newspapers.

1. Introduction

“Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill” (Krashen, 1987). It means that in language acquisition students don’t need to focus on grammar structure rather they require ‘meaningful interaction’ in the target language. According to Krashen (1987), acquisition requires natural communication; speakers don’t need to be conscious about structure of the language rather their basic concern should be the messages they are producing and comprehending. But in Bangladesh, one of the most common ways of learning English language is the study of the grammatical structure. Teachers announce the grammatical rules and structures, and students memorize and those rules and try to apply.

This approach of teaching is identified as deductive approach of teaching grammar, which according to David Nunan (1999) is ‘the process of learning in which one begins with rules and principles and then applies the rules to particular examples and instances. (p.305). In this approach of learning, students follow the examples which are not in context. Most of the cases they don’t bother about the meaning rather concentrate on the structures presented by the teachers. Long (1991) has labeled this approach as ‘focus on form’ (p.44). In this approach, the students don’t achieve the ability to discover new forms and can’t produce new sentences on

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their own. While the deductive approach of language teaching fails to achieve its goal, the inductive approach can be a fruitful one for the students of Bangladesh. Inductive learning, according to Nunan (1999), is ‘the process by which the learner arrives at rules and principles by studying examples and instances’ (p.309).

1.2 Objective and Thesis

Inductive and contextual approaches can prove to be helpful in learning English grammar for the students of Bangladesh. This paper examines the current research in teaching English grammar and the role of grammar in learning language. This paper also attempts to enquire the traditional way of language teaching in Bangladesh with a view to understanding how the deductive approach is proved to be a useless approach of teaching grammar, and, if and how it can be replaced by Inductive and contextual approaches; and, how and to what extent inductive and contextual approaches can be suitable for the students of Bangladesh.

1.3 Methodology

The concern of this paper is to examine the effect of inductive and contextual approaches in language teaching to understanding if and how they can be effective approaches in English language learning in the context of Bangladesh. This paper also includes a short survey to measure the impacts of inductive approach. The methodology includes field work and critical study for data collection and data analysis.

1.3.1 The design of the paper

The paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is the ‘**Introduction**’ which discusses the present scenario, objective and thesis of the paper, methodology, design and extent of the study. The second chapter ‘**Effective Approaches**’ explores and elaborates some influential terms and theories to explain the concept of inductive and contextual approach. The third chapter ‘**Internalizing English Grammar**’ analyzes how inductive and contextual approach help to internalize English grammar. The forth chapter ‘**Theory in Practice**’ explores Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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the positive impacts of this approach on the students of Bangladesh. The last chapter, ‘**Conclusion**’ summarizes the paper as well as suggests scope for further research in the related area.

1.3.1.1 The extent of the study

The paper concentrates on the students of the Bangladeshi private university students. This is primarily a library research with a certain amount of empirical study. For theoretical discussion, this paper heavily relies on Chomsky and Steven Krashen.

2 Effective Approaches

As the paper explores the use of inductive and contextual approaches in the perspective of Bangladesh, this chapter elaborates and explicates the concept of inductive and contextual approaches. It also explores the concept of deductive approach in order to show the contrast.

2.1 Inductive Approach

An inductive approach comes from inductive reasoning stating that a reasoning progression proceeds from particulars(that is, observations, measurements, or data) to generalities (for example, rules, laws, concepts or theories) (Felder et al, 1995). In short in inductive approach we observe a number of specific examples and forms then we infer a general principle or concept. Inductive approach can also be called rule discovery learning. Learners learn the use of structure through practice of the language and later discover the rules from the examples. Eisentein (cited in Puji Widodo, 2006) states that the inductive approach tries to utilize the very strong reward value of bringing order, clarity and meaning to experience. In inductive approach of teaching the teacher presents samples (examples) of the language, and students discover rules from the sample through their prediction and intuition. This approach helps the students learn the grammar rules by themselves and student can know the appropriate use of forms in context. The students enjoy a learner centered environment.

2.2 Deductive Approach

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A deductive approach comes from deduction reasoning stating that a reasoning progression proceeds from generalities to particular. In this approach, rule, principles, concepts or theories are presented first, and then their applications are treated. The instruction is oriented to the perspective grammar, and the students face a teacher-centered environment. 'Dealing with the teaching of grammar, the deductive approach can also be called rule driven learning' (Puji Wdodo, 2000). Learners learn the rule and apply it only after they have been introduced to the rule. For example, if the teacher wants to teach past indefinite tense, he will outline the rules of the past indefinite and will instruct the students to complete exercises using the given rules. In this way students know and master the grammar rules and this way of explicit grammar teaching saves time. Though the students master the grammar rules, yet they can hardly use the language for the purpose of communication.

2.3 Contextual Approach

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2004), context means a 'situation in which something happens and it helps you to understand it'. The basic concept of contextual approach is to help students understanding the lesson well by relating the material with their real life and their own experience. This is an approach that helps the student to get a better comprehension and lets the students to explore the material by themselves. In this approach teachers keep themselves more focused on arranging strategies rather than only giving information.

3 Internalizing English Grammar

Grammar is an integral part while using a language. It is often argued that to learn a language, grammar is not an essential factor to begin with. However the need for knowing the grammatical rules while mastering or learning a language cannot be denied. Grammar is specially needed for the learners of English language of our subcontinent as their learning style depend on knowing the grammar first then knowing the language.

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3.1 Grammar and Language Teaching

The study of the structure of the language is very common in second language learning. But it should be mentioned that ‘examining irregularities, formulating rules and teaching complex facts about the target language is not language teaching but rather is ‘language appreciation’ or linguistics’ (Schutz, 2007). Therefore, type of teaching of grammar cannot be fruitful in language acquisition. According to Krashen, ‘the only instance in which the teaching of grammar can result in language acquisition (and proficiency) is when the students are interested in the subject and the target language is used as a medium of instruction.’ (Schutz, 2007). It means that structure can be internalized only when students learn structure without any conscious effort. Their conscious efforts are on the subject matter, not on the medium. In the process of learning an interesting subject they actually internalize the structure of the language. Once they internalize the hidden structure, they can easily produce unlimited number of grammatically correct sentences.

But in Bangladesh, the highest priority is always given on the teaching of grammar structure. Here most of the teachers and students are convinced that they need to learn grammar in order to be proficient in English. Teachers always keep their students busy in error analysis, finding irregularities and memorizing grammar rules. This type of traditional grammar teaching approach helps raising ‘affective filter’ and facilitates ‘affective variables’. Most of the cases it results in low motivation, low self-esteem, and anxiety which ultimately combine to raise the ‘affective filter’ and form ‘mental block’ that according to Krashen prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition.

3.2 Communicative Grammar

Grammar should not be the focus of the activity, but need to be addressed in order to communicate. However, in Bangladesh, grammar is the stated focus of an activity and teachers use deductive grammar explanations rather than using inductive and contextual presentations in the form of comprehensible input.

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According to Schwartz (1993), learner must 'have exposure to instances or examples of that particular language' (p. 148) in order to acquire grammatical competence. These instances and examples help the learner in internalizing the structure of that language which ultimately allows them to comprehend and produce the structure of the target language. In order to internalize a language a learner must have 'meaning bearing input' which according to Vanpatten (1996) is 'language that the learner hears or sees that is used to communicate a message' (P.5). Without this 'meaning bearing input' learner cannot achieve second language acquisition. Comprehensible input increases learner's ability to learn and speak the language.

'The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situation, containing messages that students really want to hear'. (Krashen, 1987). According to Krashan's input hypothesis, the learner improves when s/he receives 'input' that is interesting and a little beyond their current level of linguistic competence. He suggests 'natural communicative input' as a key to designing a syllabus.

3.4 Teaching Grammar in a Class room

As the students of this continent are taught grammar in an isolated manner, they find it very difficult to relate it when the actual use of English takes place. In addition, they never get the chance to use the language enough which makes them conscious users of language while writing and specially while speaking. Consciousness stops a learner from becoming fluent in a language. In other words, the natural flow of speaking or using the language is hampered to a great extent the moment a learner gets conscious of its rules, forms and structures. Moreover, the learners of English language always try to think in Bengali first then translate them into English so their L1 interferes with their L2 to a large extent. For instance, in Bengali there are no several pronoun differences for him/her. So, one basic problem that our students face while using English is in the use of pronouns. In Bengali language there is no concept for adding s/es with verb followed by singular subject therefore another rampant error that the learners of English Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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language in Bangladesh make is they hardly add a s/es when a verb is followed by a singular subject. In other words, they have a problem in making the verb agree with the subject while using the English language. After long drill and repeated lessons they might start adding s/ es with verb followed by singular numbers or subjects but they will again fail to do so the moment they get more than one subject in a sentence. Another frequent grammatical error that learners of English make is in the use of prepositions. The reason behind the commitment of the error again lies in the fact that it is absent in the case of learner's L1. So as teachers we have to be cautious about these issues while teaching grammar to our students.

This paper would like to propose a procedure for teaching grammar which involves five steps:

- a) Exposure to the comprehensible literature containing a representative set of sentences about an area of English grammar.**
- b) Paying attention to grammatical features with a view to understanding and using them.**
- c) Generalizing a grammatical rule after negotiating with the teacher.**
- d) Checking the discovered rules against some other pieces of literature containing the same area of English grammar.**
- e) Producing sentences of their own applying the newly learned rules with a view to sharing some personal experiences, ideas and feelings.**

The paper will further elaborate each step with a model class room material, as an example, relating to teaching the past Indefinite tense to the students at the first semester university level.

3.4.1 Model class room material

When Natasha was a girl, she *loved* reading. She *had* three bothers and a younger sister and *lived* in Uttara, where her father *used to run* the local post office- he's retired now.

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She *had* a very happy childhood, and *was* very lucky to have a kind and talented teacher, Mr. Raihan, who *recognized* her ability. He *helped* her to achieve a good result in her HSC exam, and to get into the University of Dhaka. She *studied* English, and then *decided* to become a teacher. In 2005 she *joined* the University of Dhaka as a fulltime lecturer. After one year, she *left* Dhaka in order to get higher education in London. When Natasha was in London, she *missed* her country terribly. She *came* back to work in Dhaka when she *completed* her PhD.

First of all, students are given this comprehensible passage containing a representative set of sentences about the area of past indefinite tense. Students are instructed to read the passage again and again in order to understand the meaning. Comprehensible input can be both written and spoken form, but it's better for the beginners to start with the written form.

In the **second** step, students are expected to pay attention to italic words and phrases. This is called 'typographical input enhancement' (white, 1998, p. 85). Here texts are italicized so that students' attention is focused on a particular grammar structure. Though the teachers don't point out the italic words or ask them what they mean, yet students are expected to notice the italic portions expected to comprehend rules implicitly.

In the **third** step, students generalize some grammar structures for the italic texts. They discuss with the teacher and figure out the grammar rules. Here teacher provides different clues and ask question in order to let the students think aloud. Ellis (1997) terms this technique as 'consciousness-raising tasks'. Teacher gives immediate feedback in order to avoid students' construction of inaccurate grammar rules.

In the **fourth** step students are asked to read other pieces of comprehensible literature containing the structure of past indefinite tense. Here students get more exposure to the target

language. They check and test the grammar structures against the new sentences. The more they get exposed to the structure the more they internalize it.

In the **final** step, students produce their own sentences. They are asked to write something applying all the newly learned rules. It's better to share their personal experience, ideas and feeling. In this case they are asked to write about their own childhood.

4. Theory in practice

So far this paper provides some theoretical evidence supporting the use of inductive and contextual approach and the right procedure to use them in the class room of Bangladesh. This chapter presents a practical example in order to check and support the theoretical discussion.

4.1 Survey

A survey was conducted in order to measure how much affective the inductive approach for the students of Bangladesh. The findings of the survey effectively helped to support the theoretical discussion of the paper. To conduct the survey a class of 30 students was divided into two groups titled 'Group A' and 'Group B'. They were first year student of basic composition attending the course of 'Basic Composition' in the Department of English.

4.1.1 Procedure

This was an experiment conducted in the semester of summer 2012. At the beginning of the semester a class of 30 students of the Department of English was asked to sit for a proficiency test. The result of the test was carefully preserved to be compared with the final test which was supposed to be conducted at the end of the semester. Then they were divided into two groups according to their learning style. Those who love to learn grammar through rules memorization are put into the same group. 'Group A' was formed with the students who don't prefer to learn grammatical structure and 'Group B' was formed with those who are deductive Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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learners. In this way the class was divided into two classes and they were taken care of separately: ‘Group A’ with ‘Inductive and Contextual Approach’ and ‘Group B’ with ‘Deductive Approach’.

4.1.2. Result

All the students reported having high motivation during the whole semester, first, because for the first time in their life they were under such an experiment, second, because each of the groups wanted to prove them more talented than the other.

The average score of ‘Group A’ in their first exam which they faced at the beginning of the semester was 35%. It means all of them scored between the parameter of 30-40 out of 100. On the other hand, the average score of Group B’ was 52% and all of them scored between (38-65) out of 100.

At the end of the semester, when they had to sit for their final exam ‘Group A’ scored 65% while on the other hand, ‘Group B’ scored 63%. In case of ‘Group A’ all the students scored between the parameter of 45- 75 out of 100. On the other hand, all the students of ‘Group B’ scored within the parameter of 40-70 out of 100.

4.1.3 Discussion

The finding suggests that exposure to inductive and contextual approach can have a great impact in the internalization of English grammar. Though apparently for some students deductive approach seems to be fruitful but in the long run inductive approach helps in the process of internalization. Students taught in inductive approach feel more confident, motivated and anxiety free in performing all the four skills than the students those who attended the class of deductive approach.

4.2 Recommendation

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This paper analyzed the importance and application of inductive and contextual approach in learning English grammar. If we want to implement these approaches for the students of Bangladesh the following steps should be taken by the respective authority.

The national education board should take the first step. They should take necessary steps to introduce inductive and contextual approach in the text books. Secondly, school, college and university authorities can play vital role in the implementation of this approach. The authority needs to encourage teachers so that they understand the value of inductive approach and apply this approach in the class room in order to create a student centered environment. Thirdly, skilled, motivated and highly qualified teachers are required for the proper application of this approach. Educational institutes should increase the salary and other facilities for the teachers so that they are encouraged to work harder in their job. Finally, the teachers play the most vital role. They should be creative. They should always analyze the need of the students and should adapt their way of teaching according to the necessity of the students.

But, no matter, how much initiative the teachers, education board, colleges and universities take, it will not be fruitful unless the students are motivated. For the acquisition of any second language students need to be motivated, hardworking and determined.

5. Conclusion

The use of English is a point of paramount significance in Bangladesh. In all the universities of Bangladesh English language is used as a medium of instruction. However, the standard that the students have regarding the use of English even after 12 long years of learning English in schools and colleges are very poor. Most of the students are hesitant to even ask a glass of water in English. Some can write few grammatically correct sentences but most cannot construct a single error free sentence in English. What the students do throughout their school and colleges regarding English is blindly memorize rules without the knowledge of practical use of the rules and produce it in the exam scripts. They never write anything on their own in English so their analytical power is not triggered. For a student to master a language he/ she has to

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become the ‘user of the language’ rather than simply having the knowledge on the structure and form of the language. In order to reduce this problem, this paper refers to the use of inductive and contextual approach. This paper also proposes a five step procedure for the proper implementation of inductive approach. The technique for teaching grammar proposed here can be readily used at the university level grammar classes in Bangladesh.

5.1 Scope for further study

This paper basically explores how and why the learning of English grammar in an inductive and contextual approach can be fruitful for the students of university level in Bangladesh and proposes a five step procedure of teaching grammar. A further study can be done to enquire whether individual learning style has a relationship with language learning, if and how a deductive learner can internalize English grammar by using inductive approach of language learning.

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