

DISCUSSING THE QUESTION OF TEACHING FORMAL GRAMMAR IN ESL LEARNING

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В статье автор обобщает точки зрения на вопрос о необходимости изучения грамматики на уроках английского языка для специальных целей. Главный вопрос состоит в том, чтобы найти способы интегрировать формальную грамматику и коммуникативные методы.

Teaching grammar plays a central role in every ESL teacher's classroom. The important question that needs to be answered is: how do I teach grammar? In other words, how do I help students learn the grammar they need. This question is deceptively easy. At first look, you might think that teaching grammar is just a matter of explaining grammar rules to students. However, teaching grammar effectively is a much more complicated matter.

Nowadays there is no consensus among educators, psychologists and trainers about the role of grammar in learning a foreign language. Some authors believe that the formation of grammatical skills is one of the weaknesses in foreign language teaching. Grammar is not trained at school in general; grammar skills are formed on an intuitive, unconscious basis. So, it is "a weak spot" when students use language structures, but do not realize their grammatical information and therefore don't not understand their meaning and can't communicate properly.

When learning or using a language, many people find that their grammar is far from perfect. But grammar is inescapable; it is the backbone of any language and must be understood in order for one to communicate effectively. Every time you write something, you are being judged for your grammar, even if it is subconscious. You are less likely to land jobs, you are less likely to get replied to on social media sites, and you are less likely to get contacted when online dating. Having good grammar simply makes you look more intelligent, so it is important for everyone to spend a little time perfecting theirs.

We often tell students that the way an individual present himself to the world says a lot about who he is. This is often thought of in terms of address and physical appearance. There are other ways, however, that people send messages about who they are and that is through the way they speak and how they create and share words with others. One reason that it is vital that an individual learns the correct usages of English grammar is for the impression that it gives others. What we say and how we say it sends a message about who an individual is. Writing and speaking English correctly and in the proper context is a way to show that an individual is competent in communication and dialogue with others who share the language. Failing to use the appropriate English grammar can send the wrong message and can impact the way an individual is perceived to the outside world. That is not to say that those that are learning English or those that struggle with these concepts are not competent, but

simply it is saying that to others they may not be perceived as such. This is a sad but true fact regarding the way in which the world perceives each other.

Linguists often say that communication is the heart and soul of the human experience and the process of communication includes speaking, listening, and writing. It is evident that nobody learns grammar to learn his/ her own mother tongue and it is a 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, we have to study its grammar and we usually do that.

It is impossible to divide grammar and speech, we can't imagine any form of speech without grammar, and it is the material basis of speech along with vocabulary and sound structure. Grammar plays an organizing role. Inside our brain we have a so called system of stereotypes, which dictates the rules of the organizing words into a coherent way. Every person unconsciously uses this system in his/her native language. When learning a foreign language it is also necessary to start the system of stereotypes based on your grammatical minimum to form an intuitive grammar, which helps to organize your speech in a foreign language.

When looking at the advertisements on the English-teaching sites we can often meet such statement as "Don't Study Grammar". But we should remember that it is just a marketing trick. This attitude is shared by those who despite having been learning English grammar still can't use it. Those English-teaching scammers know too well how much hard it is to understand foreign grammar fast, so they try to deceive a student by saying that they can make you speak fluent English with no grammar. I think that it's a joke because it impossible to speak a foreign language without knowing how to put words into sentences or clauses.

When students come to learning a new language like English, they need to study its grammar, the importance of grammar cannot be neglected and before we do that we need to understand what grammar is. Grammar is the study of words and the ways words work together. This is an invisible force that guides us when we put words together into sentences. Any person who communicates using a particular language is consciously or unconsciously aware of the grammar of that language. It is important to study grammar to speak in a clearer and more effective manner. A person who has unconscious knowledge of grammar may be sufficient for simple language use, but the ones who wish to communicate in an artful manner and well, will seek greater depth of understanding and proficiency that the study of grammar provides.

The importance of formal grammar teaching was not challenged before the 1970's. Since this period however many different views have developed and impacted significantly on the development of language teaching practice. There is no agreement on the role of grammar in ESL teaching and the primary question is how it should be taught? One of the biggest challenges to formally teaching grammar in ESL comes from Krashen (1983). Krashen and Terrel's natural approach argues that ESL learners should not necessarily be accurate in all details of grammar nor should a grammatical syllabus be shaped into classroom activities. They do not claim that

students don't need to acquire (and in some cases learn) grammar but that students will acquire more grammar only if the course focuses on communication and provides students with sufficient comprehensible, meaningful input. Teaching grammar in ESL formally is seen to have a minimal role in language learning, the goal is to produce students who can use grammar as a supplement to acquisition in situations where grammar use is appropriate. Supporters maintain that reliance on a grammatical syllabus, no matter how 'contextualized', cannot be as efficient, even if the goal is little more than syntax acquisition.

They further claim that a grammatical focus distorts attempts to communicate. When teaching grammar in ESL, grammar explanations then should be avoided because they take time away from acquisition activities. The use of grammar texts outside the classroom is recommended when students can profit from such reference. Also, if grammar explanations are done in the classroom, a very short, simple explanation in the native language is acceptable. This kind of explanation can serve as input for acquisition if it is comprehensible.

This approach rests on five basic premises that have the following four implications for English language teachers

1. Give as much comprehensible input as possible, (talk simply and clearly to students – but not Tarzan talk).
2. Anything that aids comprehension is important, (use visuals and expose students to a wide range of vocabulary...)
3. Lessons should be focused on listening and reading; speaking should emerge naturally, (let the students speak when they want and feel ready to).
4. To lower the affective filter, lessons should focus on meaningful communication rather than form and input should be interesting and contribute to a relaxed classroom atmosphere. (Don't bore and/or put fear into the students. Use practical, interesting materials and make the students feel comfortable) [1].

From the beginning of a natural approach class the emphasis is on providing comprehensible input and a stress free environment, "It is possible that 'no pain, no gain' does not apply to language acquisition" Kashan, S.D. Students are not required to speak until they feel ready to. When they do, the teacher responds by giving comprehensible input, talking slowly and distinctly, giving the opportunity for simple responses. Students gradually progress from Yes/ No questions and answers and are only expected to use specific words after they have been heard many times and advertisements, pictures and other realia are used as the focal point for questions. Language acquisition activities can involve pair and group work followed by a teacher lead whole-class discussion.

With this approach, the teacher is the main source of comprehensible input and should provide classes that are interesting, friendly and with a low affective filter for learning. The teacher also needs to organize a variety of activities with materials that are meaningful and vary group sizes, content and context. In addition, teachers are responsible for the materials used and should choose materials based on two main criteria: Their own perceptions and elicited student needs and interests. Finally, the teacher has a responsibility to communicate clearly. So, what happens if we utilize this approach in class? According to Krashen and Terrell, after 100-150 hours a

student should be able to communicate with a native speaker without any major problems, read everyday texts and have enough English to continue improving on their own. Providing the right kinds of comprehensible input and meaningful communication, are the necessary and sufficient conditions for acquiring English as a second language according to this approach [1].

There is no consensus concerning teaching grammar in ESL. The focus of debate nowadays has shifted to the question of how it can best be taught. The communicative approach emphasizes language use with little overt grammar teaching and with tolerance for error commission. Educators continue to search for ways to integrate formal grammar instruction with communicative methods. It seems that the question of whether students should be taught formal grammar in the classroom has neither a generally agreed upon nor a simple answer. One point that most researchers and linguists concur on is that explicit grammatical knowledge does have to be either acquired or learned by second language learners. When teaching grammar in ESL, teachers should demonstrate their willingness to learn from a variety of different viewpoints with regard to the content of grammar instruction as well as the pedagogy of grammar. Grammar teaching in ESL needs to be taught in a manner that is consistent with grammar's new role. The remaining and primary question is, 'how to teach grammar in ESL' and the challenge lies in discovering effective ways to do this.

References

1. Krashen S.D. "The input hypothesis: An update" Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1991. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. 409-431.

