Teaching Grammar in the English Language Classroom in Saudi Universities

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Abstract: Teaching English Grammar in non-native countries is an arduous task because of a number of factors causing the lack of motivation and concentration of the learner in acquiring the grammar-based inputs of the English language in the classroom. In view of the core issue this paper attempts to critically assess the situations and experiences the English language teachers and the students have to go through in teaching and learning grammar at the university level in Saudi Arabia and seek a solution to the crisis engulfing the potential growth of the English language learners. Of course, the picture presented here is not meant for a generalization in the context of all universities in the EFL or ESL countries. It mainly focuses on the problems typically facing the non-native learners in their efforts to master the grammar skills of the English language. The effectiveness of different approaches to the teaching of English Grammar to the relatively inattentive Saudi students is critically evaluated as well. As a matter of fact, this endeavor on my part can be treated as a study of an English Grammar teacher based on sincere and passionate observations in the English language classrooms in Saudi Arabia.

Introduction: The grammarians have tried to define grammar in different ways suiting their own line of thoughts and logic. The mostly accepted definition so far is that of Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defining grammar as the rules in a language for changing the form of words and joining them into sentences. The role of Grammar in the acquisition process of the English language has been a debatable issue for the linguists, researchers and the classroom teachers over a long period of time. Some teachers emphasize on teaching grammar so much and to such an extent that they appear slavishly loyal to it. Others seem to ignore it so vehemently that they consider it a negative influence in the ESL or EFL learners' overall production of the integrated skills of the English language. Having an extreme view in judging the role of grammar does not seem to be the right approach to the teaching and learning of the English grammar. As a matter of fact, grammar is not an end in itself but a substantial means to an end. Grammatical rules are nothing but hypothetical codes to initiate the process of communication in an orderly manner. Given the fact that language is an ever changing phenomenon, there should be flexibilities in determining and practicing the rules of grammar in the English language. We should bear in mind that the rules add formal beauty to the language and give authority and control to those who adhere to it. Hence, we should learn grammar as much as is necessary to protect the beauty of the language. The use of grammar is in no way harmful to the spirit of the language as well. Different strategies adopted by the teachers in the classroom in teaching English grammar have not so far met the desired level of expectation of the concerned authorities in the Saudi universities in general and Jazan university in particular. Creating a grammar friendly environment in the language classroom is the first

stepping forward for the teachers to help the learners in acquiring the grammar inputs as part of their linguistic development.

Learners' control over language with grammar and without grammar: An analogy may provide some input to clarify the disputed issue of controlling language with or without grammar.

A little boy can switch on the TV and with the remote control in his hand; he can keep on changing channels until the desired one comes. In doing so, his primary goal of watching TV is served. But, if the TV is a little bit out of order, the boy cannot fix it up. On the contrary, the TV mechanics can both watch TV and fix things up accordingly. Of course, in the given situation the mechanics have more control than the boy and hence in a relatively advantageous situation to command things at their will.

Students' treatment of grammar in the English language classroom in Jazan University: As has been observed in the English language classroom in dealing grammar with the students of PYP(Preparatory Year Program) Jazan University, they are not naturally motivated to learn language as a consequence of which they feel increasingly frustrated when they are provided grammar lessons mostly based on drilling of exercises without a proper discourse.

Their lack of motivation to learn grammar rules in isolation ends up in de-motivating them to learn language with a welcome gesture and true passion.

Their lack of exposure to the basics of the English language at the elementary and secondary level creates a big vacuum to learn the language in true spirit.

Their disinclination to the aspects of the language requiring analysis, penetration and deep concentration makes them uncomfortable in the process of the skills acquisition of the language.

Their tendency to rote memorization and dependence on readymade materials altogether incapacitate them to approach language properly.

Their tendency to follow short-cut to pursue English language leads them to approach grammar rather negatively.

Unsuitable text-books, inappropriate testing methods detach them further from learning to know grammar rules in the classroom.

Their conception of grammar not being a key component of the English language results in overlooking it in the English language learning process.

Grammar contextualized in communicative approach to the English language learning in Headway does have little impact on them due to lack of cultural resemblance and proximity.

Teachers' lack of skill, proper methodology and strategy obstruct them to learn grammar rules of the language in the classroom.

Teachers' lack of knowledge of the Arabic language to explain them the subtle aspects of the grammar rules of the English language work as a deterrence for them in the overall acquisition of the English language.

Hectic class schedules of the learners and their specialization in different branches of learning lead them to ignore grammar in commercial perspective.

Lack of planning and balance on the part of the course distributors propel the learners to develop aversion to learn grammar.

Grammatical reasoning of the English language clashes with the pre-programmed grammatical order of the first language in their thought process.

Learners' tendency to learn something as fragments not as a whole contributes greatly to their lack of interest for grammar in the English language classrooms.

Learners' too much pre-occupation with the exam-related things deter them from learning grammar with necessary concentration and attention.

The students' lack of control and application of the acquired grammar knowledge:

There is no denying the fact that there has been some improvement in the students' level of proficiency in English grammar since they started taking skill- based courses in PYP, Jazan University. But nearly 70% of the students can not apply the acquired grammar knowledge in free hand writing. The reason being they don't have the conscious control over their grammar knowledge. Most of them cannot write grammatically correct sentences even on a common topic. This is where the teaching of grammar skills has to be integrated in the other skills such as Reading, listening, writing etc. The items of English Grammar in which most of the learners of PYP, Jazan University make mistakes include tense, preposition and the function of various types of verbs in sentences such as finite, participle, modals etc. Of course, the knowledge of those grammatical items is imparted to the students in the classroom without a long term effect. Consequently, they cannot reproduce that knowledge in real life situations.

Three may be a number of reasons for their lack of reproduction and application of the English grammar knowledge in practical situations. One vital reason is that the teachers don't teach the students the anatomy of English sentences. For example, the students hardly know about the following grammatical terms which are vitally important for the working ability of the English language in practical purposes.

1. The use of Subordination.(How the phrases and clauses are linked in a sentence)

2.The use of Coordination.(How the independent clauses are linked by cohesive devices in a sentence)

3. The use of Absolute.   (The part of the sentence having no grammatical link with the main clause)

4. The use of SPCA.   (Subject, predication, object, complement)

All English sentences revolve round the grammatical function stated above. Once the grammar teacher ensures that the learners master those formulas, it would be easy for the learners to reproduce them in appropriate situations.

Another notable problem that hampers their grammar learning is their lack of knowledge of the structure and functioning of the phrases and clauses in a sentence. Often they don't know the elements that determine the kind of a sentence. I tested some 31 PYP students in a grammar class on their basic understanding of the sentence structure. The following sentences were used as a model to ascertain their understanding of the clauses in a sentence.

1. One of the most notable gangs of robbers of that locality on that fearful night attacked Mr. Rahman the richest man of the village. Sentence Type: Number of clauses:

2. Do or die.   Sentence Type: Number of clauses:

3. Do as I say.   Sentence Type: Number of clauses:

Nearly 90% of the students wrongly considered sentence 1. as simple and couldn't find out the exact number of clauses. They have a silly notion that a big sentence is necessarily a complex or compound sentence. They lack the knowledge that a simple sentence can be enlarged by adding phrases into them.

Similarly, they mistook the sentence 2 and the sentence 3 for simple sentences considering the small size of them.

Most of them also don't know a simple sentence has one clause (having one finite verb), a compound sentence has at least two independent clauses (having more than one finite verbs) and a complex sentence has at least two clauses (having more than one finite verbs) of which one is the principal and the other subordinate. They hardly know how the linking devices such as Subordinate Conjunctions and Coordinate conjunctions form the structure of the sentences. Had they been given a little bit of input such as finite verb, the types of clauses, the types of conjunctions, and their functioning in a sentence, they could have easily identified the first sentence as simple, the second one compound and the third one complex. It is vitally important for a grammar teacher to ensure that the grammar inputs cover phrase structure, clause structure, the different types of verbs, linking devices and their functioning in a sentence. Besides, the students can benefit a lot from a grammar class if the inputs are substantiated with both the form unit and the function unit of the key grammar components that constitute the meaningful discourse.

The students' reproductive power and their control over the acquired grammar knowledge can never be ensured by task- based and exercise- based grammar teaching without imparting substantial inputs that focus on the determining and governing formulas of the sentences.

By no stretch of the imagination can we assume that without knowing the basics of English Grammar an ESL or EFL learner can effectively communicate in English with reasonable control.

Teachers' approach to the teaching of English grammar worldwide: All over the world, the language teachers follow different approaches to teaching grammar in the English language classrooms. None of the approaches seems to be totally successful. likewise, two of the theoretical approaches that are often talked about and practiced globally for the ESL and EFL learners deserve mention: Inductive approach and deductive approach. Inductive approach is bottom up approach. The approach suggests that learners can learn necessary amount of grammar for language acquisition in an implicit way through exercises, extensive reading, listening etc. In this regard, Krashen (1993) maintains that extensive reading significantly promotes grammatical fluency and a command of the syntactic resources of the language for both first and second language learners.

Elley (1991) also suggests a similar view "For learners of English as a second language, research suggests that extensive reading may promote the acquisition of grammatical structures better than explicitly studying or practicing such structures."

Research over a period of nearly ninety years has consistently shown that the teaching of school grammar has little or no effect on students. All these views advocate the supremacy of Inductive Approach as it is automatic and spontaneous. As a matter of fact, it still remains a debatable issue whether a learner can have reasonable command in English grammar through implicit learning.

Deductive approach to the teaching of grammar implies explicit learning of grammar rules through conscious efforts. It is also called Top –down approach. In this approach, grammar rules are presented to the learners first. They consciously pick up the rules and then apply them in sentences. They use the grammatical formulas for different purposes of communication in language. This is of course, a forced and artificial process of learning. Again, how much durable and lasting is its impact on learners depends solely on their individual cognitive capacity.

Teachers" approach to the teaching of grammar rules in the English language classroom in Saudi Universities, specially in Jazan University:

Context is very important in teaching grammar and any skill of the language for that matter. In Saudi Arabia, English is a foreign language. To keep pace with the globalization, the Saudis now come up with some efforts to learn the English language. But the efforts are not properly internalized into them to achieve sufficient mastery over the English language. The teachers in most of the universities teach Headway for the English courses at level one. But the students generally try to ignore the grammar lessons presented in Headway.

The teachers mostly apply inductive method of teaching in the English language classroom to impart grammar lessons to the students. But because of their lack of vocabulary and primary basics of English usages, the students stumble to get at the meaning of the texts in the book. The teachers depend

heavily on "EEE' approach to teaching grammar in the English language classroom. The approach implies that a learner has to have recourse to exploration, explanation and expression to learn grammar rules and formulate them in real situations. This is too much for a student in the given context to shape and master grammar rules following that approach. What happens? They are drifted into the darkness and lose ways and means to an end.

Similarly, some teachers follow 'PPP' methodology to teach grammar rules in the English language classrooms. 'PPP' approach that implies presentation, practice, production is virtually ineffective in the English language classrooms in Saudi Arabia because of the students' lacking in the basic knowledge of the structural pattern of sentences. Most of the students are not well informed about the form and function unit of the English grammar. Naturally, they feel confused and hesitant in dealing with grammar exercises in the classroom. This confusion and hesitancy leads to aversion in them to the English language eventually. Consequently, English grammar teaching has not so far been a soothing balm but a seemingly impassable barrier to the learners in PYP, Jazan University.

 Substantial Inputs for the English language teacher in the selection and presentation of grammar in the classroom: The aspects that deserve special attention in teaching grammar in the language classroom are grammar as meaning, grammar in discourse, and grammar and style.

a) <u>Grammar as meaning :</u> Grammatical rules are intended to make a meaningful statement.

When it is not amenable to reason, it is laughable. If we say,' the dead cow is alive' it does not make any sense even though it is grammatically correct. Linguistic meaning covers a great deal more than reports of events in the real world. It expresses--- our attitudes--- towards the person we are speaking to, how we feel about the reliability of our message, how we situate ourselves in the events we report, and many other things that make our messages not merely a recital of facts but a complex of facts and comments.(Bollinger 1977:4)

Here 'linguistic meaning' covers lexis as well. An example of how we express subtle shades of meaning can be found in the ways we have of expressing obligation, as in:

> 1. 'I must get in touch with my mother this week'(expressing personal obligation). How would the meaning change if the sentence is put into the third person?
> 2. 'He must get in touch with his mother this week'(forced and not implying personal authority). These examples show how meaning can change when the same modal verb is used with different persons.
> b) <u>Grammar in discourse:</u> This presents six ways of organizing connections which can be exemplified as follows:
> 1. **Linking signals:** These includes familiar signposts which signal what comes next, for example incidentally for changing the subject or that is to say to signal an explanation.
> 2. **Linking constructions:** These include conjunctions used to co-ordinate and subordinate clauses, for example and, or and if, because, and adverbial links such as however for contrast.
> 3. **General purpose links:** These include participle and verb less clauses, for example:

Being a farmer, he has to get up early.

He stared at the floor, too nervous to reply.

4. ***Substitution and omission:*** This includes the use of pronouns to refer back to noun phrases, for example: I like this coat better than the one (= the coat) you showed me before.
   and the auxiliary do to refer back to verb phrases, for example:
   He can cook as well as she does. (as she cooks)
   It also includes omission of infinitive clauses as in :
   A Why don't you come and stay with us?
   B I'd love to (do so).
   or omission through co-ordination, as in:
   Sharif ate the food but left the drink. (= 'Sharif ate the food but he left the drink.')
5. ***Presenting and focusing information***: This includes the way in which we create contrastive focus in spoken language by using stress, for example:
   One of the parcels has arrived, (but the other one hasn't)
   It also includes the way in which we can focus on important information in writing through placing it last in a sentence, for example:
   Arguments in favour of a new building plan , said the mayor, included suggestions that if a new shopping centre were not built , the city's traffic problems *would soon become unmanageable*.
6. ***Order and emphasis :*** This includes variations in presenting information in order to create emphasis. For example,
   1.It was by train that we reached Istanbul.The emphasis in the sentence is on train which has been achieved by using' it-clauses'.
   2.Up went the kite. The emphasis on the sentence is on up which has been achieved by reversing the order.

c) <u>Grammar and style</u>: Where English gives us a choice of grammatical structures for a particular purpose, the different grammatical structures available are often not equivalent, since they belong to different' styles' or' varieties'. We believe that the appropriate choice is as important as it is difficult(Leech and svartvik 1975: 11) In *A Comprehensive Grammar of English* Leech and Svartvik discuss varieties of English, using the term 'variety' to denote differences according to geography and situation, the latter covering a number of things: written and spoken language; formal and informal style; impersonal, polite, and familiar language; tactful and tentative language, and literary or rhetorical style. Using their set of labels, the same message can be conveyed in these ways:
I suppose he's quite a nice little boy, isn't he? (tentative, polite)
Nice kid. (informal, spoken)
In all, he was a pleasant child. (formal, written)
A cheerful child of pleasant disposition. (literary)
Lexical variations in the above sentences are clearly noticeable as well: style is as much a matter of lexis as of grammar. One task of the teacher is to help students to become aware that English consists of many styles. Some of these only needs to be recognized and understood but others are crucial for

production, such as the tactful style needed to avoid giving offence. For our learners, communicative ability involves knowing the different styles available, being able to recognize their characteristics sufficiently for comprehension, and making useful grammatical choices for effective interaction appropriate to the situation. For teachers and materials designers there are, therefore, careful choices to be made in what is to be selected and presented as a model for production.

Unforgettable tips for the grammar teachers teaching in PYP, KSA.

Careful selection of materials for the courses and presentation of those as per the context in the English Language classrooms play a key part in teaching grammar. The learners should be provided spoon feeding when it comes to teaching grammar to them. As they are not used to brain-storming in the classrooms the teachers should not stick to a particular pedagogy. Rather, they should alter the approaches from time to time. They should produce humor and fun in teaching grammar lessons. Sometimes, it is useful that some basic ideas relating to grammar rules are provided to them in an innovative way. Orthodox approaches to the teaching of grammar should be altogether avoided. The basic structural concept of the sentence like SPCA (subject, predication, complement, and adjunct) should be taught to them systematically. The teachers should constantly motivate the students to generate patterns of sentences in the English language classroom. The teachers should furthermore try to raise awareness in them for learning grammar in the English language classrooms. Focus of teaching grammar items should be primarily based on the individual cognitive power of the students and their mental status in the classrooms. Audio-visual aids should be used by the teachers proportionately in teaching grammar in the English language classrooms. Grammar class has to be interactive focusing more on the learners' response than imparting formulas to them.
The teaching of grammar skills has to be integrated in other language skills such as listening, reading, writing etc.

Conclusion: Teaching grammar in the English language classrooms at the university level in Saudi Arabia is an extremely challenging job. The teachers are required to be highly professional and self-motivated in teaching English grammar. They can better serve the purpose of teaching English grammar by avoiding dogmatic views and introducing innovative ways out of different linguistic approaches in the classrooms. Finally, the English teachers can help themselves well in teaching PYP students at Saudi Universities grammar lessons by remembering the great comment "Grammarians dispute and the case is still before the courts" by Horace.

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Teaching grammar in an ESL / EFL setting is different from teaching native speakers and there are important questions to address before you begin. Â Kenneth Beare is an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and course developer with over three decades of teaching experience. our editorial process. Kenneth Beare. Updated June 26, 2018. Â Is there a computer in the classroom? The more learning resources you have the easier it will be for you to employ different strategies when teaching your students grammar. For example, a group of students who like using computers could use the computer to study a certain grammar task while another group who prefers spoken explanations might prefer to have you explain the point with a number of examples. World Learning Teaching Grammar Course Description. Professional Development for Teacher Trainers Delivered by Arizona State University Course Overview This course is designed for both novice and experienced teacher trainers. Participants will develop and polish their skills and knowledge base of evidence-based methods for delivering comprehensive, engaging, and relevant teacher trainings. Learners will be introduced to methods for crafting, presenting, and evaluating effective teacher training workshops so they can apply concepts and theories to the production of impactful teacher training in...Â Iowa State University. Using Educational Technology in the English Language Classroom. Course Description. Some researchers in language acquisition and teachers claim that grammar should be taught explicitly, as rules. Others point to the teaching of grammar implicitly, suggesting that students acquire language structure only through meaningful exposure in context. As a result they create their own â€œlanguage rulesâ€ implicitly rather than having the rules taught explicitly. Letâ€™s make sure we have a solid understanding of the two approaches to language instruction. Deductive instruction is a â€œtop-downâ€ approach, meaning that the teacher starts with a grammar rule with specific examples, and the rule...Â Digital Can Do Statements in the Language Classroom. The PACE Model: Teach Foreign Language Grammar Inductively as a Concept. %d bloggers like this Teaching grammar is probably one of the most challenging aspects of teaching a foreign language. We need to make sure the students assimilate what we are trying to deliver and feel comfortable using it on a day-to-day basis. In this article, we will have a look at different procedures and techniques of teaching grammar. PPP.Â At every stage of teaching grammar (presentation, practice, production) the work is organised in the micro three-phase framework.This ensures the assimilation of the language and its future application by the student in relevant situations. Now, letâ€™s look at some other ways of grammar presentation below which have worked for many classes, mine included. MFP. Different strategies adopted by the teachers in the classroom in teaching English grammar have not so far met the desired level of expectation of the concerned authorities in the Saudi universities in general and Jazan university in particular. Creating a grammar friendly environment in the language classroom is the first stepping forward for the teachers to help the learners in acquiring the grammar inputs as part of their linguistic development. 1 Express, an International Journal of Multi Disciplinary Research ISSN: 2348 â€“ 2052 , Vol. 1, Issue 1, January 2014 Available at: www.express-journ