

Teaching Grammar Creatively at Elementary Level

Sadia Afrin

Student ID: 03203013

Department of English and Humanities
August 2007

BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Teaching Grammar Creatively at Elementary Level

An Internship Report

Submitted to the Department of English and Humanities

of

BRAC University

by

Sadia Afrin

Student ID: 03203013

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

of

Beachelor of Arts in English

August 2007

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Literature Review	2
2.1 History of Grammar Teaching	2
2.2 Effective and creative grammar teaching	4
3. My Experience of Implementing Theories into Practice	6
3.1 A Success Story	7
4. Recommendation	8
5. Conclusion	9
6. Bibliography	10

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The successful accomplishment of this report is due to the support I received from many faculty members of my department. My deepest gratitude and appreciation goes to the honorable teacher, Asma Anis Khan because without her proper guidance and assistance the report would not have been submitted properly. I would like to thank Shaheena Chawdhury, for her immense patience, guidance and support throughout all stages of my internship. On the basis this internship I have developed my report.

Finally, I would like to pay humble gratitude to the Almighty for giving us the ability to complete this report timely and my warmest gratitude goes to my family and friends for their helpful attitude, sharing of their thoughts to prepare this report.

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a reawakening of interest in the role of grammar in English language teaching. Grammar is usually a necessary or desirable part of classroom language learning, especially in elementary level. In Bangladesh, teachers teach grammar based on the rules and typical examples where it is expected that students will memorize all these. On the other hand, developed countries do not follow this technique. They follow different creative techniques by entertaining and relaxing the learners while they are learning or practicing a linguistic structure, which eliminates students' negative attitude towards learning. However, recent methods and theories of language teaching reveal that the traditional techniques of teaching grammar are ineffective. According to these methods and theories grammar should be taught inductively that demands grammar items to be presented creatively. There are many ways of teaching grammar creatively at elementary level like introducing the grammar through anecdote, describing pictures, playing songs etc.

As part of my undergraduate degree in English, I had to do an internship where I worked as an elementary level language teacher in an English medium school. This gave me the opportunity to implement the language teaching theories and methods that I learned in class. When I applied different theories and teaching techniques in the classroom to teach grammar, I used authentic materials and taught grammar through real context that made the grammar points more understandable and easy. Then I realized the importance of presenting grammatical items creatively in front of students. Moreover, as I was a student of Bengali medium school and went through the typical ways of learning grammar where creative presentation of grammar did not take place, I can compare the style of teaching grammar between Bengali medium and English medium school. Furthermore, when I found an adult student of Bengali medium struggling with grammar while producing a single grammatically correct sentence, I once more realized the importance of grammar in language learning. All these motivated me to write this report on this topic.

This report is, therefore, going to document the significant ways of teaching grammar creatively suitable for elementary level students and discuss the practical implementation of these ways.

2. Literature Review

Most people, when they hear the word grammar, think of lots of useless, boring rules that they were forced to learn in school. However, recent studies in language teaching shows that if grammar is presented in a creative way it can be an enjoyable learning experience where learners subconsciously 'pick up' grammar of a language. Many educators and teachers now believe that grammar is a necessary and a desirable part of classroom language learning. Apart from the four language skills listening, reading, writing and speaking, grammar and vocabulary are considered as two more important skills. According to Davit Crystal, "grammar is the study of the way words, and their component parts, combine to form sentences"(Crystal 1985, p.141). This definition suggests that the vast majority of people of this world know grammar but they are not aware of it.

According to Brumfit and Johnson, "The important point is that the study of grammar as such is neither necessary nor sufficient for learning to use a language" (Brumfit and Johnson, 1979,p.165). Therefore, grammar is the basic of any language and cannot be ignored in language teaching. In teaching grammar some general considerations are how to integrate grammar teaching into communicative methodology, which is aimed at developing ones competence, the level at which grammar is taught (elementary, intermediate, advanced), and what precise method the teaching should follow. And these have further implications about the choice of grammatical structures to present, what kind of grammatical description to use, whether to use an inductive or deductive approach, what the role of practice might be and what forms of practice are appropriate for different types of learner.

2.1 History of Grammar Teaching

Traditionally, grammar has been considered as being of primary importance in language teaching. It is regarded as structure-based and formal activity. This attitude, however, is no longer maintained and as a result direct grammar teaching has been eliminated from today's second language classes. In 1980s an anti-grammar movement was experienced, perhaps influenced by Krashen's idea that grammar can be acquired naturally from meaningful input and from opportunities to interact in the classroom. In other words, grammatical competence can develop in a fluency-oriented environment without conscious focus on language forms (Tricia Hedge 1982, p.143). Changes in language teaching methods throughout history have reflected a shift of focus from reading and writing proficiency to oral proficiency. Consequently, grammar teaching now also addresses oral skill in addition to the usual practice of teaching grammar for reading and writing purposes.

Early textbooks consist of statements of abstract grammar rules, lists of vocabulary, and sentences for translation. These sentences are constructed to illustrate the grammatical system of the language and consequently bear no relation to the language of real communication. Students labor over translating sentences such as, *The philosopher pulled the lower jaw of the hen, He has a book and a dog* (Rivers. M. Wilga 1987, p.23). This approach to foreign language teaching became known as the Grammar Translation Method.

In Grammar Translation Method the learning occurs through memorization drilling exercises. When students want to use it in real life conversation, it is found that they are not able to speak in the target language. So the learning becomes purposeless to a large extent. On the other hand, using creative techniques and providing plenty of opportunity to practice language in situations, which encourage them to communicate their needs, ideas and opinions, will enable them to operate grammar effectively in the real world. So the importance of communicative and creative activities is essential for learning grammar. These types of activities share some features with Communicative Language Teaching. In Widdowson's theory of communicative performance, he referred to two

aspects of communicative performance: a) “the ability to produce correct sentences, or manifestations of the linguistic system = USAGE and b) the ability to use the knowledge of the rules for effective communication = USE” (Diane Larsen- Freeman 2004, p.121). That is, to be able to communicate requires more than mastering linguistic structures. Again Halliday observed that students must learn to apply as well as learn the language itself. Halliday has talked about seven functions of language (Instrumental, Personal, Interactional, Regulatory, Representational, Heuristic, Imaginative) which are effective for learning grammatical forms because grammar is learned through the activities in a communicative and interesting way (Richards and Rodgers 1986, p.159). Students can learn to communicate meaningfully in a target language through different creative activities.

However, the best way of grammar teaching is to present the grammar rules in such a way that subconsciously learners will learn the rules and it will only be possible through communicative activities. Through communicative activities students will first communicate and later on they will learn the grammar inductively. Chomsky’s theory of language acquisition is based on the hypothesis that innate knowledge of the principles of Universal Grammar (UG) permits all children to acquire the language of their environment, during a critical period in their development. When a child learns the first language during critical period, he or she does not memorize any rule but acquire by practicing it in daily situations or activities. Presuming that first language acquisition is similar to second language learning, some linguists now argue that Universal Grammar offers the best perspective from which to understand second language acquisition. (Patsy and Spada 1999, p. 36).

2.2 Effective and creative grammar teaching:

One of the most important teaching tools is lesson plan. In case of teaching grammar creatively, the PPP framework is helpful. A PPP lesson is divided into three phases: Presentation, Practice and Production. So it is not only presenting the grammar item then practicing it and lastly producing it, but also doing it in a creative and effective way that makes the whole learning successful.

To sum up, rather than leading students towards memorizing and repeating rules, students should pick up the rules of the language on their own from the context. In that case, teachers should teach grammar in a creative way where real life situation or activities will take place.

Here are some examples of creative activities for elementary level students, which incorporate not only grammar but other skills as well.

Interactive oral grammar exercises /Speaking

- dialogues
- interviews
- guessing games
- physical demonstration
- sentence completions
- contextual cues

Listening

- songs
- drama, movie
- news

Writing

- journal
- comprehension
- describing a picture
- shopping list

Reading

- story books
- magazines
- newspaper

(Soars and Soars 2000, p. 45-48)

3. My Experience of Implementing Theories into Practice

I completed all the linguistic courses where I learned different theories based on teaching and learning language. Recent theories have assured me that for a long time what the schools and colleges of Bangladesh were following regarding the way of language teaching was not right. So, when I got the opportunity to teach elementary level students, I prepared myself to implement all the techniques of teaching grammar and eliminate the traditional way of learning grammar in a language. I started from making lesson plans. I divided the lesson into three parts and tried to fill each part with interesting activities.

Some of the creative activities that I used while teaching grammar are as follows:

Teaching: I know

Activity: Telling about the real world

I took a marker and said 'I know this is a marker'. Again I told a student 'I know you are a good boy.' Then I put one pencil and one box in front of a student and asked him what are these and he has able to answer using 'I know'.

Teaching: I want to...

Activity: Gathering materials

I brought some apples to the class and said 'I want to eat apple'. Then I took out a football and said 'I want to play football'. Finally, I placed an orange and a cricket bat in front of the students and asked them what they want to do with it and they were able to answer using 'I want to'.

Teaching: You and me...

Activity: Talking in groups

I pointed to a student and said 'you and me will go together'. Then I told the students to make groups and talk using 'you and me'.

So, I made my students practice in such a way where students would do the activity with interest and learn grammar subconsciously. Not only that after learning any grammar

item, students didn't need to drill. They needed practice and the practice was done through other activities.

3.1 A Success Story

An experience that I had with one particular student in my class will show how effective grammar teaching can be if grammar items are presented creatively. I had a student who came from Japan. He mostly knew Bengali and Japanese Language and had little knowledge of English. He did not go to any school before getting admitted to this school. His father taught him English at home and the first thing he did was, made the boy memorize the rules of grammar. In my first two English classes I observed that he was good in writing but he never spoke in the class. I asked different questions to him, he answered in "yes" or "no". Then I realized that he needed such activity through which he would be able to find the way of using language frequently without concentrating on rules. Then I gave them a story to act out in English. They had read the story in their Literature book. I brought some changes in the story by making the dialogues easier. I kept the characters in such a way that the students could handle. I gave the main character to him because this character had more dialogues. I gave the instruction in such a way that everybody became interested in drama including him. Then the practice started and gradually I noticed that he became easy in speaking. Sometimes he stopped talking when he understood that if he would say the sentence it would be a wrong one. At that time I told him to go on and not to hesitate. This got rid of his inhibition and he became more talkative in class.

As a language teacher I found it beneficial to use a variety of techniques, since my concern was to motivate the students and draw their utmost attention on English during teaching. During my internship I realized teaching grammar creatively brought students' interest toward learning. Not only that they forgot to memorize the rules of grammar.

4. Recommendation

In Bangladesh, teacher-student relationship and teaching techniques are very formal. In Language classroom, students see particular lesson presented in a conventional way, beyond that they don't have any creative activity to keep them connected with the lesson. To change this situation teachers have to follow some ways of teaching. For this they can take training, do workshop, gather experience, observe good teaching techniques etc. Firstly, language teachers have to know that they are the best motivators for students in learning second language. They can lead a student towards good performance. Secondly, they have to change their way of teaching, as they need to be more organized. A teacher's selection of a technique or a set of techniques should be based on his or her objectives for the classroom. After deciding the grammar point to be studied, and the techniques to be used, the teacher should prepare an effective lesson plan. Thirdly, they have to teach in such a way where students will learn willingly. The materials should be enjoyable, creative as well as effective. Fourthly, teachers have to implement various ways of teaching grammar. If one technique doesn't work then she/he should apply another one. In other words, teachers should be eclectic when it comes to teaching grammar. Finally, it is necessary to integrate all the skills while teaching grammar in order to achieve successful teaching. One thing the teachers should realize is that students' progress will not come early. Teachers have to wait patiently and then gradually students will start doing well.

5. Conclusion

After the integration of several sources and techniques, which are mainly based on communicative activities, the teaching of grammar has gained a new insight. In order to make a grammar lesson effective, beneficial, and interesting a teacher should use some well-developed and fascinating techniques in the classroom. Since teaching is a "developing art" (Penny Ur 1987,p.13), which requires innovative and creative ideas to enrich its effectiveness, we must not hesitate to use such resources in our classrooms. These resources can assist our teaching of grammar while providing a relaxed atmosphere and motivating students. Such activities are student centered, hence, by using them we give a chance to our students to express themselves, enjoy themselves during learning,

and “use the reserves of their minds” (Penny Ur 1987, p.29). So this is an undeniable fact that if our concern is to provide a successful and beneficial teaching, we must not hesitate to use songs, poems, games, and problem solving activities, which bring the structural and communicative aspects of language together, in our language classrooms.

Bibliography

1. Brumfit, C.J. and Johnson, K. 1979. *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*. 2nd edition. Oxford University Press.
2. Crystal, David. 1985. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. 1st edition. New York. Basic Blackwell Ltd.
3. Freeman, L. Diane. 2004. *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford New York. Oxford University Press.
4. Hedge, Tricia. 2000. *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. 1st edition. Oxford New York. Oxford University Press.
5. Lightbown M. Patsy and Spada Nina. 1999. *How Languages are learned*. 1st edition. Oxford New York. Oxford University Press.
6. Rivers, M. Wilga. 1987. *Interactive Language Teaching*. 3rd edition. Cambridge University Press.
7. Richards, C. Jack and Lockhart, Charles. 1996. *Reflecting Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. 1st edition. Cambridge University Press.
8. Richards, J.C and T.S. Rodgers 1986. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
9. Soars and Soars, 2000. *New Headway Intermediate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10. Ur. Penny. 1987. *A Course in Language Teaching*. 1st edition. Cambridge University Press.