



THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR TEACHING IN ESL WRITING

Manuscript Submission Data: 2020, April 1

Article Editing Date: 2020, May 1

Article Accepted Date: 2020, May 11

Chonthita Phuwarat*

Nirachorn Boonchukusol**

ABSTRACT

The role of grammar teaching in language learning has been a prime focus of debate for many years. Learning a language is not a traditional ended result; therefore, there is no ideal method in which every language learner can undoubtedly learn a language (Ellis, 2002). The purpose of this article is to examine the role of grammar teaching in ESL Writing and the probable practical approaches to grammar teaching. In writing instruction for English learners, the role of grammar teaching has changed dramatically over time. The writing exercises existed primarily for students to practice word and sentence level grammar. A summary of second language writing pedagogy discloses the change in attitudes towards the pedagogic effectiveness of explicit grammar instruction in writing class. Research in second language writing has defined the issues and offered new perspective related to the teaching of grammar in the second language writing whether focusing on grammar in different contexts can help students understand variation in functions and forms across diverse genres as well as build linguistic resources for a wide range of writing needs.

Keywords: grammar teaching, second language writing.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is a system of language that consists of sound, structure, and meaning. It is a structure of a language - how the way words in a sentence are arranged. Every language has its grammar system. Native speakers of the language naturally

* Lecturer, English for Business Communication, Sripatum University, Chonburi
e-Mail: chonthita@yahoo.com

** Lecturer, Sripatum University, Chonburi



and intuitively know the grammar system of the language - it is the rule of meaning. Students who are native English speakers already recognize the sound, meaning, and able to put words together in different forms because they exposed to the language since birth. Even though native English speaker students speak fluently, but they still need instruction to write well and effectively. In writing, grammar is an important foundation.

Grammar teaching has been a topic that researchers debate whether it should be taught as a specific subject in language learning. For many years, the grammar traditional teaching method has not provided ELLs with skills they need to communicate proficiently, especially writing. For many English teachers for teaching ELLs, they emphasize too much on memorizing grammar rules. As a result, they cannot express themselves effectively in writing. When they write, they make many grammar mistakes such as sentence fragments, making collocation errors, misuse punctuation marks, and modifiers. There are factors that contribute to students' ability to apply grammar rules in writing English. Teachers need to reconsider the role of grammar in English writing and come up with an effective approach to grammar teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies that have been published in recent years showed that students who were taught with direct instruction were more likely to improve in the use of the rules. The research indicates that the lack of focus on forms and structures has brought some researchers, formerly for meaning-based instruction, "(to) now believe that students need input on structure" (Frodesen, 2001). Similarly, Ellis (2006) stated that grammar is a fundamental part of L2 instruction. The role of grammar is a predominant part of language learning in that "not only does it help learners to improve their writing skills, but also it helps them in reading and listening alike".

Some researchers agreed with formal grammar instruction; they believe that teaching grammar helps to improve L2 learners in grammatical accuracy and speed up their learning process (Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997). Ellis (2002), who reinforce formal grammar instruction, argues that consciousness-raising and explicit knowledge facilitates L2 learners' intake to form implicit knowledge.



The reason to keep up with grammar instruction is the basic view that is the fundamental base of any language. In order to organize and get their messages and idea across, grammar provides the learners with the structures they need. Grammar cannot be separated from language since it ties words together so that we can make sense of what someone is saying. According to Azar (Online, 2007), the language has a predictable pattern that makes us communicate the way we are, by learning about grammar; it helps learners discover the nature of language.

Furthermore, teaching grammar is another reason to achieve optimum second language learning. According to Frodesen (2001), grammar is an essential resource in transmitting accurate and effective communication. She further stresses the importance of grammar instruction by referring to the results of studies conducted on classroom immersion and naturalistic acquisition. Without teaching grammatical knowledge, some learners will face fossilization, and, in most cases, their speaking will become pidgin-like language. Their acquisition of the target language will be, somehow, incomplete, although they can use the target language to communicate.

In addition to increasing the ability to communicate efficiently and appropriately, grammar teaching improves writing. Some educational ideas stated that conscious grammar could improve students writing proficiency. It is argued that many L2 students need advanced level writing proficiency for academic or professional purposes. According to Azar (Online, 2007), experience as an English teacher, students with no concept of grammar will also have difficulties to "grasp the principles of rhetoric which affect their academic writing." Students who cannot understand how a sentence is also structured cannot readily see how the sentences in a paragraph relate. Mulroy (2003) promotes some convincing arguments for the teaching of grammar to language learners - individuals who understand the concept of sentence combining and grammar rules have an advantage over ones who do not.

Indeed, some ESL students need advanced level writing proficiency for academic or professional purposes. The knowledge of grammar facilitates any writing that some students will have to do in their careers. Similarly, many ESL students will have to write intensively, in English, for example, if they aim to study abroad to get a degree. Other findings of classroom research have begun to indicate that students who have



experienced grammar instruction have an advantage over those students who have not (Ellis, 2006; Frodesen, 2001). It is easier for them to correct their mistakes because they may only need to be reminded of a basic rule they have learned. Their level of grammatical accuracy is also higher. Frodesen's (2001) example of international students and permanent residents in the US exemplifies this fact. She explains that many international students are going to study in America have learned English in their countries in classrooms and have received a large amount of explicit grammar instruction. On the other hand, most permanent residents have acquired English through exposure to the language by using it in daily life. Also, error correction is another advantage of grammar teaching. Many believe that grammar instruction allows students to practice structures, makes them aware of their errors, and helps them to correct their errors. Schulz (2001) summarizes the results of studies about grammar teaching and error correction and suggests that explicit feedback is necessary and can be an effective approach for the teacher in teaching grammar, also to improve students writing.

The importance and usefulness of teaching grammar, explicitly, could also serve to bring students' attention to promote what some researchers such as Larsen- Freeman, and Ellis called noticing. The idea of noticing is that if the learners pay attention to the features of some grammatical structures, this will help them understand the rule. In fact, this concept aims to develop an awareness of rather than the production of target forms through explicit grammar teaching.

According to Ellis (2002), through explicit grammar teaching help, learners notice target forms in future input and facilitate the acquisition of these forms as implicit knowledge. This kind of notice can sometimes be necessary for the students to be aware of difficult structures in grammar. Nunan (2004) explains that noticing can be a tool to help students apprehend that the language features noticed are different from their current language. Larsen-Freeman (2001) believes that grammar should be conceived of as a skill to develop rather than a transmission of knowledge. Grammar is not only a set of rules that teachers try to inculcate in students' minds. The hope is to have students use grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately.



ENGLISH LEARNING AND GRAMMAR

There are three elements in language, which are vocabulary, phonetics, and grammar. Grammar is the foundation of the language; without this knowledge, students cannot comprehend a language. When students understand the grammar rule clearly, it can help them write effectively, interesting, and precise sentences and paragraphs even with their limited vocabulary and help them learn English faster because they can apply grammar rules to the summarized idea. Because grammar is a foundation of a language - whether students can learn English well or not depends largely on their knowledge and ability to use it. It is mandatory for the teacher to be able to teach grammar to students effectively.

Some researchers suggested that teachers should combine diverse instruction methods to implement in their language teaching. Several different instruction methods included learner-centered and teacher-centered - covert and overt - deductive and inductive. It also included fluency-focused and accuracy-focused; direct and indirect, and form-based and meaning-based (Azar, Online, 2007).

ENGLISH WRITING AND GRAMMAR

In many foreign countries, the goal of English teaching at the college level is to prepare students to be able to communicate in English comprehensively - especially listening and speaking. But there are many studies that have shown that focusing only on listening and speaking does not help students using language accurately. To comprehend second language learning, grammar instruction is necessary. By teaching it through different perspectives and structures instead of the traditional method - grammar should be added on as a fifth skill besides listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). It is obvious that grammar teaching is essential for ESL students. Also, it is important to know teachers' perspectives on the role of grammar teaching in second language teaching. Language learners are not focusing on their learning style, but they are focusing more on how they should learn a language, especially with older learners. It is a belief. It is based on the way a language has been taught, and the assumption about a certain method of instruction works best for them. A few studies have indicated that students' perceptions were critical to have



successful language learning experience and outcome. As an example, in a study reported by Kern (1995), ESL students aged between 19 and 25 showed the majority of the students in language learning expressed concerns about the lack of grammar instruction and their dissatisfaction regarding the communicative program focused exclusively on a meaning and spontaneous communication.

THE BENEFITS OF TEACHING GRAMMAR

Grammar is an essential component of language, a system that learners can use for their communicative needs, a tool allowing them to say more than they already know. The failure of the traditional grammar-centered methods to lead to fluency in the target language brought some researchers and practitioners to consider and reexamine grammar teaching from a different perspective. Instead of claiming that grammar is irrelevant, many researchers and educators have more recently raised the question of how best to integrate grammar into language instruction. According to Azar (Online, 2007), grammar can be taught in an innovative way and an integral component of effective second-language instruction for many students.

THE LIMITATIONS OF GRAMMAR IN WRITING IMPROVEMENT

According to Noguchi, the major reason that cause the failure of grammar instruction is its formality and structure. It is overly challenging and being uninteresting – it is not adequately learned by students. Even if adequately learned, it is not transferred to writing circumstances.

As Noguchi stated, teachers who have constantly seek to implement traditional grammar pedagogy as a medium for improving writing will agree that challenges are highly reasonable. Due to a lack of interest or because of the difficulty of the subject matter itself, students simply fail to learn formal grammar. Students are neglectful and fail to apply that knowledge to relevant writing situations. Students fail to solicit knowledge because that knowledge is irrelevant to writing situations; therefore, students fail to apply their knowledge. Although there might be other contributing factors, the above-mentioned probable agencies seem to be the most important impediment in the failure of formal grammar instruction to improve writing skills.



CONCLUSION

Since everyone has different style and preferencing in learning style and language teachers prefer their unique teaching styles in the classroom. In general, findings indicated evidence that grammar instructions helped ESL students improve writing proficiency. Its importance of formal grammar instruction in second language learning and teaching is inevitable for writing improvement. teacher perception has been acknowledged as fundamental in second language teaching. Indeed, teachers' perceptions of grammar instruction and how languages are taught are crucial to understanding the reasons they teach and the way they teach. Though, teachers are implementing their practices based on their beliefs. There are quite a few teachers wonder how formal grammar instruction can benefit ESL learners, their approaches toward teaching usually is a reflection from their teaching experience as well as their experience as language learners. Also, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) state that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are very much shaped by their personal experiences. However, to understand teacher's ideas of learning and teaching means comprehending teachers' classroom pedagogy as well as the pedigree of influence that shape such ideas.

Grammar is a language component that will help the student improve their English proficiency. It is an essential part of any language, when a student masters the grammatical rules of the language, they will be able to understand, speak, and write correctly. Also, it is a component of language without its knowledge, and students may not communicate in English accurately. It polishes the students' language and helps give a good impression of their command of the language. Grammar will help students be better speakers, a bit of a better reader, but, most of all, it will help them improve their writing. Whether or not all the teachers agreed on the importance for the students to know about grammar to learn English. In order to help students achieve their learning goals, it is necessary to not only assist them completely understand the meaning and function of grammar but encourage them to create their own learning style about grammar, by using the effective explicit and communicative exposure, students may be more likely to gradually and successfully apply what they learned into the real world situation to help them further advance their English ability in facing any challenges of language learning in the future.



REFERENCES

- Azar, B. (2007). *Grammar-based teaching: A practitioner's perspective* (Online). Available: <http://tesl-ej.org/ej42/a1.pdf> [2019, December 1].
- Beverly, A. H. (2007). *The role of grammar in improving student's writing* (Online). Available: <https://people.uwplatt.edu/~ciesield/graminwriting.htm> [2019, December 1].
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 413-427). London, UK: Sage.
- Eisenstein-Ebsworth, M., & Schweers, C. R. (1997). What researchers say and what practitioners do: Perspectives on conscious grammar instruction in the ESL classroom. *Applied Language Learning*, 8, pp. 237-260.
- Ellis, R. (2002). The place of grammar instruction in the second/foreign language curriculum. In E. Hinkel & S. Fotos (Eds.), *New perspectives on grammar teaching in second language classrooms* (pp. 17-34). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- . (2006). Current Issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), pp. 83-107.
- Frodesen, J. (2001). Grammar in writing. In M. Celce-Murcia (Eds.) *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 233-248). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Hillocks, G., Jr. (1986). *Research on written composition: New directions for teaching*. Urbana, IL: ERIC.
- Kern, R. G. (1995). Restructuring classroom interaction with networked computers: Effects on quantity and quality of language production. *Modern Language Journal*, 79(4), pp. 457-476.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2001). *Teaching language: From grammar to grammaring*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Mulroy, D. (2003). *The war against grammar*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Noguchi, R. R. (1991). *Grammar and the teaching of writing: Limits and possibilities*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.



- Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Savignon, S. J., & Wang, C. C. (2003). Communicative language teaching in EFL contexts: Learner attitudes and perceptions. *Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 41(3), pp. 223-227.
- Schulz, R. A. (2001). Cultural differences in student and teacher perception concerning the role of grammar instruction and corrective feedback: USA-Colombia. *Modern Language Journal*, 85, pp. 244-258.
- Wang, P. L. (1999). *English grammar instruction in Taiwan: Student and teacher attitudes*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania.
- Weaver, C. (1998). *Lessons to share on teaching grammar in context*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
-