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11<sup>th</sup> International Congress on English Grammar (ICEG 2014)  
In association with Systemic Functional Linguistics

## Grammar and Grammar Teaching: Changing Perspectives Volume 2

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### Grammar Teaching for Grammar's Sake or for Communication?

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#### Introduction

The tangible impact of English language teaching within the Indian academia is that it has made learners grammar conscious and therefore accuracy-obsessed sans communicative efficacy and fluency. Explicit grammar teaching independent of communicative empowerment has made them underestimate the importance of fluency. Deductive grammar teaching is symptomatic of the collective internalization of GT method by English language teachers despite their outward declaration of the importance of communicative language teaching methods and strategies.

English language teachers' subscription to the *Wren & Martin Grammar* is an instance of this grammar syndrome. It ultimately leads to learners knowing English and NOT using English. Grammar teaching and teaching English for communication are

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 14:4 April 2014

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perfectly divorced and the privileging of the former over the latter also raises a pedagogical question if grammar is playing a central role in the acquisition process of communication skills.

There is an internal but undeclared war between the TG subscribers and CLT followers and they trade accusations against each other. While the advocates of the TG method claim that acquisition of grammar is a must for acquiring language proficiency, CLT experts claim that communication is the mantra of second language learning classes. But it should not be sidestepped that grammar and communication must join together to produce proficient language users.

### **Literature Review**

**Jean & Simard (2011)** conclude their study with the findings that grammar teaching/learning is necessary, but teachers and learners don't enjoy doing it. **Loewen et al. (2009)** conclude that there is perceived usefulness of grammar teaching for language production. **Bernat & Lloyd (2007)** state that the most important part of learning a language is the learning of its grammar. **VanPatten (1996)** argues that attending to form and meaning simultaneously is cognitively more demanding. **Ellis (1995)** proposes a new approach (Interpreting input) to learn grammar by processing the target structure and not producing it. **Mitchell & Redmond (1993)** asserts that grammar and (not OR) communication must be taught and practiced in order to produce effective language users. **VanPatten (1993)** argues that grammar must be taught communicatively with learners being engaged in speaking and writing. **Fotos & Ellis (1991)** suggest that grammar tasks should encourage communication about grammar.

### **Research Design and Result**

The aim of the present investigation is to ascertain if grammar is taught for its own sake or for the sake of communication, and if grammar can be taught communicatively. The following research questions served as signposts during investigation:

1. How should grammar be taught: deductively or inductively?
2. Can grammar teaching be integrated into the teaching of USRW skills?
3. Can learners pay attention to form and meaning at the same time?
4. Can grammar be taught communicatively?

The present research constructed the following hypotheses for its study:

1. There is a perceptible difference in the acquisitional process of grammar between arts and science stream students.

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2. Learners of both streams fail to pay attention to form and meaning simultaneously.
3. Grammar can be taught communicatively.

A few hours were spent with students and English faculty from both Arts & Science colleges and Engineering colleges to elicit the importance of grammar teaching/learning, the current methods of grammar teaching, the connection between acquisition of skills and grammar, and the use of regional language in grammar classes.

Observation as a method of investigation through conversation has its own advantages compared to the other two modes of data collection, namely interview schedule and questionnaire wherein the response is as structured as the means. Without divulging the purpose while engaging learners and teachers in conversation on the said topics, the researcher could extract as much data as possible in purely physical, verifiable terms.

Some of the edited observations are as follows:

1. Grammar is taught deductively
2. Regional language is used to teach certain grammatical items of English
3. Majority of students prefer deductive approach
4. Grammar teaching is not related to larger discourses.
5. Students are patient and passive listeners in Grammar classes.
6. Grammar class is monologic.
7. Grammar is not taught communicatively
8. Some science students prefer inductive approach.
9. Many students strongly believe that language learning is not possible without grammar learning.
10. Many students were not aware that grammar teaching/learning should take place in and through communication.
11. Some students believe that grammar learning will make learners intellectual.
12. Many think that accuracy in expression is most important in language learning.
13. Almost all students wish to be fluent in English though they do not know if grammar aids fluency.
14. Not much difference is detected in the learning style of arts and science students.
15. Some faculty members in engineering colleges claim that they practise the inductive method.

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16. Activities in grammar classes mean filling-in the blanks or transformation of sentences.
17. In writing, teachers just mark in red those expressions that are ungrammatical at random, but many students ignore them neither seeking explanation nor undertaking self-correction course.

While the first hypothesis stands invalidated, the second and the third are validated in the light of the feedback from students and teachers.

### **Discussion**

Learning grammatical structures should take place in contexts that aid them in understanding form. Contexts can be provided through dialogues, conversations, sports commentaries, body of the letter, news paper articles, extracts from novels, short stories, (One-Act) plays, et al. Grammatical consciousness-raising should be part and parcel of the language learning experience so that it can satisfy learners' expectation. Grammar must be taught/learnt in and through communication. Traditionally, students learn grammar by listening to lectures on grammar and it leads to a situation wherein learners fail to perceive the relation between form and meaning. Moreover, teachers resort to the deductive method of presenting the grammatical structures in isolation irrespective of the level of students, the grammatical structure to be taught, and the domain-specific style of learning.

The choice of the method—deductive or inductive—depends on what and how grammar is presented. Though there has been a controversy for many years over the relative merit of both the methods, **Harnett (1985: 4)** claims that both approaches are viable and desirable and it all depends on the learning style of students. If students are analytical (left-hemispheric dominant), deductive learning is preferred. On the other hand, right-hemispheric dominant learners who are holistic in their approach to learning prefer inductive approach. **Fischer (1979) & Shaffer (1989)** argue that the use of both approaches is mandatory for learning grammar. If the rules to be taught in the target language resemble those in L1, the inductive method is suitable, or else the deductive approach is desirable. This implies that English language teachers ought to have a strong base in Contrastive Analysis involving the knowledge of both L1 and L2. In the Indian classroom, students find it difficult to pay attention on meaning while form is taught.

Grammar teaching/learning can be integrated into the acquisition of LSRW skills in the class. Conversations about every day happenings, for instance, can be exploited for the

inductive method of teaching/learning structural aspects of English. The present, the past, and the future tense forms are juxtaposed in the following conversation:

John: Sorry, I overslept. My clock didn't go off this morning.

Jane: Again?

John: That's right, even though I did set the alarm last night.

Jane: Your clock never works. Perhaps you should buy a new one.

John: Well, if it breaks down again tomorrow, I'll definitely buy a new one.

Jane: Maybe by then it'll be too late.

John: What do you mean "too late"?

Jane: By that time you'll be fired.

The attention of the learners may be drawn to collocations such as *set the alarm*, *the alarm went off*, and *the clock breaks down*. Learners can be asked to recite the conversation in pairs. Pronunciation and accent can be given emphasis. Their attention to the informal properties of conversational English expressions like 'be fired can be focused.' Someone can be asked to report the content of the conversation to others who pretend that they don't know. It encourages the learner to practice 'reported speech.' Though it is true that communication would be limited sans some knowledge of grammar, **Mitchell (1993: 19)** argues that "in the second language classroom, it is not grammar *or* communication but rather grammar *and* communication that must be taught and practised in order to produce proficient language users." Of course, grammar is only an adjunct to communication in language teaching. Whether it is skills-based communication class or rules-bound grammar class, learners should interact in the class.

Poetry and plays can be exploited to teach/learn grammar. For instance, Rudyard Kipling's "**If**" is ideal for learning the conditional class while Nissim Ezekiel's "**Very Indian Poem in Indian English**" can be used to draw the learners' attention on their failure to make a distinction between the present and the present progressive tense forms & "**Farewell Party for Ms T.S. Pushpa**" that highlights grammatical mistakes, strange arrangements of words and phrases and idioms which are direct translations of expressions in Indian languages. Modern plays like **Waiting for Godot** can be used to teach sentence structures of spoken or conversational English. For instance,

Estragon : Nothing to be done

Vladimir : Did you ever read the Bible?

E : The Bible... (he reflects.) I must have taken a look at it.

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- V : Do you remember the Gospels?
- E : No
- V : Shall I tell it to you?
- E : No
- V : It'll pass the time. (Pause). Two thieves , crucified at the same time as Our Savior.  
One—
- E : Our what?
- V : Our Savior. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other... (he searches for the contrary of 'saved')... damned.
- E : Saved from what?
- V : Hell
- E : (with exaggerated enthusiasm) I find this really most extraordinarily interesting.
- V : But one of the four says that one of the two was saved.
- E : Well? They don't agree and that's all there is to it.
- V : But all the four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?
- E : Who believes him?
- V : Everybody. It's the only version they know.

Students may be asked to play the roles. Accent and other features of conversational English can be highlighted. Chatty style can be highlighted. Wh-questions, degrees of adjectives, voice, subject-verb agreement, yes-or-no questions can be located within this short extract without going into the explication of the full text or providing the background information about the absurd play. Students can raise questions on grammar presented in the extract. They can formulate rules of usage on their own.

One of the disadvantages of the deductive method of presenting grammar is that students cannot concentrate on meaning and form simultaneously. Inductive method eliminates the dichotomy between form and meaning. While they grasp the communication and its context, they also learn the grammar of communication. What comes first is communication (meaning) and what becomes by-product is form (grammar). Though they are intertwined in communication, grammar learnt/guessed through the act of communicating or writing or reading or chatting/listening not only has permanence but also application-value. Since **Terrell (1991)** and **VanPatten (1991)** question if learners can pay attention to form and meaning simultaneously, the former recommends the lightening of the lexical load,

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the latter advocates the delaying of the grammatical focus until the advanced stage of learning. Grammatical explanation that should be demanded by learners should aid their oral proficiency and communication skills.

### Suggestions

Implications of the present study are:

1. English language teachers should be familiar with both the methods of presenting grammar: inductive & deductive.
2. Attempts should be made to teach grammar communicatively.
3. Communication should be the focus and background of grammar classes, if any.

### Conclusion

“The proof of the pudding is in eating” is a classic assertion of human experience and therefore, the success of a language class is in interactive classrooms where grammar **and** communication play vital roles though the former is achieved/learnt through the latter. Grammar cannot be taught in isolation and therefore should not be taught. Communication is the only channel through which, and the only end to which, grammar can be taught/learnt. Basically, English language teachers are communication facilitators and they are incidentally grammar explicators.

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