

The Effectives of “Teaching Grammar Awareness” on the Perspective of Bangladeshi EFL Learners: A Rethinking

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Abstract

English is an international language, spoken in many countries both as a native and as a second or foreign language. It is taught in the schools in almost every country on this earth. It is a living and vibrant language spoken by over 300 million as their native language. English is spoken habitually in the United States, the British Isles, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, The Republic of South Africa, Liberia, and many territories under the United Kingdom and the United States of America. It is estimated that 300 million people speak English as a foreign language and an additional 100 million or one billion people around the world have some knowledge of English, either as a native language as a second language or as a foreign language. There are controversial about whether or not to teach grammar in language pedagogy. There are some applied linguistics who hold the view that grammar teaching does little to the acquisition process of language. This paper focuses on the fact that formal grammar instruction to Bangladesh EFL learners to have accuracy as well as fluency in English for their academic. It is suggested that instead of teaching the whole of the grammar or some discrete items randomly, language teachers should focus on those areas in English grammar in which Bangladeshi EFL learners face problems and make frequent errors. This paper concludes with some considerations regarding the techniques that language instructors can apply in teaching grammar to the entire perspective of Bangladeshi EFL learners.

Keywords: EFL, Acquisition, Explicit Instruction, Error Analysis, Focus on Form, Consciousness-Rising, Accuracy, Formal Grammar Instruction, Motivation, Social Background

Introduction

Grammar teaching has always been an important issue in second and foreign language teaching. There has been considerable debate and discussion about its role in language teaching among the practitioners and theorists. With the advent of communicative era, explicit grammar instruction has been put question. But in recent years CLT has been

criticized for its failure to produce the desired result especially in EFL context (Shohidullah, 2008). Consequently, a revival of interest in grammar teaching is seen years though there is debate when and how to teach grammar. The difference in strength and types of motivation between the rural and urban learners in the country was not given importance to teach English to Bangladeshi learners was paid excessive importance before focusing on the socio-psycholinguistic factor of motivation. Specially, a little has been done in the field of learner-motivation at the Secondary and Higher Secondary level in Bangladesh.

Different EFL learners develop different attitude and different types and strength of motivation to the factor of learning of English language due to several language due to several causes including their social background and the location of the institution is taken here to represent their social background. However, due to the short duration of the language course conducted at Universities and the learning having some knowledge of English, teaching the whole or some randomly selected items is not much effective for them. Therefore, it is desirable to focus on them on those problematic areas in English grammar while giving instruction to the learners interrogating form and meaning.

Linguistic Status of Bangladesh

Language of a speech community is closely related to its historical background. This statement is more pertinent to Bangladesh context. Bangladesh is predominantly a monolingual country. Before its independence the country experienced the British colonial rule of two hundred years preceding Pakistan reign of more than two decades. The British took initiative to establish English firmly in the middle of the 19th century turning it into a way for the educated Indians to enter into the privileged class. A national education policy, proposed by a committee lead by Lord Macaulay, was passed in 1835. Macaulay's controversial Minutes states

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the million we govern a class of persons Indians in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinion, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave to refuse the vernacular dialects and to render them fit vehicles for conveying western knowledge. Bangladesh is essentially a monolingual country there live a good number tribes speaking different languages belonging to the Tibetan Burmese group. In spite of this almost each and every member of all these languages possesses almost native or near native competence in Bangla. Bangladesh can not be considered to have a genuine ESL situation. Neither does it qualify as a purely EFL one. As Bowers (1986) in his study on ELT observes that ESL is lapsing into EFL and this is, in fact, the present states of English in Bangladesh (Begum, 1990:215)

There were at least seven Education Commissions were independence, but none could be implemented given much importance to it.

The role of grammar teaching in language pedagogy, however, it is an issue of considerable debate among the linguistic and practitioners. The historical background of grammar teaching shows that until 1967, there was no controversy regarding the role of grammar in language teaching. In fact, as Rutherford (1967) points out, for 2500 years the teaching of grammar had often been synonymous with foreign language teaching. With the advent of communicative approaches in the 1970s, the role of grammar has been challenged.

Grammar in Language Teaching: A Review

Ellis (2006:84) defines grammar teaching as “any instructional techniques that draws learners attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it met linguistically and or process it in comprehension and or production so that they can internalize it.”

Krashen (1985), also asserts that consciously learned- grammar can only function as monitoring instead of productive ability and grammar knowledge should be acquired subconsciously and naturally through direct exposure to language in use.

Anthropological linguists in the U.S (Hymes, 1972) and functional linguists in Britain (Haliday, 1973) viewed language as an instrument of communication. They claimed that communication with people is the goal of learning a second language. So, the focus should be on meaning, not on the grammatical forms in developing the communicative ability of the learners.

So, it may appear from the views presented here that formal grammar instruction is not helpful to the acquisition of language; rather it can be detrimental to language learning. Schmidt (1990) suggest that some grammar structures can benefit instruction any time they are taught and influence the learners in the sequence of development of linguistics proficiency. Grammar Knowledge also offers the means for potentially unlimited linguistics creativity Thornbury (1990), learners can produce new sentences as they need it for regular communication instead of creating some chunks of the language. On the other hand, students or learners in any grammarless approach may produce some broken, ungrammatical and pidginize of the target (Higgs and Clifford, 1982, cited in Celce-Murcia, 1991), Consequently, there is a possibility for the students of being fossilized.

A per the National Education Commission Report, in keeping with the inspiration and expectation of the newly liberated people of Bangladesh, on July 26, 1972 the national education commission was formed with a view to removing “various defects and deviancies of our present education system to indicate a way as to how a wholesome nationhood can be achieved through the medium of education and strengthen the country in modern knowledge and creative Endeavour (1974:10). The commission submitted its report with its recommendation to the government on June 8, 1973.

about teaching English at primary level the commission kept no provision believing that imposition of English would be an “additional burden” for the young learners and that would act ‘as an impediment to their mental development’ The commission recommended that English must be introduced as a compulsory subject from class VI and must continue up to class XII in order to “liberalize the pupils” outlook and to help students acquire modern knowledge. The Commission did not recommend teaching of English either as a compulsory or optional subject at college or university level.

The Necessity and Purpose of the Study

English is now the most important foreign language studied in junior, secondary and higher secondary levels as a compulsory subject in Bangladesh. The situation has not changed much even after the introduction of Communication Language Teaching (CLT) in secondary levels

of education. CLT is claimed to be followed in the school and colleges, the focus of which is to make learners able to communicate in English with each other. So grammar introduction is not given much importance though some grammar introduction is included in the curriculum of secondary level in recent years. It is worthy of mention here that Bengali is that Bengali is the medium of instruction in schools and colleges except the English medium schools. So the students study English as a compulsory subjects to pass the examinations rather using it as a tool learning the language. When these learners reach university level, they face problems to study their majors as English is used the medium of instruction in all disciplines of public universities. They are required to read and write in English and to make presentations. In the examinations the students need to write the answer in English. So they are required to possess certain level of accuracy for their better academic result. Moreover, even after completing graduation when they seek adobo get a job certain levels of accuracy in writing and speaking is needed for their professional purposes.

Due to their lack of accuracy in English, the learners fall behind in both academic and professional life. Many of them have serious problems in grammar and vocabulary. They lack knowledge of basic sentence structures which is not desirable from the undergraduates. Formal grammar instruction helps the acquisition process through noticing the structure of the input language exposed to them (Schmidt, 1990). This conscious noticing will help them in monitoring the speakers own utterances and in their own production as well as the deeper understanding of target language. Schmidt (1990) suggests that some grammar structures can benefit instruction any time they are taught and influence the learns in the sequence of development of linguistic proficiency.

On the other hand, students in any grammarless approach may produce some broken, ungrammatical and pidginize form of the target language (Higgs and Clifford, 1982, cited in Celec-Murcia, 1991), Consequently, there is a possibility for the students of being fossilized. The purpose of the study is to analyze the importance of social background and the necessity of separate strategies to motivate the EFL learners at rural areas. The effects of 'location' of the educational institution or college on there types and strength of motivation explored in the study.

According to the Task Force Report "the English teaching situation in the primary system appears to be far worse than that seen in any other part of the education system" (Report 1976:28). There appeared little true learning and after studying English for three years the students came out having learned only writing letters and recognizing few simple words in isolation. This is partly due to lack of qualified trained teachers.

System of Planning for Language Up-Gradation

Language planning involves three process determination, development and implementation. "Determination involves initial decision regarding what language to implement in terms of the functions of given language within a country and of the development of the language itself. Development entails the elaboration of the means to achieve the desired outcome and implementation is the actual attempt to bring about the desired goal" In Bangladesh only determination was there in the initial stage and the other two processes e.g. 'development' and 'implementation' were absent English practically continued to play the role of the official language

Grammar Instruction and Classroom observation

Classroom were observed as a participant and participant observer. Care was taken about observer's paradox. Audio recording was also used to collect data during class hour. Now it is evident that some formal instruction on grammar is essential for the undergraduates in the context of Bangladesh. Now the question which is very relevant here is how the language teachers can teach grammar to the learners at this level. Very often it is found that grammar is taught in the way of Grammar Translation Method which has been discredited on a number of grounds. As grammar is taught through presenting discrete grammatical items in an isolated manner, learners often fail to transfer their grammatical knowledge to attain competence in language. Since the goal of language learning is to attain communicative competence. This form of grammar teaching will not be of much help to the Bangladeshi undergraduates. On the other hand, purely communicative-orientated pedagogy is inadequate for the learners because of its failure to promote high level of grammatical accuracy. The teachers can, therefore explore ways in which form and meaning can be integrated to facilitated language learning and teaching. To this end, some explicit grammar instruction for Bangladesh learners can be helpful as they do not have much exposure to the target knowledge. English is hardly used outside the classroom. This makes is difficult for them to notice and observe the structures in the natural communication. Besides, explicit grammar instruction especially to the EFL learners will be helpful in two ways as mentioned by Schaffer and Cicada (2011). First, simple met linguistic descriptions can be helpful for the learners for better comprehension of the input through noticing some of the formal L2 features taught to them. Second as a better understanding of grammatical rules facilitates the learners grammatical output, it, to a great extent, contributes to a sense "security, confidence, and achievement" in the learners(Schaffer and Cinciata2011:22).

It is important to mention here that only focusing on grammar may not be effective for the undergraduate learners to achieve proficiency in English. So grammar instruction should incorporated within communicative activities in such a way that learners can focus on the form as well as meaning.

Importance of English and Reasons for our Constant Downfall of English Standard

A significant point to raise here is that some of the economic factors affected not only the EFL learners but their English teachers also they caused classroom anxiety which had a very harmful on strength of motivation for learning EFL. The teachers were found to ignore classes and to be inspired to drive the learners to take private tuitions which would get the teachers some money. The most important facts found through interviews and classroom observation, are that none of the English teachers at rural colleges were trained to teach present course according to prescribed Communicative Teaching Approach (CLTA). In the context of the present globalization every student of Bangladesh is aware of importance of English. And they are also interested to learn it. But learning is not taking place satisfactory. This sad state of affaires of English in our institutions has been stated by Prof. Sadrul Amin very aptly. He says: in a country like Bangladesh, despite all out efforts on the part of some teachers, there is hardly any student -learning. The education system, social – economic conditions of the people and political unrest are mainly responsible for it. Besides the faulty testing principles which put emphasizes on the power of memorization, not on learning and unbridled scope to adopt unfair means in the examination are sufficient reasons for the

students to be passive and indifferent towards the learning or acquisition of English. All learners with the exception of a monitoring. The deplorable standard may be accounted to the fact that English having lost its status of the second language no longer enjoys its past cachet in our society. Most learners in Secondary and Higher Secondary stages are not aware of any need for English other than passing of examination. Prof. Anwarul Haque (1989) is of the opinion that the standard of English has declined during the last two decades owing to

I. the absence of a well- defined foreign language policy,
 II. failure of the government to the deteriorating trend of English,
 III, literature oriented language teaching and
 IV, the acute dearth of competent teachers of English,
 He also points out the following reasons of high standard of English in the pre- independence Bangladesh

I. the quality of teachers was much better than that of the present ones,
 II. there was a great competition among the learners,
 III. the motivation for learning was very high,
 IV. the medium of instruction was English,

This is why students acquire a very good competence in English even through the Grammar- Translation method at that time. Finally he says that language expert of today's world have discarded the system of teaching- learning through words and rules of grammar and isolation.

Absence of Good Institution for Teaching English

Another feature of English in Bangladesh is the mushrooming of English teaching institution popularly known as kindergartens. These kind of schools have divided our society. This sentiment is voiced by Prof. Zillur Rahman Siddiqui the great educationist. He express his great concern about about the harm done to our society by so- called kindergartens. He is worth quoting in his respect. He says in comparison with this private system in primary education. the government primary education is poor, The children from the poor class usually receive their education in government primary schools, As a result with the passage of time the gape between the rich and the poor is getting widen day by day. It is so to say a kind of injustice to the poor class whose offspring can not stand in competition with affluent counterparts. As a result of these opposition directions in primary education, the principle of equal right to education is violated here (Siddiqui, 1994:49) but now a days this kind of situation is day by day improving

Reasons for Falling Down of the Standard of English

Though English is seen a prestige language, the teaching learning of it has gone down alarmingly. The poor state of English in our education can not be attributed to the absence of EFL. Curriculum and detailed syllabus for different levels for giving clear education to the teaching- learning of English. Our teacher of English are not dedicated to the profession.

It may be mentioned that weakening English by making it an optional subject at Degree level, may be in the mid seventies a circular was issued from the Education Ministry banned English as a medium of instruction up to Higher Secondary level. Similarly in the early eighties the University of Dhaka, Chittagong with the exception of Rajshahi University with which all

the degree colleges of the country were affiliated issued circulars making English which had been a compulsory subject at Degree level, an optional one. These decisions of the ministry and universities along with government proclamation of making Bangla as the state language heavily weakened the teaching learning of English. As a result the standard of English were down to an alarming level. At the same time English has retained its previous prestigious status in the national context.

It also mentioned new state policy about English, according to the education, English will be included as a compulsory Second language in the curriculum from class I to XII. It also clarifies that there is no need for the inclusion of English as compulsory subject at degree level. But the National University of Bangladesh which control territory education of all the affiliated colleges has made English a compulsory for both pass and Honors from 1996.

Here Some Analysis of Government Policy

To teach English from class I sounds well, But the success of the scheme depends according to some experts on the following conditions:

- 1 there should be well – organized administrative infrastructure
- 2 there should be guarantee of the timely supply of adequate books.
- 3 there must be a sufficient number of qualified and trained teachers to teach English effectively
- 4 there should be adequate financial resources to give English education to lakhs of primary children throughout the country.

Conclusion

In the light of above discussion it can be mentioned here that with the beginning of birth of Bangladesh the status of English has undergone some radical changes which have exerted very powerful impacts on our national life. The paper through reviews on grammar teaching focuses on some of the important issues in the field and argues that grammar teaching to the EFL learners is essential. However we don't advocate to a return to the grammar teaching as it was in Grammar Translation Method. The proficiency level of the learner and their purpose of using the language should be taken into consideration while giving instruction on grammar. As the undergraduates have the cognitive skill required to grasp different aspects of the grammar. Some explicit instruction on grammar should be provided to them. However, teaching the whole of the grammar is not viable for them and this fact necessitates some selection which can be made by carrying out an error analysis. The teacher can carry out this study at the beginning of the course so that they can select the items in which their students need special care and attention. The analysis will help the teachers to know the pitfalls of the learners and design the lesson plans and provide the learners instructions. But instruction should be integrated within the communicative activities. The success of different techniques on grammar instruction to promote accuracy in the Bangladeshi undergraduates learners is yet a subject of further research. Again, introduction of CLT without building the proper infrastructure has affected teaching learning of English adversely, lack of oriented interesting text books faulty examination system, dearth of devoted trained teachers, introduction of new teaching method without building proper infrastructure and absence of right foreign language teaching policy and congenial teaching environment have put our English teaching in a doldrums. But finally a slight ray of hope is

there for us in the sense that all the university departments of English in our country have introduced language teaching stream and many students going for teaching profession the study the course related to English Language Teaching (ELT) When they will go for teaching , it is expected the present hopeless state of English may be improved in near future . we are waiting for these days.

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