



## The Bitter Pill of Teaching English Grammar to the Students of Second Language Learning

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### ABSTRACT

*The very utterance of the word 'Grammar' sends a chill down the spine for many non-native students of English. The learning and Teaching of grammar, for some reasons, has always been regarded as 'Pain the neck' or 'necessary evil' for students and teachers whose mother tongue is not English. Arguments and counter arguments abound about the importance and the role of English grammar in learning and teaching of the same as a second language. Over the centuries, many theories and methods of learning and teaching English grammar have been advanced. Since then, the idea of incorporating 'Grammar' consciously with a view to render communicative competence or edge to L2 students has been gradually yet critically gaining momentum in educational programs. This paper briefly attempts to lend credence on the general concept of Grammar while delineating the practical benefits of Learning and Teaching of Grammar in the context of second language learning. This paper finally endeavours to ward off the misconception surrounding the Learning and Teaching of grammar as a worthless, boring chore that the students and the teachers have to inevitably put up with in their academia, thus drives home the home truth that the prescription of grammar in the ESL and EFL context, might be bitter but begets better and sweeter results*

### KEYWORDS :

#### Introduction:

A concerned father, having tried all his tricks under his sleeve in the vain effort of getting his eight year old son (who is running high temperature and nausea) swallow a pill, resorted to the help of the class teacher whose only recommendations his son would probably take heed to. The prudent class teacher, on learning that gulab jamun (the boy called it a jamun fruit anyway) is the most favourite sweet of his ward, cleverly suggested the father to slip the bitter tablet inside the pudding and present it to his ward so that the boy would instantly devour it, in the process would swallow the pill as well and get back to good health soon. The father did exactly as he was told and the trick worked. The little boy went to school the next day and the teacher awaited his arrival with an air accomplishment and excitement. On his arrival he said, 'sonny, I heard that you like jamun fruit very much, by the way, did you eat the jamun fruits that your father brought home yesterday? Tell me how tasty it was?' 'Much to the horror and dismay of the teacher the little boy said, "Well, the flesh of the fruit was absolutely delicious and mouth-watering but the seed inside it was very bitter so I spat it out"

Just as the desperate father and the helpless English teacher frantically trying different methods to somehow get their desired end of ramming the bitter pill down their ward's throat, many teachers of English down the ages, adopt different theories, approaches (like Formal Grammar, Traditional Grammar, Functional Grammar) in their herculean challenge of imparting the same to their students. However, most of these theories/approaches seem to have done very little or less in kindling their zeal and sustaining their linguistic aspirations of L2 students. A pill may be bitter in taste but bears medicinal rejuvenation when taken as medication. In the same verve, learning the ropes of English grammar might seem to be a dusty, uninspiring and tedious job for many a linguistic aspirants whose mother tongue is not English yet it pays great dividends in the long run.

#### The Concept of Grammar:

Grammar means different things to different persons. Some people say that it is a body of rules and regulations. Some others say that Grammar guides about correct language. It may be termed as descriptive science, which describes the structure of a sentence, function of words and their relations to one another at particular period and of particular people. It is a scientific enquiry in form and structure. The term Grammar, has in fact, been derived from the Greek word 'grammatica or grammatika techne' which means 'the art of writing'. The Greeks considered grammar to be a branch of philosophy concerned with the art of writing. In the Middle Ages grammar came to be regarded as a set of rules, usually in the form of text book, dictating correct usage. So in the widest and the traditional sense, grammar came to mean a set of normative and prescriptive rules in order to set up a standard of 'correct usage'. Etymologically, Grammar is the "Art of Letters".

Moreover, Grammar is generally thought to be a set of rules specifying the correct ordering of words at the sentence level. Grammar explains how the language should be structured, using various categories. By and large, the concept of Grammar is not quite straightforward. Grammar is "multi-dimensional" and has multi-meanings. It is generally thought to be a set of rules for choosing words and putting words together to make sense. Every language has a grammar. It has been held that if a language is a building, the words are the bricks and the grammar is the architect's plan. One may have a million bricks, but do not make a building without a plan. Similarly, if a person knows a million English words, but he doesn't know how to put them in grammatical structure together, then he can neither speak nor learn English. Given this background and context, the learning and teaching grammar will depend on the teachers own discretion and his or her ability to teach the subject matter in a way that incites the interests of students. Needless to emphasize, the teacher's own experiences of learning and teaching grammar, teacher's attitude, conviction, and the level of motivation with which he /she handles the subject matter in the bargain.

#### The Pros and Cons of Learning Grammar: Advantages of Learning Grammar.

It is absolutely essential for both teachers and students of language to have a thorough knowledge of grammar. Without this the teacher can neither explain his lesson nor can the students assimilate the grammatical aspects.

Speech and reading are not the surest Safeguards to correctness of language. At some stage, in our educational career we need grammar to give precision and correctness to our language. Grammar is the means for a systematic study of language and it helps to secure the necessary exactness in the use of language.

Grammar helps in bringing our knowledge of language under a regular system. An understanding of the system of a language can help us to accelerate our linguistic acquisitions. It gives us an insight into the working of different language forms.

While learning a foreign language, the comparative study of its grammar the grammar of mother-tongue may be helpful in understanding that language.

The why and wherefore of mistakes can only be discovered through a knowledge of grammar. In this way mistakes can be easily corrected. Wrong learning habits can be removed through explanation.

#### The Disadvantages of learning Grammar.

Grammar has certain limitations: In the first place, knowledge of grammar does not help in the acquisition of vocabulary. With the exception of a few typical terms.

Does not add to the range of our vocabulary. Very few grammarians have been great prose or poetry writers. In the second place, we know that in the earlier stage

For our career we need no grammar to express ourselves. This intently shows that grammar is a hindrance to free speech. In one of his essays, George Orwell has

Grammar actually hinders the spontaneous learning of a foreign language. It is insisted that grammar helps in composition but the real facts prove something different. The performance of Students from grammar ridden schools is worse than students from grammar-less schools.

Grammar and composition are more or less independent. Good composition requires ideas, vocabulary, and correct expression and logical development of thought grammar provides none or very little. The knowledge of grammar does not help in creative work.

### **The Nature and Complexity of English Language Acquisition:**

Language comes before grammar. A child learns how to speak the language first by imitating the people around him. In course of time, he eventually forms sentences using structures of language to which he is exposed to. The English language is made up of structures such as Subject-Verb-Object, Subject-Verb-Complement, Subject-Verb-Indirect Object-Direct Object, etc. There is a world of other structures too which are all centred on the verb. Technically, one needs to know these structures in order to write and speak English well. The only way to learn these structures is by strenuous study and practice of English grammar. Syntax, This conscious knowledge of word structure teaches one how to write sentences in a meaningful manner. For instance, the boy ran on a thorn has a different meaning from the thorn ran on the boy. Although the structure of both these sentences is that of Subject-Verb-Object (S-V-O). Hence, one gains facility and confidence in the English language by methodically studying grammar and syntax. Reading good English books serves to enhance one's language proficiency.

Moreover, learning grammar rules helps us to make our communication coherent and logical. Understanding the use of noun, verb, adverb, adjective, phrase or clause helps us to write English better. When we write a letter, we need to know the rule of sentence structure and the customs in letter writing. Basic grammar helps a lot to understand literature better. News, stories or poems have a lot of long sentences. By analysing the grammar of sentences and paragraphs, the readers can enjoy their reading with clarity. The understanding of grammar and syntax is undoubtedly important. In fact it is essential to make any progress when learning a language and to be able to enjoy this process. It allows us to have fun and to be passionate about learning the language.

### **Practical Dividends of English Grammar Acquisition:**

Comprehending grammar intricacies enhances student's writing. It gives good command over speaking also. People, who are well-versed in grammar, can be better professionals. They are able to know to put right words to give catchy talks we need Basic English grammar in day to day life situations like writing an email and drafting a long memo. Having strong English skills will help to write a research paper in a science or sociology class. Grammar empowers language skills. College students should take at least an introductory English course that includes writing and grammar. They can also take additional classes to meet their requirements to have better writing and communication skills. Grammar gives a feeling of comfort in writing and reading.

According to developmental psychologist John Holt in his classic text, "How Children fail." Holt emphasizes, "However, that classes that focus on repetitive drilling and that fail to make the material relevant to everyday life can actually cause students to dislike reading and English. Choosing a course taught by an expert teacher can help to avoid this problem". Learning English grammar and syntax will increase proficiency particularly in written English. Understanding grammatical terminology makes the students competent and confident. Researchers agree that it is more effective to teach punctuation, sentence variety, and usage in the context of writing than to approach the topic by teaching isolated skills.

### **Gateway to a sea of opportunities:**

Quality grammar will open doors of opportunity, and may even allow creating verbal and written masterpieces. Good grammarians have the chance of becoming the next great poet, journalist, novelist or orator. Better grammar knowledge makes learning additional languages easier. We can recognize patterns and words with the association of grammar skills. Personal enrichment is increased through grammar. We can comprehend many of the great classics of the English language. No one can deny that studying English Quality grammar is beneficial for taking college entrance exams and competitive exams. Learning grammar is an important endeavour. It is an enjoyable process of learning with many benefits.

### **Conclusion:**

The value of grammar teaching is important in the field of teaching English language as it operates at the sentence level and governs the syntax or word order of English language. Besides, Grammar is not acquired naturally especially in a non-native environ. It's rather acquired by dint of learning the rules governing the language and also by rigorous drilling of the same in the practical situations of day-to-day life. Moreover, it is rather difficult to learn and master a language like English on our own. It is quite easy to get away with some spoken English with mistakes and get our ideas across somehow but written English calls for exacting perfection and impeccable accuracy. To top it all, the whole gamut of syntax, semantics, idiom, phrases, and Pronunciation, besides bewildering the students of L2, makes the process of learning English language, Grammar in particular, a hard nut to crack.

In this given context, the premise of grammar being unconsciously acquired and that studying the rules of grammar is simply a waste of valuable time as reiterated by the Communicative Approach stands not only irrelevant but also completely untenable. Research finds that students who were taught grammar instruction progressed to the next stage after a two-week period, Grammar teaching can help learners of L2 acquire grammar which they would not have learned on their own otherwise. Hence the mooted point that looms large is how to teach grammar in a way that arouse and arrests the interests of students. Interesting literary pieces, anecdotes, short stories, movie footages, poetry, and the likes that engage and sustain the interests of student in the target language can be incorporated. Above all, constant encouragement, face to face counselling to the students on the indispensable role of English in our lives through induction classes could be a world of help in imparting the bitter pill of English Grammar.

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