

EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR AS A TOOL FOR ACTUALIZING EDUCATION FOR ALL

Nwani-Grace Ugwu
Department of English,
Ebonyi State College of Education,
Ikwo.

And

Onwe Godwin Onwe
Department of English,
Ebonyi State College of Education,
Ikwo.

Abstract

As the language of instruction and of common use in Nigeria, the English language has become a vital tool in national development. To achieve education for all, therefore, the majority of the populace must speak impeccable English. Grammar is the core of any language and the mastery of it determines competence and performance in a language. This paper focuses on the teaching of grammar and discussed the reasons for the teaching of grammar as well as some of the methods and techniques that can be applied in its teaching in order to achieve success. Among others the paper recommended that only qualified teachers of English should be employed to teach grammar and that teachers must not only be observant to know if and when a change in a method or technique is required, they must also be able to modify existing techniques or initiate their own to suit situations in the class.

Keywords: English grammar, teaching methods, techniques, national development.

Grammar means different things to different people, so, when it comes to its definition, confusion abounds. As Boadi, Grieve, and Nwankwo (2004:8) rightly observed that,

"grammar " is one of the many words in English which may have very different meanings for different

people according to their educational background and experience, or which may be used by the same person with quite different meanings on different occasions.

To some people, for instance, it could mean the branch of the study of language which governs language use. To yet a different group, it is a set of rules and regulations which everyone must follow if they want to speak correctly.

According to Otagburuagu, Obah, Onuigbo, and Okorji (2007), grammar is a set of rules showing how sentences are formed. Alabi (2007) in agreement, defines grammar as a set of rules which specifies the organization of lexical items into meaningful larger structures in a language. Also, Boadi, Grieve, and Nwankwo (2004) posited that recent linguistic studies have come to use grammar to designate a set of rules which, when mechanically applied, will produce all the well-formed sentences in a language. From the perspective of these scholars, grammar suggests a list of do and don'ts rules that tell us how to say what we say. For others, such as Osisanwo (1999), grammar is a body of descriptive statements about the structure of a particular language. He sees grammar as a description of ways in which language uses patterns of structure to convey meaning. From this perspective, language is viewed as a behaviour and it is possible to discover and describe orderly patterns of arrangement into which various kinds of units are placed.

Grammars that make distinction between correct and incorrect forms are defined as prescriptive grammar. This approach codifies certain distinctions between standard and non-standard varieties and often makes overt value judgments by referring to the standard varieties as correct and the non-standard as incorrect or 'bad English' (Decarrico and Larson-Freeman, 2002). On the other hand, grammars that do not make

distinctions between correct and incorrect, which aim to describe language, are called descriptive grammars. In this approach, the rules are more like a blue print for building well-formed structures, and they represent speakers' unconscious knowledge of a language. Linguists who support descriptive grammar seem to be saying that language is what the native [speakers say it is, and not what someone else thinks it ought to be. The approach focuses on describing how native speakers actually do speak and does not prescribe how they ought to speak. In descriptive grammar, no value judgment is made, but neutral terms (grammatical and ungrammatical) are used to distinguish between patterns that are well-formed and those that are not. For example, "I went to school" is a grammatical construction in English but, "went school to I" is ungrammatical.

Language is an instrument of national development since it is through language that humans share information. Man as the prosecutor of development would not be able to transmit the results of his creativity without the use of language as a vehicle (Okafor & Ugwu, 2007). In the case of Nigeria, the language of common communication as well as the language of instruction in educational institutions is the English language. As a result, the use of English has become a measure of one's educational achievement. It, therefore, makes sense if effort is geared towards ensuring that English is effectively

taught and learnt. However, studies have shown that speaking and writing in a language with clarity cannot be achieved if one is deficient in the grammar of that language. Notwithstanding, the language background of Nigerian learners of English makes the teaching of grammar a difficult task. Teachers of English need to be adequately prepared to handle the task of teaching grammar effectively. This paper, thus, looks into the specific reasons for the teaching of grammar and also x-rays the methods and techniques that can be employed in the effective teaching of grammar.

Why Teach Grammar

The teaching of grammar is important for a lot of reasons; a few are discussed in this paper. Firstly, languages are different and the grammar of every language should be taught since grammar is an integral part of every language. Though all languages possess the same component of grammar (what is called language universals), every language is different in sound, vocabulary, and grammar, so, the grammar of every language being learned needs to be taught. For instance, using the Igbo and English languages, it can be seen that the grammar of one language can differ from that of another:

Igbo	- English
Akwukwọ a tọrọ uto	- This book is interesting
Nri a tọrọ uto	- This food is delicious

The sentences in the table above are supposed to pass the same information

but with the analyses of the said sentences it would be discovered that they differ in arrangement and choice of words. The Igbo grammar permits the use of the demonstrative adjective — a — (this) after the noun it modifies unlike in English where it precedes the noun it modifies. One can also see that the same word in Igbo (uto) can be used to mean both interesting and delicious signifying that they can both be used interchangeably. On the contrary, English would not tolerate delicious for book or interesting for food in the same context, no matter how elegantly constructed. The difference in the constructions is word-choice which is a grammatical phenomenon. Thus, it must be accepted that languages are different with implications for grammar and must be thoroughly taught to cater for the different structures. According to Otagburuagu, et al (2007), this explains the use which linguists make of contrastive analysis in order to identify the differences between learners' source language and the target language before selecting to teach.

Grammar is a mental discipline and as such helps to increase the stock of words and choices that people make in speech, to expand the borders of knowledge, and to sharpen the perception of the learner about the relation of grammar to the world. Learners, daily, seek to feed their minds on knowledge; if the hungry minds of learners are not fed through informed, sustained, and adequate teaching of the

discipline (grammar), they will seek to be satisfied elsewhere and eternal damage could be done.

Another reason for the teaching of grammar is that languages (in second language situations such as in Nigeria) have to be taught formally before they can be learned. To teach a language is to teach its grammar, speech, and appropriate usage. Grammar is the central part of any language and if a language is worth learning, it is the grammar that is learnt (Otagburuagu, et al, 2007). More so, as William (1990) says, grammar is primarily concerned with developing control of structures as a basis for effective communication, so, its teaching is of utmost importance.

Grammar is made up of a set of components: Phonetics (the production and perception of sounds in a language); Morphology (the study of forms, or how elements are combined to create words); Syntax (how words are strung together into sentences); and Semantics (the study of meanings). Asiyanbola (2005) observed that grammar can be subsumed under two categories of morphology and syntax. Morphology, he says, is the study of morphemes which are the smallest meaningful units of grammar while syntax is the study of grammatical units that are larger than the word. Language does not exist without grammar and viewing grammar with all of its components helps one to understand the complexity of language. Clearly, the goal of language learning is

for learners to acquire the grammar of a second language in its broadest sense; to understand and make meaning; and to become proficient users of the target language.

According to Cook (1989), grammar is important for language teaching as an account of part of the knowledge the students want to attain and of what they have to learn, and as a partial account of the processes involved in language production and comprehension. Cook went on to say that the importance of grammar in a language classroom, affects the syllabus a teacher wants to use, which relates to the native speaker's knowledge: the sequence for introducing elements the teacher adopts, which relates to the learning process; as well as the classroom techniques the teacher employs, which make use of language processes. In a language classroom, grammar plays some part in the description of what the students need to know (i.e. the syllabus). As has been said above, grammar is the core of every language, learning and teaching process in any classroom needs to seriously take grammar into consideration before the syllabus is constructed since the teacher cannot go outside grammar to select material in the language he intends to teach.

The Teaching of Grammar in the Language Classroom

The teaching of grammar is not the easiest of tasks, as Okotie (2010)

opined, most teachers find the teaching of grammar tasking and stressful and as a result, tend to dislike teaching it. However, the teaching of grammar need not be stressful as there are various available linguistic models that teachers can adopt to make their teaching easy and interesting. These models are called language teaching methods and they can be said to be the overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material. Depending on the topic, learning background of learners, the teaching environment, and the teacher, any of the following methods of teaching may be chosen.

1. Grammar Translation Method (GTM);
2. The Direct Method (DM);
3. The Audio-Lingual Method (ALM);
4. The Cognitive-Code Learning Method (CLM); and
5. The Eclectic Method (EL).

The Grammar Translation Method is also known as the Traditional Method and it is based on the deductive approach which presumes that learners know nothing beforehand about the topic. The GTM stresses the vitality of learning the rules of grammar and translating them (the rules) into the mother tongue of the learner (William, 1990). Boadi, Grieve, and Nwankwo (2004) described the GTM as a rule governed method and to explain the use of the method, they give an example in which a teacher writes a sentence on the chalkboard, divides it into parts and

classifies the different parts as belonging to particular parts of speech. As the lesson progresses, the teacher gives definitions of the parts of speech and asks the learners to repeat after him before translating the definitions of the parts of speech into their native language.

The features of GTM include, translation (the target language is translated into the learner's source language); memorization (sentences, words and discourse are memorized and recited); definition (parts of speech and other aspects of grammar are defined and memorized); writing (a lot of writing is done in the GTM class); and reading (reading is used to complement writing and vice versa). Teachers who use the GTM, especially at the lower primary school classes, have the advantage of translating into the mother tongue of the child thereby getting the child to relax and familiarize himself to the different new concepts being introduced. William (1990), also gave an interesting fact in favour of the method, he observes that in some instances, using the method can be economical: to just state the rule and explain it.

The Direct Method, on the other hand, is based on the inductive approach which assumes that the learners should be able to find out facts on his own and is therefore given examples, questions, or rules to lead him to the facts. The DM according to Olajide (2000) supported active and spontaneous use of the target

language in the classroom. This, he says will induce the language learner to learn the grammar of the language faster. In agreement, Olaoye (1998) further explained that the DM is hinged on the notion that language learning is a natural process and learning is bound to take place if learners are often spoken to in the target language. Further, Okonkwo (2006) asserted that DM advocates that students should associate foreign language directly with objects and actions without the use of the mother tongue. Thus, in a DM class, the teacher is encouraged to use pictures and settings from everyday life (i.e. create real life situations). Also, the DM, according to William (1990), encourages high learner participation which the GTM fails to do.

Another method which the teacher of grammar will find invaluable is the Audio-Lingual Method. As the name implies, the ALM has listening and speaking as its primary skills. In fact, Otagburuagu, et al (2007) described the name of the method as a descriptive term for listening and speaking as it thrives by the aural and oral skills. In an ALM class, Otagburuagu. et al demonstrate the method where a teacher invites the class to listen as he presents a structural pattern aloud and asks the class to repeat after him; repetition is carried on for some to ensure that the learners attain automatic oral mastery; gradually, minor transformations and substitutions are inserted by the teacher. Further, William points out that the

techniques of the method rely heavily on the use of dialogue where learners are made to speak and listen to others. More so, Okotie (2010) agreed that dialogue is a good strategy in teaching structure as it affords learners the opportunity of not only learning the structure being taught but getting the chance of orally practicing self expression. Thus, the method is an improvement upon the earlier two methods (GTM and DM) as dialogue creates environment for learners to communicate creatively.

The ALM, however, has been criticized for mainly teaching language through practice and repetition and emphasizing the primacy of oral drills over writing and reading. As a result of this and other criticisms, the method has been modified in recent years to accommodate the observed lapses. For instance, William (1990:46) observed.

More attention is now paid to explanation during pattern drills. Real-life situations are now being simulated in the classroom. There is a greater variety of activities through pictures, dramatization, role-playing, and an increased use of native-language equivalents where necessary.

The Cognitive Code-Learning Method is sometimes regarded as an improved version of the Grammar Translation Method. This could be because it also emphasizes the learning of rules as a way of attaining mastery in grammar (Otagburuagu, et al, 2007).

William (1990) wrote that the teaching principles of the method derive from the view that language learning is rule-formation and not habit-formation. The proponents of the method believe that since most second and foreign language learners cannot sound exactly like native speakers, pronunciation practice should not be unduly stressed. In using this method, writing, group work, and individualized instruction are given more attention than choral work. Automated repetition is discouraged and greater use is made of audio-visual aids, anecdotes, and other illustrations. Also, the use of mother tongue and translation is allowed.

As has been said earlier, many methods abound, though the teacher of grammar should note that they are all different and possess diverse areas of strength and weaknesses. It should also be noted that no single method is complete to solve every problem of the teaching and learning situation. This has given rise to the need to arrive at a method that has the advantage of flexibility and adaptability - the Eclectic Approach. This method tends to incorporate every type of teaching method to bring out the best in the students. This has become expedient as Azikiwe (1998) affirmed that there is a need for variety in the teaching and learning situation in order to bring equal opportunities to learners with differing learning abilities. She warns, however, that any teacher who wants to use the method will be a slave to many methods

in the execution of his duties. Proponents of the method feel that teachers of grammar should not tie themselves to any one method since there are individual differences amongst learners. In agreement, Akuma & Okorie (2007) suggested that teachers should combine methods considering that monotony kills interest. William (1990:6), on his part, declares that the Eclectic Approach,

...is not a sitting-on-the-fence attitude. Neither is it an approach which randomly or indiscriminately takes a little bit of this and a little bit of that to come up with a mixture of disjointed teaching styles. ...it applies a specific method or technique to suit a specific objective.

He further added that the teacher who chooses to use this method must be one who acquaints himself with alternative choices and modifies different methods to suit any situation.

There are many other teaching methods which space will not permit to be discussed here, no matter how brief. However, there are techniques which the teacher of grammar needs to apply in classroom situations to effectively bring the methods to life. Techniques are the actual activities and strategy that the teacher uses in the classroom. In the teaching of grammar, there are both formal and informal techniques and the teacher is also allowed to invent his own techniques as the need arises. Some of

the techniques for teaching grammar are, substitution drills, completion exercises, chaining, transformations, and pattern practice (Otagburuagu, et al, 2007). Other techniques are dialogue, group work, use of questionnaires, use of visuals, re-telling stories, and role-play.

Substitution drills are used to teach new lexical items, especially antonyms (opposites) and synonyms (same in meaning). Words are written in tables and learners are asked to substitute items from different columns until they can create as many sentences as the words in the table will permit. Completion exercises are also done in tabular forms but are used for learners who have acquired some mastery in structures and can try their hands on completing sentences with required lexical or structural items. Chaining and transformation go hand-in-hand in teaching composition frames. Chaining displays the connected ideas while transformation which logically accompanies it requires that structures be converted to arrive at different sentences using the same frame. These are used for learners who have acquired some level of freedom of choice of patterns, words, and connectors in a composition frame. Pattern practice is used with beginners as a good means of presenting new patterns. It can be done in a tabular form or in prose form but due to the pictorial effect teachers often prefer to use the tabular form. In pattern practice, a structure is written to show the different parts of a sentence and the

learners repeat it several times hence the name.

To use dialogue, the teacher creates a situation that requires two or more learners to make contributions; the teacher listens and takes notes that he will use to make corrections and improvements at the end of the interaction of the students. Group work allows learners to work in pairs and groups to solve language problems. This technique is particularly good because weak learners get to learn from strong learners and they feel free to contribute without fear of disappointing their teacher. More so, William (1990) asserted that group activity is essential for practice in communication. Questionnaires and visuals (maps, diagrams, and pictures) are good prompts for dialogue in communicative practice; they may also be used for pair or group activity where two or more students are required to interact posing and answering questions. Another technique is to ask learners to re-tell a story they read earlier in their own words. Creation of real life situations is a good way of getting learners to contribute meaningfully in a communication practice. Role-play provides a substitute for real life scenario and young learners find it interesting and often have a lot to contribute.

Conclusion

Given the importance of the English language in Nigeria, it is

necessary to ensure that it is taught effectively at all levels of the education system. Since competence in a language implies knowledge of the grammar of that language, grammar, thus, is the basis of language study. To this end, traditional and modern linguistics have made available various teaching methods for the teacher of grammar to choose from. A few of these methods have been discussed here.

The discussion revealed that newer teaching methods adopt the same patterns as older ones. As William (1990) reported, "some language teaching methods which are now regarded as new bear a strong resemblance to what was practiced in the past." It will be safe to conclude that linguists build upon what is already in existence to get better methods. Thus, over the years, methods of language teaching keep getting better. In applying the theories of any of the methods, the teacher will not lack techniques to choose from.

Recommendations

Having seen the importance of the English language in Nigeria and the need for the study of grammar, the study makes the following recommendations.

1. It has become paramount that teachers of grammar possess knowledge of the different methods of language teaching so that they would be well equipped when they set out to impart the knowledge of grammar. More so, as English is a

second language in Nigeria teachers need to keep updating their knowledge.

2. Teachers should be initiative and not rely solely on textbook techniques. While in the classroom, situations should dictate the techniques that the teacher uses. Also, the teacher must be observant and know if and when a change in the method or technique is required.
3. Language teaching is a delicate affair and should never be handled by an unprofessional merely because they are fluent in the language. Some concepts in language can only be explained by linguists who have spent time and resources studying language scientifically. Thus, only qualified teachers of English should be employed to teach grammar.
4. As a matter of urgency, seminars and re-training programmes should be organized for teachers of English on a regular basis. This will help in no small measure to update their knowledge with new innovations. The National Policy on Education (2004) clearly stated that the quality of the education system of a country cannot rise above the quality of its teachers; it then falls on the teachers of English in Nigerian schools to be worthy models of the linguistic skills they seek to impart.

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