

## TEACHING GRAMMAR WITH FUN: CHALLENGING THE MYTHS

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### ABSTRACT

Banyak mahasiswa atau pelajar beranggapan bahwa grammar (tata bahasa Inggris) adalah sesuatu yang rumit dan sulit. Kadangkala terdengar bahwa mengajar tata bahasa tidak membuat siswa mengurangi kesalahan berbahasa. Para siswa percaya bahwa pelajaran tata bahasa membosankan dan tidak menarik. Pelajaran tata bahasa adalah struktur dasar dari aktivitas formal suatu bahasa. Salah satu aspek terpenting dari pelajaran tata bahasa adalah membantu siswa menemukan keaslian bahasa. Bagi Pengajar bahasa sangatlah penting membuat model pengajaran tata bahasa berdasarkan pada teori. Penggabungan beberapa sumber pengajaran dan teknik, yang berdasarkan pada aktivitas komunikasi, pelajaran tata bahasa akan membentuk sudut pandang baru.

Makalah ini menunjukkan beberapa mitos yang salah dalam memandang pelajaran tata bahasa. Ada beberapa saran yang bisa diikuti terutama untuk mereka yang ingin menghidupkan kelas tata bahasa. Dengan keinginan untuk mencapai yang terbaik, pengajar harus tahu apa yang dibutuhkan saat mengajar tata bahasa. Para pengajar diharapkan mengasah kemampuan dan memperdalam pengetahuan dalam tata bahasa melalui berbagai sumber salah satunya adalah internet.

**Keywords:** pelajaran tata bahasa, mitos, integrasi, aktivitas komunikasi

### INTRODUCTION

Language is an instrument. According to Henry Sweet, an English phonetician and language scholar, (cited in Encyclopedia Britannica, 2005) language is the expression of idea by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words themselves are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts. Languages are immensely complicated structures. They differ in the extent to which word-form variation is used in their grammar. Not surprisingly, one soon

realizes how complicated any language is when trying to learn it as a second language.

Therefore, many learners assume that grammar is a large, complicated subject. Grammar is often misunderstood in the language teaching field. Moreover, we sometimes hear that teaching grammar does not help students make fewer errors. Even, we often perceive that learning grammar is boring and not fascinating.

#### **Why is grammar important?**

Grammar is a rule of language governing the sounds, words,

sentences, and other elements, as well as their combination and interpretation (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2005). Musumeci explored the nature of grammar in her article: Linguists define grammar as a set of components: phonetics (the production and perception of sounds), phonology (how sounds are combined), morphology (the study of forms, or how elements are combined to create words), and syntax (how words are strung together into sentences), and semantics or meaning. According to NCTE, grammar is important because it is the language that makes it possible for us to talk about language. It names the types of words and word groups that make up sentences not only in any language. Because all languages are characterized by these components, by definition, language does not exist without grammar. Viewing grammar with all of its components helps us as language teachers understand the complexity of what it means to know the grammar of a language. Besides, understanding basic grammar can help learners see the patterns of different languages and dialects.

In agreement with NCTE, as human beings, we can put sentences together even as children, however, *knowing about grammar* is a chief skill to be able to talk about how sentences are built, about the types of words and word groups that make up sentences. They moreover described *knowing about grammar* offers a window into the human mind and into

our amazingly complex mental capacity. *Knowing about grammar* also helps us understand that grammar can be part of literature discussions. *Knowing about grammar* means finding out that all languages and all dialects follow grammatical patterns.

Furthermore, Azar (2007) stated "one important aspect of grammar teaching is that it helps learners discover the nature of language, i.e., that language consist of predictable patterns that make what we say, read and write intelligible. She explained more without grammar, we would have only individual words or sounds, pictures, and body expressions to communicate meaning. In relation to her, grammar is the weaving that creates the fabric. Subsequently, Chen (in his article *In Search of an Effective Grammar Teaching Model*) proposed that "language teachers urgently need a grammar teaching model built upon theoretical insights and research findings from second language acquisition. This model must be compatible with a communicative framework that stresses meaningful (negotiated) interaction resulting from the learners' comprehension of classroom input." Recently, communicative language teaching has played an important role in language teaching.

Musumeci () pointed out "communicative language teaching has brought a renewed emphasis on the role that semantics plays in the definition of language. Communicative

language teaching is fundamentally concerned with 'making meaning' in the language, whether by interpreting someone else's message, expressing one's own, or negotiating when meaning unclear." Then, Chen (1995) suggested a grammar teaching model should integrate *explicit grammar instruction* (EGI) with communicative language teaching (CLT). He borrowed the term explicit grammar instruction, from Terrell (1991) to refer to those instructional strategies employed to raise learners' conscious awareness of the form or structure of the target language.

As stated by Saricoban & Metin (2000), grammar teaching has often been regarded as a structure based, formal activity. After the integration of several sources and techniques, which are mainly based on communicative activities, the teaching of grammar gained a new insight. In the teaching of grammar, technique-resource combinations are often modified to structure-discourse match and if well developed, they can be used effectively for all phases of a grammar lesson.

Indeed, some studies (see Canale and Swain, 1988 in Chen, 1995) reported that grammatical competence is not a good predictor for communicative competence, overestimate the role of unconscious learning. Lumanen (2004) also gave details that the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which developed in opposition against too much explicit grammar teaching, has gained much

success over the years and is considered to be the current mainstream in Finland, whereas the MFL Department in St Martin's College Lancaster has developed its own approach based on the idea of teaching grammar through the target language.

#### Challenging the Myths

The misconception lies in the view that grammar is a collection of arbitrary rules about static structure in the language (Larsen-Freeman cited in <http://www.learninggrammar/grammar.morph.html>). Further questionable claims are that the structures do not have to be taught, learners will acquire them on their own, or if the structures are taught, the lessons that ensue will be boring. Consequently, communicative and proficiency-based teaching approaches sometimes unduly limit grammar instruction. According to ERIC (cited in <http://www.learninggrammar/grammar.morph.html>), of the many claims about grammar this digest will challenge ten myths.

1. Grammar is acquired naturally; it used not be taught.
2. Grammar is a collection of meaningless forms.
3. Grammar consists of arbitrary rules.
4. Grammar is boring.
5. Students have different learning styles. Not all students can learn grammar.
6. Grammar structures are learned one at a time.

7. Grammar has to do only with sentences-level and sub sentence-level phenomena
8. Grammar and vocabulary are areas of knowledge. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are the four skills.
9. Grammars provide the rules/explanations for all the structures in a language.
10. "I don't know enough to teach grammar."

Hirsch (article, 2005) explained the first point is true that some learners acquire second language grammar naturally without instruction. It is also true that learning particular grammatical distinctions requires a great deal of time even for the most skilled learners. Carol Chomsky (1969, in Hirsch's article, 2005) showed that native English speakers were still in the process of acquiring certain grammatical structure in English well into adolescence. Hirsch kept on: "with regard to whether instruction can help learners acquire grammar they would not have learned on their own, some research, although not unequivocal, points to the value of form-focused instruction to improve learners' accuracy over what normally transpires when there is no focus on form."

The second myth may have risen because many people associate the term grammar with verb paradigms and rules about linguistic form. However, grammar is not one-dimensional and not meaningless; it embodies the three dimensions of

morph syntax (form), semantics (meaning), and pragmatics (use). These dimensions are interdependent; a change in one results in change in another. Despite their interdependence, however, they each offer a unique perspective on grammar.

The third myth possibly will emerge as it is assumed that while there is some synchronic arbitrariness to grammar, not all of what is deemed arbitrary is so. If one adopts a broad enough perspective, it is possible to see why things are the way they are.

Grammar is boring. This myth is derived from the impression that grammar can only be taught through repetition and other rote drills. Teaching grammar does not mean asking students to repeat models in a mindless way, and it does not mean memorizing rules. Such activities can be boring and do not necessarily teach grammar. This does not mean there is no place for drills, but drills should be used in a meaningful and purposeful way.

On behalf of clarifying the fifth myth, research shows that some people have a more analytical learning style than others. According to Hatch (1974, in Hirsch's article, 2005), some learners approach the language learning task as "rule formers." Such learners are accurate but halting users of the target language. Others are what Hatch calls "data gatherers, fluent but inaccurate producers of the target language. This observation by itself does not address whether or not all students can learn

grammar. While it may be true that learners approach language learning differently, there has been no research to show that some students are incapable of learning grammar.

Students have different strengths and weaknesses. It is clear that all students can learn grammar as is evident from their mastery of their first language. As grammar is no different from anything else, it is likely that students will learn at different rates.

The sixth myth above seems demonstrably untrue. Teachers may teach one grammar structure at a time, and students may focus on one at a time, but students do not master one at a time before going on to learn another. There is a constant interaction between new interlanguage forms and old. We know that the learning curve for grammatical structures is not a smoothly ascending line, but rather is characterized by peaks and valleys, backslidings and restructurings.

Next, still in Hirsch's article, he enlightened the seventh myth: "grammar does operate at the sentence level and governs the syntax or word orders that are permissible in the language. It also works at the sub sentence level to govern such things as number and person agreement between subject and verb in a sentence. However, grammar rules also apply at the suprasentential or discourse level." He persevered with the example, not every choice between the use of the past and the present perfect tense

can be explained at the sentence level. Often, the speaker's choice to use one or the other can only be understood by examining the discourse context.

What's more, we discuss about the eighth myth that goes on about the area of grammar. Grammar can be thought of as static knowledge apart from it can also be considered a process. Language teachers would not be content if their students could recite all the rules of grammar but not be able to apply them. The goal is for students to be able to use grammar in an unselfconscious fashion to achieve their communicative ends. As with any skill, achieving this goal takes practice. Ellis (1993, in Hirsch's article) postulated that structural syllabi work better to facilitate intake than to teach learners to produce grammatical items correctly. He suggested that grammar teaching should focus on consciousness raising rather than on the practice of accurate production. Van Pattern and Carderno's finding (1993, in Hirsch's article) supported that students' experience with processing input data is more effective than giving students a grammatical explanation followed by output practice.

Explaining why the ninth myth comes into sight is an ongoing quest. On account of languages' evolution, linguists' descriptions can never be complete for all time; they have to accommodate the changing nature of language. Hirsch indicated languages change and any textbook rule should

be seen as subject to change and non-categorical. Just as grammar learning is a process—witness the persistent instability of interlanguages—so grammar itself. There is little static about either.

As a final point, teachers often say like the last myth when they have opted to teach one of the other language skills, or when they choose to teach a low-proficiency class. While it is true that teachers can only teach what they know, teachers who articulate the above often know more than they think they do.

#### **The best way to approach grammar**

Although teachers have tried to teach the standard parts of speech and the usual rules for correct writing, for example, the students will hang on to the information for very long. Under these circumstances there are three suggestions to approach grammar. The first is to be selective, to the extent that teachers can. Students benefit much more from learning a few grammar keys thoroughly than from trying to remember many terms and rules. Experiment with different approaches until teachers find the ones that work the best for teachers and their students. Some teachers focus on showing students how phrases add rich detail to sentences. Other teachers find that sentence diagrams help students see the organization of sentences. Some use grammar metaphors (the sentence, for example, as a bicycle, with the subject as the front wheel and the predicate as the back). Some

emphasize the verb as the key part of speech, showing students how the sentence is built around it and how vivid verbs create vivid sentences.

The second is to make lots of discussion of language, along with lots of reading and lots of writing. Teaching grammar will not make writing errors go away. Students make errors in the process of learning, and as they learn about writing, they often make new errors, not necessarily fewer ones. Nevertheless, understanding basic grammatical terminology does provide students with a tool for thinking about and discussing sentences.

The last suggestion is that whatever approach you take to grammar, show students how to apply it not only to their writing but also their reading and to their other languages/art activities. For instance, knowing basic grammar can help students when they come across a difficult story or poem. If they know how to find the main verb and the subject, they have a better chance of figuring out a difficult sentence. When they like the way a writer writes, they can identify the sentence structures that the writer uses, and they can experiment with them themselves.

#### **The best way to liven up a grammar class**

Teaching grammar has varied from time according to different methodologies and learning theories. Generally, teachers have their own method to teach and to learn grammar. The result of Jaakkola's

research (cited in Sumanen's essay) showed that teachers preferred explicit learning to the implicit one as well as inductive teaching in mother tongue supported by independent production activities. The teachers actually considered language ability to be the ability to use language for communication.

However, what should teachers do to liven up a grammar class? For those who are teachers, grammar class is always an opportunity for fun. Furthermore, it is important that teachers are not far too seriously, with long unsmiling faces, in plodding academic style. Therefore, teachers should collect, categorize, or detail fun communicative activities to use in the classroom.

Many teachers make up games as they go along and create interactive activities out of grammar exercises. They have an excellent resource for ideas and materials to support and expand upon the activities that make grammar fun. Moreover, Lee Su Kim (1979, in Abdelaziz Dqai's article, 2007) observed that games 'not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing to do.' Rather they should be considered of a paramount importance. In addition to be fun they generate, their educational value should not be denied. Evenly, he concluded using games in teaching English as a foreign language is very beneficial to students and teachers alike. He had used games and he had

seen hilarity and merriment on his learners' face. Games are very useful in the sense students acquire second language the way they do with their mother tongue.

#### **What is needed?**

When teachers teach grammar, actually they must know what is needed. There are three components that they should prepare in teaching grammar. The first component is content. Teaching grammar will be fun if the content is interesting and relevant. Azar (2007) described those of us who engage in Grammar-Based Teaching often notice that students enjoy talking about grammar; they become meaningfully engaged in the content. And as Ellis (2002, in Azar) pointed: 'for some learners at least, talking about grammar may be more meaningful than talking about kinds of general topics often found in communicative language courses'. Azar persevered communicative interaction with grammar as the topic is seen as a valuable language-learning experience in Grammar-Based Teaching, equally as valuable as talking about any other academic subject that requires negotiation of meaning and cognitive understanding of information and ideas.

The second one is input. During class time there are, of course, periods of focused concentration, especially during the first phases of a new unit when the students are trying to grasp an initial understanding of the form and meaning of a structure. Since the meaning is an important

device in teaching grammar, it is important to contextualize any grammar point. We, as teachers, should know that even during those phases, explanations, and examples can be enlivened by funny sentences, songs, verse, games, problem solving activities, fun demonstrations or pantomimes, mini-reading, or drawing or other art work. Songs, for example, offer a change from routine classroom activities. According to Saricoban and Metin, songs are precious resources to develop students' abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They can also be used to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, adjectives, and adverbs. As stated by Lo and Fai Li (1998:8, in Saricoban and Metin's article), learning English through songs also provides a non-threatening atmosphere for students, who usually are tense when speaking English in a formal classroom setting.

Like songs, poems exaggerate the rhythmic nature of the language. They excessively contextualize a grammar lesson effectively. If a poem that exemplifies a particular structure is also a good poem, it engages the eye, the ear and the tongue simultaneously while also stimulating and moving us; this polymorphic effect makes poetry easier to memorize than other things for many students (Celce-Muria and Hills, 1988:123).

The latest concern of the foreign language teachers is to make the students use the language communi-

catively. As pointed out by Saricoban and Metin: "after the realization of communicative competence, activities or techniques that are task-oriented and that lead students to use the language creatively have gained importance". They put forward games and problem-solving activities, which are task-based and have a purpose beyond the production of correct speech, are the examples of the most preferable communicative activities. Such activities highlight not only the competence but also the performance of the learner.

The last is tasks. To give students tasks teachers can try using worksheet or other materials, such as surfing in internet, newspapers and the students' own writing, as sources for grammar examples and exercises. In real texts, students can see how sentences connect and contrast to each other through their grammar. Teachers can also use many of the generic worksheets that can adapt from any kinds of grammar books. It assumed that students of English who limit their study of grammar to what they find in grammar books are like naturalist who limit their study of nature to an encyclopedia (Intensive English Institute, 2005). Grammar books tend to make things fairly simple and there is some value in that. Nevertheless, for the serious student of English, it is worthwhile also to broaden your horizons and explore the jungle out in the real world.

These three components will give teaching and learning grammar with fun if teachers can apply it whenever they are in grammar class or other class. So, it will be hoped the students can understand and find grammar most interesting when they apply it to authentic texts.

#### **Integrate the Skills as much as possible**

Briefly, as Saricoban and Metin stated the integration of sources and techniques can generate a grammar lesson affective, beneficial, and interesting. They concluded according to the needs analysis of a classroom, several techniques can be integrated with such resources (songs, poems, games, and problem solving activities). These resources can assist our teaching of grammar while providing a relaxed atmosphere and motivated students. Such activities are student centered, hence, by using them we give a chance to our students to express themselves, enjoy themselves during learning, and use the reserves of their minds.

In addition, on behalf of integrating the skills we can also take advantage of as what Hall (1998, in Al-Jarf) recommended: "explicit, implicit, and exploratory grammar teaching approaches that use word processing packages, electronic dictionaries and grammars, the World Wide Web, concordances, electronic mail, computer games/simulations, and authoring aids were combined to overcome the 'grammar deficit' seen in many British undergraduate

students learning German". Therefore, the Internet is an excellent place to begin experiencing English as it occurs in its natural surroundings – not only are there millions of English readily available, but also most of them can be electronically searched for those elusive yet fascinating English grammar structures.

Al-Jarf findings illustrated for all levels of English proficiency, the computer-based students scored significantly higher on open-ended tests covering the grammatical structures in question than the teacher-directed students. She also found that computer-based instruction can be effective method of teaching L2 grammar.

Derived from the fact, through the 'grammar safari' activities on the internet, for example, either teachers or students can hunt and collect grammatical structures. Going on a Grammar Safari does not give learners access to any special documents collected for ESL study or any other purpose and does not provide any grammatical explanations for what you find. On the contrary, going on a grammar safari provides you with (usually) hundreds or thousands of examples of any particular English words you choose, used in authentic communication. That is fine. Do not hesitate to adapt if you want to be success with fun grammar.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Grammar is important because without grammar we can talk about

language, go on about how sentences are built and are not capable of seeing the patterns of different languages and dialects. Nevertheless, there are some myths that show the misconception in the view of grammar. For defeating this, as being mentioned, teachers and learners should possess the way to approach grammar which is selective, shows more discussions, and illustrates how to put on grammar to writing or reading or other languages art activities.

Subsequently, teachers are supposed to build a grammar class being fun for all time. Many teachers are required to effort their class attractive, valuable, and powerful. In order to achieving this goal, they may build up some well-developed and fascinating techniques in the classroom. When teaching grammar, they must prepare some components with the intention of brightening up the class. The components maintain contain, input, and tasks.

In an attempt to integrating the skill to the extent that achievable, the teachers can utilize in the role of: (1) the integration of sources and techniques which can generate a grammar lesson effective, beneficial, and interesting; (2) the accomplishment of word processing packages, electronic dictionaries and grammars, the World Wide Web, concordances, electronic mail, computer games/simulations, and authoring aids.

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