



THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING GRAMMAR IN EFL CLASSES

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Abstract. The present article is about the methods of teaching grammar in EFL classes. The author of the article discusses advantages and disadvantages of the traditional and communicative methods of teaching foreign languages and gives opinions concerning them. At the same time the problems of using authentic material in the EFL classes are also discussed in the article. The author suggests some recommendations that can be useful for EFL teachers in choosing a song to be used in their classes.

Key words: EFL, communicative method, traditional method, authentic material, accuracy, fluency, motivation to speak, violation of phonetic and grammar rules.

Learning foreign languages has become prestigious for the last 20-30 years, especially in the developing countries. To our mind, this is the main factor for the increase of number of international students studying abroad. Knowing at least one foreign language (in most cases this is being the English language) gives great opportunities for those young people who are willing to work in a prestigious job. At the same time, there appearing different variants and types of pronunciation of the English language, there are made numerous changes to the phonetic and grammar rules of this language. As an example, we can state the usage of the verb *will* for all persons which replaced the verb *shall* that was used for the first person singular and plural pronouns.

The knowledge of grammar is an important factor in language learning. This is to say, without the knowledge of grammar we can speak a foreign language neither fluently nor accurately. But to our mind, most textbooks cannot simply cover all the changes that happened to the grammar of the English language. In the present article we will make an attempt to prove the importance of teaching grammar in EFL classes.

At the present time in the whole world communicative methods of teaching foreign languages are regarded as the most productive one. The usage of this will

allow learners to speak fluently and with confidence. This method tends to use different authentic and non authentic materials at the foreign language lessons. In recent years, increasing numbers of teachers, in all subjects, has been looking for ways to change the traditional forms of instruction in which knowledge is transmitted, in a one-way process, from a dominant teacher to a class of silent, obedient, “passive” learners. They have sought ways to make the classroom more “student-centered” and have investigated the different ways in which students can play more active roles in discovering and processing knowledge. As an example, we can state task-based learning. Although task-based learning is regarded as one particular approach to implementing the broader “communicative approach” and, as with the communicative approach in general, one of the features of task-based learning that often worries teachers is that it seems to have no place for the teaching of grammar [1].

Teaching grammar was always considered by the learners as the most boring process, that’s why it was difficult for EFL teachers to teach grammar. With the changes that took place in teaching foreign languages, teaching grammar has become less boring as it was not taught separately and using communicative methods. Today we can observe the use of authentic materials in EFL classes. This also covers teaching grammar. We strongly support the use of authentic materials as they prepare the learners to communicate using live language. At the same time we think that authentic should be chosen with some care. For example, when we choose songs to be used in our classes, we are to pay attention, whether they do not contain lines contradicting to English grammar rules. In most American songs we can hear such a phrase “*I don’t need nobody*”. As far as we know, the usage of two negations in one sentence contradicts to the grammar rules of the English language. Considering all of such cases we will try to discuss the following cases that EFL teachers are to be aware when using authentic materials.

- a) *Do they contain contradictions to English phonetic rules;*
- b) *Do they provoke the usage of irregular grammar;*
- c) *Can they be freely used in the culture of the learners;*
- d) *Are they relevant to the age and interests of the learners?*

As the object of the present article is teaching grammar, we will pay more attention to the second case than the other three cases and discuss it at the end.

Most songs of the American singers always contain misleading spellings of words. In most cases we can find cases of the wrong forms of words like “*pushin*” (*pushing*), “*find’em*” (*find them*), “*ur love*” (*your love*) etc. For this reason care should be taken while choosing a song for our EFL classes. Otherwise, our learners will probably take the forms given in brackets for granted.

In some cases the EFL teachers can mistakenly think that we can choose any English song in the classes. According to M. Jackson “in the USA and Ireland, songs can be used for educational purposes. It means that the teacher is to check whether the laws of the country allow them to use songs for educational purposes” [2]. Another problem that we EFL teachers can face is the content of some English songs. Different people have different culture and their religion is also different. For this reason, to our mind, care should be taken while choosing an English song containing the motive of Christian religion to be used for the Muslim learners.

Today, most experienced EFL teachers are paying attention to whether the materials they are using fit the age and sex of their learners. Concerning the choice of English songs to be used in EFL classes we can suggest the same. For example, the songs containing the content of love, to our mind, or to be used least of all when the age of learners is below 12-13. One more example is Pink Floyd’s song “*We don’t need no education*”. We should ask to what extent this song can be useful in teaching children, who might misunderstand it.

The violation of grammar rules in American and English songs is another problem that EFL teachers can face. In the above mentioned song “*We don’t need no education*” we find the usage of double negation, which contradicts to the grammar rules of the English language.

As a conclusion concerning the usage of songs for educational purposes, we can say the following. Before teachers create an activity around a song, they might want to think about the following:

- What are the songs that their learners are interested to listen?
- Are the words and expressions suitable for their learners?
- Can the songs be used for teaching purposes?

Further, in the article we would like to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of both traditional and communicative approaches to teaching English grammar. In the last century teachers of foreign languages used traditional methods, where the learner didn’t get any motivation to speak; on the contrary the learners were asked to make no mistakes. This very factor made a lot of learners to feel demotivated to speak simply because they were afraid to make mistakes. In traditional methodology the students learned the language rules first and then they were checked by the teacher how well they have acquired the rules. For a great period of time traditional way of teaching foreign languages, grammar in particular, has dominated in EFL teaching. In this method the most important thing was the accuracy of a learner’s speech. To our mind, here lies both the advantage and disadvantage of this method. The learners’ speech can be accurate, this is being as an advantage, and at the same time as a result of too much attention paid on accuracy a learner can be

afraid to make mistakes and become “an expert in English grammar, who doesn’t speak it”, this is being a disadvantage.

But at the present world we can observe the usage of so called “communicative approach” to teaching foreign languages, where the learner is motivated to speak. Concerning this method of teaching the same can be said, but quite the opposite of what we discussed while speaking about the traditional way of teaching. Today in the whole world the latter method dominates in EFL classes. But, to our mind, this method has brought the accuracy of our learners almost to zero level. Most learners have quite a fluent English speech, but at the same time there can be found numerous mistakes in their speech. This might not bring many problems when the learners do not become EFL teachers themselves, but if so, and then it is a problem. This is because, if an EFL teachers’ speech is not free of phonetic and grammar mistakes, how they can teach English in the classrooms?

At the beginning of the article we gave the opinion of many language learners that studying grammar is a boring process. This is true to some extent. Whenever we are faced with the situation when an EFL teacher teaches grammar in the traditional way, that is to say, to teach the rules and then ask the learners to learn by heart, etc. Teaching grammar, to our mind, is to be done in a way where the rules will not dominate the process of teaching. Most practical grammar books published in the USA and Great Britain for the last 20 years cover this requirement to some extent. But at the same time we should confess that, grammar is to be taught not separately, but in the integration with other aspects.

One more approach to teaching grammar is so called “grammar in the context”, according to which the grammar is taught in a completely different way. The learners are introduced with a context where the examples of the targeted grammar rule are given. For example, if the teacher is going to teach *past perfect*, then s/he can choose a text where there are situations that fit this tense. Further, during the lesson a teacher can explain how this tense is expressed, its rules, etc. This method, to our mind, is the dominating one in EFL classrooms. At the same time we can find out some problems of using this method among beginner learners who cannot read larger texts. For this reason an EFL teacher is to consider the learner's level of knowledge and then plan a lesson.

To what extent does the fluency of learners’ speech is more important than the accuracy? This is question that I asked myself during the last 4-5 years of my experience of working as an EFL teacher. I am happy when I express my opinion concerning the speaking skills of some of my learners, but I not that happy when I think of the accuracy of their speech. Why do we freely violate the linguistic rules of a foreign language and we do not feel awkward to do so? The reason lies, to our mind, in the fact of modern ways of living in some developed countries, which sat

“feel free to do whatever you want”. I am not going to say that I am against or for this way of living, my point is another – this shouldn’t violate others rights. The same can be told concerning the process of EFL teaching, violation of the rules of the English language should not violate the rights of our learners to get English with “high quality”.

As a conclusion, I want to state that by critically judging the communicative approach of teaching foreign languages I did not want to say that I am against this method. Simply as a person who was taught in the epoch of traditional method and the one using the communicative method as a teacher, I decided to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of both methods. By doing this I wanted to state that, the accuracy and fluency of our learners’ speech should be equally important for us. By ignoring the grammar of a foreign language, the English language in particular, we cannot bring our learners to a good speech, because as it is known to everyone “The grammar is the art of speaking”. We fully agree that modern education is based on democratic and liberal principles: students should not be forced, but motivated. A teacher is not a tyrant who strictly maintains order in class, checks homework and in the deathly silence explains grammar rules, but is an old friend who can help, support and interest a student and ideally only directs his or her conscientious desire to learn the language. Not only should a teacher be able to explain grammar and vocabulary but organize work in groups and pairs to enable students to communicate in a foreign language to solve problems without mindless repetition of words written on the blackboard. Thus it becomes extremely important to teach foreign languages using the communicative method which will not tend to say “there is no time for teaching grammar”.

REFERENCES

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