

Effects of Inductive Approach on Teaching Grammar

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Grammar is the science which treats of words and their correct use and gains its prominence in language teaching, particularly English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL), in as much as, without a good knowledge of grammar, learner's language development is severely constrained. That is, grammar is taught to furnish the basis for a set of language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In listening and speaking, grammar plays a crucial part in grasping and expressing spoken language (e.g. expressions) since learning the grammar of a language is considered necessary to acquire the capability of producing grammatically acceptable utterances in the language (Corder, 1988). In reading, grammar enables learners to comprehend sentence interrelationship in a paragraph, a passage and a text. In the context of writing, grammar allows the learners to put their ideas into intelligible sentences so that they can successfully communicate in a written form. In the case of vocabulary, grammar provides a pathway to learners how some lexical items should be combined into a good sentence so that meaningful and communicative statements or expressions can be formed. In other words, Doff (2000) says that by learning grammar, students can express meanings in

the form of phrases, clauses and sentences. Richards (1987) adds that it cannot be ignored that grammar plays a central role in the four language skills and vocabulary to establish communicative tasks. In terms of Sri Lankan context, teachers of English are still likely to be using only deductive approach for the process of teaching.

In recent years, concerns regarding the low standard of achievement in English among secondary school leavers and graduates in Sri Lanka have been expressed by various segments of society. The main complaint has been about the students' inability to communicate effectively through Spoken and Written English even after eleven years of learning English at school or at universities.¹ All efforts have been in vain with little or no success. All reform committees and reformers attribute this failure to the teachers' poor performance, defective methodologies, inadequacy of the teachers' of English, and perhaps the inoperative administration.

This is most evident in the depth of poor performance in English as reflected in G.C.E. (O/L) and (A/L) results in past years. Even many students who have gained distinctions in English in above mentioned examinations lack satisfactory communicative skills. So as a result, when these students step into the world of work, they are criticized by employers for their inadequate proficiency in written and oral skills in English language. One of the main problems identified has been the mismatch that existed between education and employment leading to large scale unemployment and frustration among school leavers and even among graduates irrespective of the terminal public examinations they had successfully completed.² The government recognised that the

education system must provide its output with an adequate degree of competence in the use of English Language in the world of work and in the technological international environment of the 21st century. At present the only certification that a pupil obtains by the time he/ she leaves school is the O/L or A/L certificate. Most such pupils cannot read, write or speak English language at an acceptable level. Thus, they are unable to find suitable employment or to proceed easily into tertiary education. But it is more important to look for new and state-of-the-art teaching methods or approaches suitable for our country than to allocate a colossal amount of money on English education. For instance, The Government spends billions to initiate and promote English language through the Ministry of Education. Taking into account the progress of the initiative, its impact and importance, the Ministry of Finance allocated as unprecedented Rs. 750 million, 761 million and 764 million from the Budget for 2011, 2012 and 2013 respectively.³

In promoting a language, what is needed is a change in attitudes of teachers and students. An important factor in the formation of the attitudes of students towards a language is those of teachers of English. This innovation has been a pressing need for English Education in Sri Lanka, because the curricular and teaching methods used in the schools and even in most universities are those that have been largely designed in English speaking countries such as England, Canada, Australia and the USA to deliver the structure and rules of the language who have already learnt to communicate in English in their English speaking homes and environments⁴. Pedagogical systems, teaching methods, techniques and teaching materials conceived in social cultural and ideological systems and political environments very different from our

own can't be implanted in a totally different social, political or ideological environment without being socio-culturally and structurally reflected by the host. Further, children from Sinhala and Tamil speaking homes are taught English in the way that dead languages like Pail, Latin, Greek and Sanskrit are taught to students, only to read and write and never to speak. Because the average child leaves school without being able to speak English even though teachers of English numbering 22,000 available in around 9500 schools in the country. The situation is the same with university students. This notion is clearly proven from what Michael Samuel says about it. As Michael Samuel (1998) points out curriculum designs of state policies are often ambitious programs that do not pay much attention to the ground realities of the education context, which include undeveloped human and physical resources, the entrenchment of ritualized practices of teaching and learning, poor administration and management of the curriculum renewal process, the inability of teacher educators to reconceptualise their role as promoters of alternative visions of teaching and learning, the arrogance of teacher educators who value theoretical knowledge above the practical knowledge of teachers and the unreflective teachers who dismiss the value of theory.

Most teachers in Sri Lanka, though well educated, have been following the deductive approach for their teaching process for ages even though a new approach was introduced. The deductive approach represents a more traditional style of teaching in that the grammatical structures or rules are dictated to the students first. Thus, the students learn the rule and apply it, only after they have been introduced to grammar. In other words, here grammar is taught separately (deductively) without involving any context. For example, if the structure to

be presented is Present Perfect, the teacher would begin the lesson by saying, "Today we are going to learn how to use the Present Perfect structure". Then, the rules of the present perfect structure would be outlined and the students would complete exercises, in a number of ways, to practice using the structure. In this approach, the teacher is the centre of the class and is responsible for all of the presentation and explanation of the new material. Sometimes beginning the lesson with grammar presentation may be off-putting for learners especially younger ones. Conversely, younger learners may not be able to understand the concepts and encounter grammar terminology given. Grammar explanation encourages a teacher-fronted, transmission-style classroom, so it hinders learner involvement and interaction.

So, a successful methodology of teaching a second language has always been a much debated topic throughout the world, even in the Sri Lankan context; Therefore identifying the most suitable and successful techniques in teaching English is of paramount importance. At present, the Ministry of Education has recommended and approved Inductive Approach and the Communicative Approach (circular No ED/1/3/193⁵) that lay emphasis on communicative competence, which is more natural. Communicative Approach emphasises use but de-emphasises grammaticality. The result is that students frequently generate grammatical constructions. So, it is very important for teachers of English to promote inductive approach as Inductive Grammar can never be divorced from Communicative Approach. But for all that, Sri Lankan teachers of English apply deductive approach which is practised for the first language learners instead of the deductive. Invariably, English teachers of Sri Lanka do the

opposite. That is, they proceed from the Generalisation to Specifications whereas, in Inductive Approach, the system is the opposite.

DEDUCTIVE APPROACH (for first language learners)

GENERALISATION (OR RULE) → SPECIFIC EXAMPLES / ACTIVITIES

INDUCTIVE APPROACH (for second language learners)

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES / ACTIVITIES → GENERALISATION (OR RULE)

In contrast with the deductive method, inductive instruction makes use of student "noticing". Instead of explaining a given concept and following this explanation with examples, the teacher presents students with many examples showing how the concept is used. The intent is for students to "notice", by way of the examples, how the concept works.

Using the grammar situation from above, the teacher would present the students with a variety of examples for a given concept without giving any preamble about how the concept is used. As students see how the concept is used, it is hoped that they will notice how the concept is to be used and determine the grammar rule. As a conclusion to the activity, the teacher can ask the students to explain the grammar rule as a final check that they understand the concept.

The inductive approach represents a more modern style of teaching where the new grammatical structures or rules are presented to the students in a real language context. Because grammar is taught with the guidance of the literature or comprehensive passages. That is to say that grammar is taught inductively. The students learn the use of the structure through

practice of the language in context, and later realize the rules from the practical examples. For example, if the structure to be presented is the comparative form, the teacher would begin the lesson by drawing a figure on the board and saying, "This is Saman. He is tall." Then, the teacher would draw another taller figure next to the first saying, "This is Ruwan. He is taller than Saman." The teacher would then provide many examples using students and items from the classroom, famous people, or anything within the normal daily life of the students, to create an understanding of the use of the structure. The students repeat after the teacher, after each of the different examples, and eventually practice the structures meaningfully in groups or pairs. With this approach, the teacher's role is to provide meaningful contexts to encourage demonstration of the rule, while the students evolve the rules from the examples of its use and continued practice.

The Advantages of Inductive Approach

When it comes to inductive method of presenting grammar instruction, it succeeds almost in every area where deductive method fails. When grammar is taught inductively, the grammar points become indelible due to the literature with which students deals. Its major advantage is the fact that it encourages mental effort and forces students to rely on their intelligence and the ability to analyze and make connections between particular samples of speech. Knowledge obtained through the subconscious process of identification and incorporation of the presented grammatical rules into ones language system is characterized by greater permanence and can be put into practice without conscious and time-consuming examination of the context from the grammatical point of view.

Next, it is attractive. Because students are more actively involved in the learning process, rather than being simply passive recipients, so they are likely to be more attentive and more motivated, which is especially suitable for little kids who are very active. More over, it is meaningful as rules that learners discover for themselves may be more likely to fit their existing mental structures than rules they have been presented with. This in turn will make the rules more meaningful, memorable, and serviceable. Another plus point is that it is memorable. The mental effort involved ensures a greater degree of cognitive depth which, again, ensures greater memorability. For instance, if students are provided with such a short story as "Monkeys" by Punyakante Wijenaik, they will acquire its grammar and vocabulary more easily than ever. What is more, working things out for themselves prepares students for greater self-reliance and is therefore conducive to learner autonomy.

However, this doesn't imply that deductive approach is an utter failure and inductive approach is entirely successful in any context. Countries like Sri Lanka where English language is considered a second or link language, inductive grammar approach is more promising. All things considered, It goes without saying that applying inductive method as the main, but not the only, means of presenting grammar instruction is bound to produce amazing results and help students back up their knowledge with intuition and a deeper understanding of the second language that are unattainable for those who rely solely on what clearly resembles Grammar Translation Method, which has been condemned by contemporary linguists.



Foot Notes

1. Presidential Task Force, 1997
2. Ginige, 2002, P.70
3. Fernando on 14, December 2010, Daily News
4. Teacher Guide- Speak English Our Way, 2010, P. 283
5. Teacher Guide- Speak English Our Way (published by The Ministry of Education)

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6. National Education Commission, *National Policy Framework on Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education*, (2009). Sri Lanka, 2009, P. 124-145

7. Raheem. R. & Ratwatte, H, *visible strategies; Invisible results: Language policy and planning in Sri Lanka*, Oxford University Press, 2004, P.85-89
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11. Teacher Guide, *Speak English Our Way*, Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2010, P.283-297
12. The Presidential Task Force, *General Education Reforms: Education Publication Department*, Sri Lanka, 1997, P.75-83



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