

TEACHING OF GRAMMAR FOR L2 AND L3, IN INDIAN CONTEXT

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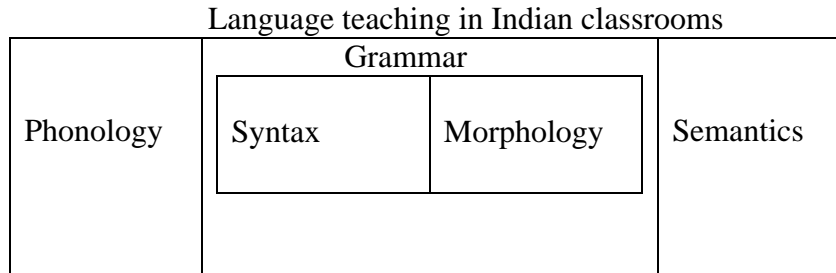
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Traditionally there is an emphasis on grammar and vocabulary learning in language classrooms of Indian universities and colleges. Though the curriculum and syllabi of the academic programs aim at developing proficiency in a language, grammar accuracy has been a major component in the evaluation than communicative competence of the learner. Underlying assumption is that if one acquires certain amount of vocabulary and mastered the necessary grammar rules, one will be able to understand the texts in the target language and further involvement with those texts (literary in nature) will generate the communicative competence. Such an understanding of language learning necessitates the vocabulary and grammar learning as a precondition for communicative competence development. Direct instruction, as the method of teaching, which is suitable for transferring the knowledge of declarative nature, is applied to language instruction in Indian universities. But language learning is predominantly skill learning than gaining declarative knowledge. Learning of a skill demands the presence of real and authentic learning environments. It is almost impossible to create a real and authentic learning environment in non-target language culture. As a result in Indian second(L2) and foreign language(L3) classrooms, direct instruction through its emphasis on declarative knowledge and the impossibility of creating a real and authentic learning environment in non-target language cultures, collectively force the second language teaching and learning programs to concentrate on the vocabulary and Grammar learning than communicative competence development. The paper tries to understand grammar learning and teaching strategies for L2 and L3 in Indian context.

Defining Grammar for classrooms

Generally grammar is understood as set of rules that guides the formation of words and sentences in a particular language. “In published course materials, syllabi and lesson plans, grammar is understood to mean anything we do with the words of phrases that can be described or prescribed with a norm, rule or pattern” (Levine 2006,2). Such a definition of pedagogical grammar has to do with the ways of manipulating morphemes (grammatical marking of words) and word order in sentences, which also can include the lexical or semantic level when this has a grammatical component. Larsen-Freeman’s model of ‘grammaring’ extends this conventional definition of grammar (phonemes, morphemes and syntax) by adding another dimension of language use of pragmatics (Larsen-Freeman,2003).Vaidman’s(1992) "Authenticity" also assert that grammar should include how people use the language, and further, how all sorts of people use all sorts of varieties of a language in the world. Though the sociolinguistic aspect of grammar is important for classroom grammar learning, for further discussions the paper limits

the definition of grammar to morphology and syntax, because in Indian context, in L2 and L3 classrooms phonetics and phonology, semantics and grammar are taught separately.



Therefore in Indian language classrooms traditionally, grammar speaks about syntax and inflection and the word is considered as the basic unit of Grammar. Syntax is the structure of a sentence and inflection is the word –forms that are used in a sentence. “Taken together syntax and inflection are complementary and constitute the principal part if not the whole; of what we calling grammar. Jointly they determine the grammaticality (i.e. the grammatical well-formedness) of sentences” (Lyons, 2006, 102). Modern concept of Grammar speaks about syntax Vs Morphology. Here the syntax deals with the distribution of words and morphology with their internal grammatical structure. This understanding of grammar differs from the traditional concept of grammar in two ways that the morphology includes not only inflection but also derivation and it takes morphemes the minimal forms as the basic unit instead of words.

Grammar Teaching Approaches

Traditional grammar approach, functional approach, dependency grammar approach and generative approach have provided insights into understanding of grammar. Traditional grammar represents the normative rules based grammar with nomenclatures from Latin and a grammar system which is passed over to other languages from Latin. It uses the terms like subject and predicate, object, verb, adjective etc... Traditional Grammar approach continues to be one of the most widely used method in teaching of grammar for L2 and L3. Functional approach to the grammar was evolved from the functional approach of the Prag- School of linguistics. This approach was too folded. Along with what grammar is, they tried to understand what grammar does in the language. ”Functional grammar is practical grammar or grammar learned through use. In the process of learning correct sentence patterns child (one) learns grammar” (Dash, 93).

Dependency grammar speaks about the interdependence of words in a sentence. Here the verb is said to govern its objects and are classified in terms of their valency. “The traditional distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs can be generalized in two directions: first of all, by including verbs within the broader class of predicators; then subclassifying predicators in terms of their valency; i.e. in terms of the number and nature of their dependant units. Counting not only the direct and indirect object but also the subject of verb dependants, we can say an intransitive verb like ‘die’ has a valency of 1 and a transitive verb like eat has valency of 2 and verbs like ‘give’ have a valency of 3 and so on.”(Lyons, 2006, 116)

Central idea in generative grammar as proposed by Chomsky that the nature of natural language syntax can be captured by a finite set of rules which are able to produce an infinite set of well formed structures. “A generative grammar is a set of rules which operating upon a finite

vocabulary of units, generates a set (finite or infinite) of syntagms (each syntagm being composed of a finite number of units) and thereby defines each syntagm to be well-formed in the language that is characterized by the grammar.”(Lyons,125). A Syntagm is a set of grammatical units brought together in a particular construction. Generative grammar is more mathematical in approach. “A Generative grammar is a mathematically precise specification of the grammatical structure of the sentences that it generates.”(Lyons,126). Generative grammar was highly influential in understanding the nature of grammar rules and its functioning. It has little influence in classroom grammar teaching in India.

System approach, Multi-media approach were influential in grammar teaching and learning (Valia, 378).System approach considers the learner, teacher, topics, books, colleagues all as a part of a system. This approach argues that in change (addition or removal) in any part of the system will have corresponding effect in the entire system. It is a mechanical approach and learning is understood as input-process-output model. Learners are assumed to be the raw materials and undergoes process as inputs and comes out as graduate, post graduates as per the duration of the treatment they undergone.

Multimedia approach focus on integrating available technologies of various types such as video, audio, voice, image, animation, internet and textual data into classroom learning. It has two aspects. On the one hand it supports the integration of technologies to classrooms as instructional aides which assist the teacher to present the learning material effectively to the learner and thereby facilitating the knowledge transfer. On the other hand Web 2.0 internet technologies like chat, skype, virtual reality can offer virtual communicative activities to the classrooms and enhances the learning process from fictional understanding of concepts to a virtual learning experience. Though the instructional technology increases the intensity of the learning stimuli and the learning process, it requires technology know how and relevant infrastructure in the classrooms. Technology is making inroads into the language classrooms in India as instructional aides but it is still in the hands of the teacher to decide whether it is used or not.

Cultural aspects of Grammar teaching and learning in India

Can one teach or learn grammar without the culture? This becomes relevant in case of English (L2) and foreign languages (L3) like German & French learning in India. Conditions of English learning differs considerably from other west european languages in India. The presence of English language in India is comparatively higher than presence of any other west european language. Such a strong presence of English for more than 200 years has contributed to the evolution of the Indian-english literature i.e, Indian culture and its values are expressed in English. For e.g, a statement like “Mr.Smith goes to a restaurant and orders an omlette and a cup of black tea for his breakfast” represents the cultural aspects of England. Where as Mr. Ram goes to a Dhaba and orders two rotis and a glass of tea for his breakfast represents Indian contexts. Therefore in case of English both statements are equally usable for teaching grammar in India. Theoretically a living language can be learned or taught only in a context of culture, it can be the target language culture or the learners culture or in a culture in which the learner learns the language.

Practically such a position on culture might cause difficulties in teaching L3 like German and French in India. The absence of an Indian German and Indian French make it difficult to find materials to learn and teach. Moreover intercultural aspect of language learning gives very different perspectives and enriches the understanding about the cultures and people in the world

in general and in this process of language learning one expands his or her understanding of the world. Many of the successful foreign language institutes use this method as one of their ‘unique selling propositions’ to encourage the learners to learn the foreign languages. When a student is exposed to different ways of living other than one’s own culture, it helps one to understand one’s own culture. More over cultural differences brings a lot of communicative stimuli in the class rooms. For example, the concept of live in relation (which is very common in Germany and western world) Vs marriage brought effective discussions in the class rooms which naturally invoke even the less speakers of the class to speak. But the role of the teacher is very crucial in this method. Teacher should encourage the discussions and do not make value judgments about one culture as inferior and other superior. It is the learner who thinks about his own culture and the new culture and reaches to his own conclusions.

Culture influences not only what one learns but also the nature of learning itself. There is tremendous difference among the Indian and western understanding about the learning and knowledge. In Indian context, learning and knowledge is transformative. “Knowledge in the east is not considered as knowledge if it does not change the knower. In the west, knowledge has been turned into a product which is bought and sold. It is used for the purposes of controlling or making systems more efficient” (Thripathi, 193). There it can be concluded that if the objective of language learning is to develop communicative competence that of native speakers, then the grammar learning must be in the context of the target language culture. If the learning objective is to develop skills of reading and understanding the target language texts, then the grammar can also be learned in relation to learner’s culture.

Grammar and Language Learning.

What is the role of Grammar teaching in learning a language? The objectives of language learning vary across the language teaching methods. Grammar translation method’ focuses on the ability to read and understand the target language texts and translate them. Communicative language teaching insists to achieve the communicative competence in the target language. Communicative competence is understood as the learners’ ability to speak, listen, read and write in the target language. “The purpose of all language teaching is communication in the language being taught, whether receptive oral (listening) productive oral (speaking) receptive written (reading) or productive written (writing).” Listening and reading are audio –lingual skills and reading and writing are graphic skills” (Dash,37).

Objectives of Language learning

Language	Audio-lingual skills	Graphic skills
Receptive side	Listening	Reading
Expressive or productive side	Speaking	Writing

As Grammar teaching is a part of language teaching, it shares the same objectives of facilitating speaking, writing, listening and reading skills of the learner. Along with these, translation skill is also part of the language learning programmes in India. In general, objectives of grammar teaching in India include developing speaking, writing, listening, reading and translational skills. Therefore grammar teaching in Indian context should be in two ways: firstly L2 and L3 grammar elements should be introduced to learn, how it is or how does it function in the language and secondly in contrast to the L1 i.e, how it is similar to or different from the L1, which enhances

the cognitive learning strategies of the Indian learner and also supports the development of translation skills.

Beliefs and attitudes of Indian learners and teachers towards L2 and L3 learning.

Understanding the beliefs and attitudes of the Indian learners and teachers towards L2 and L3 learning, i.e. the Indian context of grammar learning can contribute effectively in designing a classroom friendly grammar teaching model. Ravi Sheorey (2006, 27) has identified the general beliefs of Indian students towards second language learning,

- One can not possibly master a second language without studying its grammar or acquiring as large a vocabulary as Possible.
- Language learning simply means learning to translate from ones own native language.
- One can not comprehend the written materials in second language unless one reads every word slowly and carefully.

Teachers of English share the same beliefs with the students. Those teachers who believes that the best way to learn a second language is to increase the vocabulary is likely to emphasize the study of the words. Others who believe in translation as a method may emphasize on it for language learning. If the teachers' beliefs are the same with that of the learner, it will deepen the students' beliefs towards the L2 and L3 learning. The studies conducted by Ehrman& Oxford and Wen& Johnson (In: Sheorey, 28) have been shown that the beliefs play an important role in second and third language acquisitions. It has been found that "Indian learners are exam oriented than learning oriented and hold 'teacher knows the best' attitude towards foreign languages" (Sheorey,70).

Learning strategies of Indian students for L2 &L3

Analyzing the learner's strategies towards L2 and L3 learning, there are four major learning strategies functional practice strategies, cognitive memory strategy, Meta cognitive and systematic learning strategies and social strategies can be identified. Functional practice strategies, include those that involve looking for and using opportunities to practice L2, especially practicing L2 on outside one's class room. Cognitive memory strategies are those that the learners consciously analyze, manipulate or synthesize the target language components, which eventually facilitate memory and language processing. Meta cognitive and Systematic learning strategies are those which learners use to monitor or regulate their own learning. Social strategies include reaching out to other people for assistance" (Sheorey, 77).

A study conducted at BPS Mahila Vishwavidyalaya, Khanpur Kalan, indicated that the students apply cognitive memory strategies, where by learner consciously analyze, manipulate the target language components in grammar learning. (A structured questionnaire is administered to 12 M.Phil research scholars of English and 4 English language teachers and 4 foreign language teachers in 2009).

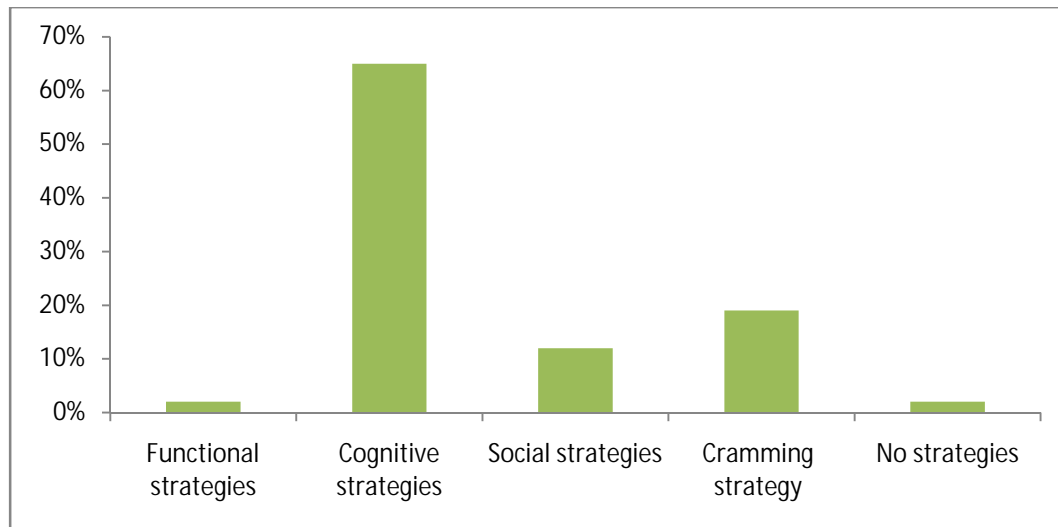


Figure3. Percentage distribution of grammar learning strategies at BPSMV

Contrastive grammar teaching enhances cognitive learning: a case study

The case study is taken from the German classroom teaching experience at ‘BPS Women University’ in 2009. It shows how contrastive grammar teaching can facilitate the cognitive learning of grammar elements. As the case forms are introduced in German to the learners, certain complexity and lack clarity is reported by the learners. Teacher tried to explain and answer the questions repeatedly; identifying non-effectiveness of the teaching strategy teacher introduced the contrastive grammar teaching, in this case from L1 to L2 to L3. Ritu was student who participated in Certificate of Proficiency in German class. Her initial understanding about the ‘cases’ were poor and the teacher decided to apply contrastive grammar teaching.

My explanation was in following order. Cases offer an intelligent solution to an interesting problem in the languages. Why? And how? Let us take an English sentence ‘Ram weds Sita’. Let us change the position of Sita in the sentence. Is there any change in the meaning? Ritu’s answer was “of course, Ram is no more marrying Sita, now sita is marrying Ram. Let us see the sentence in Hindi. Ritu answered “Ram Sitase Shadi kartha hai”. Let us replace Ram to Sithase. Is there any change in the meaning of the sentence? She said “No”. Let us remove the “se” then from Sitha. Now does it bring any change in the meaning? She replied. ‘Sir, you mand the sentence very stupid, who marries whom is not clear’. That is the problem, I continued. When one can not identify subject and objects in a sentence, as you said, it becomes a stupid sentence. Let us see the solutions now. English has solved the problem by fixing the position of the subject as first in any sentence. In Hindi, adding a ‘post-position’ ‘se’ made the Sitha to be the object of the sentence. Therefore case system is used in languages to identify who/what is subject and object. It also says whether an object is direct or indirect. She replied simply “Aha”.

Therefore to conclude, direct instruction remains as the relevant teaching method in Indian language classrooms and grammar teaching plays a predominant role in language learning. A prescribed curriculum, syllabus, and examinations direct and control the entire language learning process and the role of the teacher becomes active and central in selecting, grading the learning materials and directing learning process. The learner has a passive role in the entire process. Language textbooks based on different language teaching methods are

available both for L2 and L3 in India. In case of L2 (English) it is mostly the structurally designed learning materials are prescribed in the language curriculum of universities and colleges and it supports direct instruction as the method of teaching. In case of L3 like German and French learning materials based on communicative methods are prescribed in L3 language curriculums in India. Its application in the classrooms is left to the teacher within the framework of direct instruction. As a result both in L2 and L3 learning, grammar teaching becomes the central part of the learning. In general, to understand and learn the L2 and L3 grammar, Indian learners apply cognitive strategies than other strategies. Contrastive grammar teaching fulfills the cognitive learning strategies of learner by making them to know how far the new grammar element is similar to or differs from the L1. It also corresponds to the direct instruction principle of known to unknown. Therefore contrastive grammar teaching can play an effective role in Indian L2 and L3 language classrooms.

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