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## English Grammar –and the Challenges Its Creates for Learning English

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### ABSTRACT

Grammar takes a big area in teaching English and the concept grammar is still controversial to teachers and learners in Iraq. Many causes rise this dilemma : first Arabic grammar and techniques of teaching it as well as teachers` point of view toward grammar. Second, students` attitudes about Arabic grammar and their techniques to deal with English grammar.

Methods of teaching and development in teaching and other fields that effect teaching process gave a variety of methods and producers to present grammar in class. So, some teachers in Iraq support traditional methods and some reject them and begin to talk about CLT for example as and this makes them to face another problem which is where and when we present grammar and which grammar is suitable and enables students to develop their language.

### Keywords:

grammar deductive grammar inductive grammar

### Introduction:

As the English instructor for my college, I felt a need to write this paper so that others might read it and realize what I have; that it's no secret that English is one of the more challenging languages to learn. Of course, the difficulty students have with it will depend on what language or languages they already know; English is naturally going to be easier to learn if the student already has knowledge of a language that has the same roots, and is therefore more closely related to it. But while the same may be said to be true of learning any language, there seems to be something about English that makes it especially tricky. In my

article, we will look at some of the specific difficulties such as "Grammar" which English poses to those learning it as a foreign language, and what you can do to overcome these problems if you're in the throes of learning this complicated language yourself. We will look at several areas within the English language which poses these constraints when it comes to learning "English".

Let us start with an example of what I mean; with English Grammar, the word "other" is an indefinite article which does not exist in Arabic, leading to its omission when English requires it. There is a definite article but its use is not identical with the use of the definite article in

English. Arab learners have problems with genitive constructions such as *the boy's dog*. In Arabic, this would be expressed as *Dog the boy*, which is how such constructions may be conveyed into English.

Also, adjectives in Arabic follow the noun they qualify; this leads Arab beginners to make word order mistakes in written or spoken English. Additionally, Arabic requires the inclusion of the pronoun in relative clauses, unlike English, in which the pronoun is omitted. This results in mistakes like: *Where is the pen which I gave it to you yesterday?*

### 1-What is meant by (Grammar)?

The word grammar has different meanings: 1- a . The study of how words and their components parts combine to form sentences. B The study of the structural relationships in language or in a language, sometimes including pronunciation, meaning, and linguistic history.2-a.The system of inflections, syntax, and word formation of a language. b. The system of rules implicit in a language, viewed as a mechanism for generating all sentences possible in that language.3-a.A normative or prescriptive set of rules setting forth the current standard of usage for pedagogical or reference purposes. b. Writing or speech judged with regard to set of rules.4-A book containing the morphologic, syntactic, and semantic rules for a specific language.5-a.The basic principles of an area of knowledge: the grammar of music. b.A book dealing with such principles.( Middle English grammere, from Old French grammaire.....)(Thornbury, 1:1999)

From above definitions of this term , we see that we have a topic with different aspects and various directions and this will create a big challenge to all learners of English to choose what kind of grammar should they follow and which one makes them able to use English in proper way. Freeman( 2007:34) says that there are two kinds of grammar :Formal grammars take as their starting point the form or structure of language, with little or no attention given to meaning( semantics) or context and language use( pragmatics). Functional grammar, conversely, conceive of language as largely social interaction, seeking to explain why one linguistic form is appropriate than another in satisfying a particular

communicative purpose in a particular context. For most people, the essence of language lies in grammar. When someone said to” lack skills in language” or when the popular press decries what it sees as the declining standard of English, they are generally referring to an actual or perceived decline in the ability of individual to express themselves grammatically. For many years in past the concept of grammar associated with the concept of correctness( See Nunan,2001:96)

### 2-Grammar: A Problematic Concept

English grammar is notoriously problematic for EFL learners; its difficulty leads to a great many common mistakes, which even native speakers frequently fall foul of. But it's not just these basic errors that EFL learners must conquer. English grammar is full of subtlety, and it's only with experience that non-native speakers will learn to appreciate its nuances. Consider, for example, the difference between “I wrote” (the simple past) and “I have written” (the perfect present), to which other forms such as “I am writing” or “I had written” add even more complexity with subtly different meanings. Then there's the tricky auxiliary verbs that many EFL learners struggle with – such as “Do you want a slice of cake?” and “She has given me a slice of cake” – and modal auxiliary verbs, which express things like likelihood or obligation (“I might join you”, for example).( *ibid*:97-98)

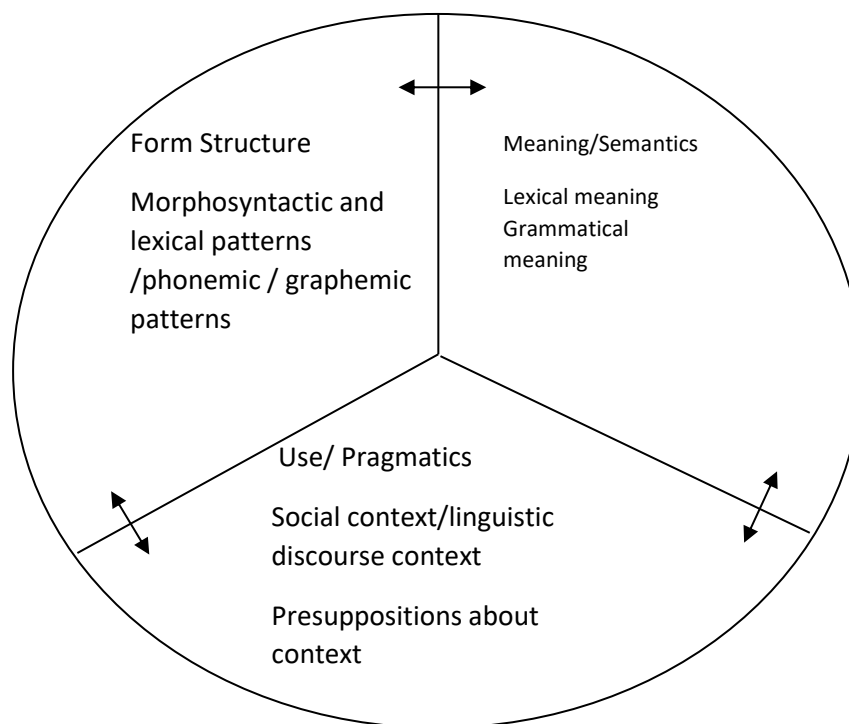
Add to all this the vernacular variations and their subtleties (it's “make a promise”, not “do a promise”, for example), to say nothing of the complexities of punctuation, and you have a tremendously demanding task to master the finer points of English grammar. While the basic aspects of English grammar must be learned by repetition from the moment you start learning the language, some of the more advanced aspects won't be picked up until you're speaking English more confidently and are able to start fine-tuning your existing English skills by listening closely to how native speakers speak the language, and by learning from your mistakes. Nobody would expect you to be able to master all this from the word go – it's something you pick up over many years of speaking English.

**3-The Place of Grammar**

Grammar is the system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationships of words in a sentence. I mean when we look at English words and their components we need to remember the word grammar because we need to rules of (prefixes, suffixes, roots, verb and noun endings.....etc). In addition, the place of grammar is so clear in communication in spite of the huge misunderstanding today about guiding learners of English to leave grammar entirely behind their backs. The reason of this importance in communication is that we need communicative competence and this is an organizational competence which is an intricate, complex array of rules, some of

which govern the (grammar)(Brown,2001:362)

In recent years, grammar teaching has regained its rightful place in the language curriculum. People now agree that grammar is too important to be ignored, and that without a good knowledge of grammar, learners' language development will be severely constrained .Because grammar is not discrete set of meaningless , decontextualized, static structures that is grammatical structures not only have(morphosyntactic) form, they are also used expressed meaning( semantics) in context-appropriate use ( pragmatics). Freeman (2001:252) shows this in the following diagram



Freeman(ibid: 526) adds that we have now (listening- speaking- reading- writing and grammaring).The addition of (ing) to grammar is meant to suggest a dynamic process of grammar using. In order to realize this goal, it is not sufficient for students to notice or comprehend grammatical structures.

**4- Approaches to Grammar**

4.1 PPP (Present- Practice-Produce) or (Deductive approach)

This approach is considered as traditional one because it depends on oral drills and written exercises. In this approach, we need a methodology that finds ways to "present" or "input" small pieces of language that have been selected by the teacher to exemplify particular structures. Each new items will then be practiced until the students are familiar with it, revised at future dates and eventually incorporated into the larger body of language that has been presented and

practiced.(Scrivener,1994:114). The adherents of this side see grammar as the central area of the language around which other areas such as pronunciation and vocabulary revolve .According to them, grammar is easier to study in L2 learners than other aspects of language because it is highly systematic and its effects are usually fairly obvious in their speech. The main goal of this kind of teaching grammar is to reach( correctness) and this goal could be done by explicit instruction and this can increase students' accuracy. In methods of teaching grammar all trends which comes close to PPP is called the deductive approach because students are given explanations of grammar rules and then, based on these explanations or rules, they make phrases and sentences using the new language.(Harmer,2007:81)

From this approach to many people-former students in our schools-learning another language is essentially a question of grammar. We hear the complaint:" I was never any good at learning languages because I could never remember the grammar". The reason for this complaint might be the teachers' attitudes toward grammar. Some teachers believe that it is very important that the students know their grammar by drills and repetition and using practice, practice and practice. They also believe that structural grammar had considerable influence on the preparing of materials for language teaching. The emphasis on structural rather than lexical or situational meaning was basic to the pattern or structure drill .In pattern drills, certain formal or functional features are isolated, and students are taught to create new utterances in response to formal cues rather than as an expression of personal meaning (Rivers,1980:72). We could summarize the basic steps of teaching according this approach as follows:

- 1-The new grammar point is explained.
- 2-new words and phrases are explained and there may be a pronunciation lesson as well.
- 3-a tape of a dialogue containing the new grammar structure and vocabulary is played.
- 4-students practice the dialogue in chorus or in pairs.

5-students translate the dialogue into their native language.

6- a final activity, listening exercises and practice grills are presented.

#### **4.2 The Inductive Approach (Engage.....Activate.....Study)**

An inductive activity is one in which students infer the rule or generalization from a set of examples. Instead of giving rules to examples , students see examples of language and try to work out the rules . Thus , for example, after students have read a text , we might ask them to find examples of different past tenses and say how and why they are used( Harmer, 2007:82)

Through my experience with Iraqi students inductive approach is difficult for learners of English especially with beginners ( students in Intermediate Schools and Secondary Schools) because of the level of the students and the cognitive ability we need to discover the rules as well as the type of testing in Iraq.

This approach of learning grammar depends on the idea that children acquire their first language without full understanding of rules because they have good exposure of the language.

Today most educators and adherents of communicative methods insist on the skill of communication and fluency rather than get good knowledge about how to use the grammar rules.

So, in this approach we need a methodology that does not select and give student language but instead exposes them to a wide range of authentic language and utilizes the student's own intelligence, experience and knowledge to analyze, learn from experiment with and improve their own corpus of language whenever they are ready to do so. This is more akin to helping them find ways to fit pieces of a jigsaw together and move incorrectly placed pieces to better position, or focusing on the overall picture or details of the picture and seeing what is there more clearly( Scrivener, 1994:114).

#### **5.Meaning of grammar in teaching**

It is so hard to give exact meaning or one dimension to deal with term grammar in

teaching. According to Freeman (2009: 518) it has been used to mean:

1-an internal mental system that generates and interprets novel utterances( mental grammar)

2- a set of prescription and proscriptions about language forms and their use for a particular language ( prescriptive grammar)

3-a description of language behavior by proficient users of a language ( descriptive grammar)

4-the focus of a given linguistic theory( linguistic grammar)

5-a work that treats the major structures of a language (reference grammar)

6-the structures and rules compiled for instructional and assessment purposes ( pedagogical grammar)

7-the structures and rules compiled for instructional purposes for teachers

From above points we see that the term grammar contains ( implicit and explicit grammars) as well as universal and language – specific grammars.

Swan(2002: 148) mentions seven bad reasons for teaching grammar and most parts of the world people probably teach too much of it. The seven reasons are

1-because it's there

2-it is tidy

3-it is testable

4-grammar as a security blanket

5-it made me who I am

6-you have to teach the whole system

7-power

He also adds two good reasons to teach grammar and they are:( comprehensibility and acceptability)

6- Developing Grammar Teaching Activities ( From Grammar –Focused to Task –Focused Instruction)

Richard (154:2002) draws two cores to deal with the development of teaching grammar and he states that Grammar –Focused Activities contains the following:

- reflect typical classroom use of language
- focus on the formation of correct examples of language
- produce language for display( as evidence of learning)
- call on explicit knowledge

- elicit a careful ( mentioned speech style)
- reflect controlled performance
- practice language out of context
- practice small samples of language
- do not require authentic communication

While he summarizes the Task – Focused Activities as follows:

- reflect natural language use
- call on implicit knowledge
- elicit a vernacular speech style
- reflect automatic performance
- require the use of improving , paraphrasing , repair and reorganization
- produce language that is not always predictable
- allow students to select the language they use
- require real communication

### 7-Strategies for Learning Grammar

Language teachers and Language learners are often frustrated by the disconnect between knowing the rules of grammar and being able to apply those rules automatically in listening , speaking, reading and writing. This disconnect reflects a separation between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge.

- Declarative knowledge is knowledge about something . It helps students to describe a rule of grammar and apply it in pattern practice drills.
- Procedural knowledge is knowledge of how to do something .It enables students to apply a rule of grammar in communication.

However important and necessary it is for teachers to have a comprehensive knowledge of their subject matter, it is equally important for them to understand their students` process. This understanding can be partly informed by insights from second language acquisition (SLA) research concerning how students naturally develop their ability to interpret and produce grammatical utterances. Three insight are important in this aspect:

1-Learners do not learn structures one at a time. It is not a matter of accumulating structural entities. For example , it is not the case that learners master the definite article,

and when its mastered , move on to the simple past tense. From their first encounter with the definite article, learners might master one of its pragmatic functions-e.g. to signal the uniqueness of the following noun. But even if they are able to do this appropriately, it is not likely that they will always produce the definite article when needed because learners typically take a long time before they are able to do this consistently. Thus learning is a gradual process involving the mapping of form, meaning and use, structures do not spring forth in learners` interlanguage fully developed and error-free.

2-Even when learners appear to have mastered a particular structure, it is not uncommon to find backsliding occurring with the introduction of new forms to the learners` interlanguage. For example, the learner who has finally mastered the third person singular marker on present -tense verbs is likely to overgeneralize the rule and apply it to newly emerging modal verbs , thus producing errors such as She cans speak Spanish. Teachers should not despair, therefore at regressive behavior on the part of their students. Well -formedness is usually restored once the new additions have been incorporated and the system self organizes or restructures.

3-Second language learners rely on the knowledge and the experience they have. If they are beginners , they will rely on their L1 as a source of hypotheses about how the L2 works: when they are more advanced , they will rely increasingly on the L2. In understanding this, the teacher realizes that there is no need to teach everything about a structure to a group of students; rather , the teacher can build upon what the students already know. It also follows that the challenging dimension for a given grammatical structure will shift from class to class depending on the students`L1backgrounds and of

L2 proficiency . Successful teaching involves identifying the relevant challenge for a particular group of students.

4-Different learning processes are responsible for different aspects of language . Indeed , given that language is as complicated as it is, one would not expect the learning process to be any simpler. It is clearly an oversimplification

to treat all grammar learning as resulting from habit formation or from rule formation. Being aware that different learning processes contribute to SLA suggests a need for the teaching process to respect differences.

### 8- Teaching Grammar

There are two questions concerning teaching grammar raised by scholars :

1-Should we teach grammar at all?

2- If we should teach grammar , how should we teach it?

Ellis( 2002:167) answers the first question with (NO) and by some applied linguists because teaching rules do not develop acquisition of language. Some applied linguists agree that learning grammar naturally by authentic communication.

In Iraqi colleges and schools most teachers using formal grammar and teaching rules separately just to provide learners with knowledge to pass final exams and do not use these rules in real communication in spite of the big change in textbooks and curricula . Here , we don't want say which side is the best but we want to discover the appropriate direction to deal with grammar.

According to Ellis( ibid: 168) any types of practice grammar( mechanical practice-contextualized practice and communicative practice) should contain the following characteristics:

1-There is some attempt to isolate a specific grammatical features for focused attention.

2-The learners are required to produce sentences containing the target features.

3-The learners will be provided with opportunities for repletion of the target features.

4-There is an expectancy that the learners will perform the grammatical features.

5-The learners receive feedback on whether their performance of the grammatical structure is correct or not.

Ellis also (ibid: 168) suggests ( Consciousness – raising ) to teach grammar and it is an attempt to equip the learner with an understanding of a specific grammatical features- to develop declarative rather than procedural knowledge of it. The main characteristics of ( Consciousness- raising) are:

1-There is an attempt to isolate a specific linguistic feature for focused attention.

2-The learners are provided with data which illustrate the targeted features and they may also be supplied with an explicit rule describing or explaining the feature.

3-The learners are expected to utilize intellectual effort to understand the targeted features.

4-Misunderstanding or incomplete understanding of the grammatical structure by the learners leads to clarification in the form of further data and description or explanation.

5-Learners may be required (although this is not obligatory) to articulate the rule describing the grammatical structure.

The researchers think that the techniques of teaching grammar should appear as follows:

1-They should appear in meaningful situation or communicative context.

2- Fit to the communicative goals.

3-Do not fill class with linguistic terms.

4-relevant to the student's level.

### 9-Techniques of Teaching Grammar (Vignette)

Nunan (2015:123) presents vignette to teach grammar in order to help students to know rules of grammar in use them in real communication. Here vignette is based on a popular technique for reinforcing previously introduced grammar points. It is called dictation or (**dictogloss**). The technique is relatively simple. The teacher reads a short text at a normal speed. Students jot down key (content) words and then work together in small groups, pooling their resources to reconstruct the text. This technique is useful because it presents grammar within communicative context, it requires learners to be actively involved in their learning, it can be used with learners all levels of proficiency from beginner to advanced, and it can be used with mixed level groups.

The class taking part in this lesson is a group of intermediate level secondary school students. Some of the students have limited experience with the grammar dictation technique. However, there are several new students in the class who haven't encountered the

technique before, so the teacher begins the class by going over the procedures.

The teacher begins by writing 'grammar dictation' on the whiteboard. He turns back to the class and says "OK, so today, we're going to do a grammar dictation. Do you remember how to do grammar dictation, Kim? We haven't done one for a while."

"Kind of" says the student.

"Kind of, Hmm." The teacher pauses, "Well, just to remind you, I'm going to read you a short passage." He holds up a book containing the passage and waves it at the class.

And, I'm going to read twice. The first time I read it, I want you to just to listen. Listen for the meaning, and to get a general idea of the story. Then the second time I read it, I want you to just to listen. Listen for the meaning, and get a general idea of the story. Then the second time I read it, I want you to write down key words. So are you going to write down the little grammar words Eon-ha, like (the to in?) Are they key words?

"No" says the student.

"Good" says teacher. "You're right". These grammar words. They're important, but I don't want to write them down. Later you'll need to come up with these words yourself. Write down the key content words individually. Then, in groups, I want you to share your words and reconstruct, or reproduce, the story.

Appoint one person - someone who's good writer, to be the scribe. When you're finished, compare your version with another group and see how similar they are.

After that, the teacher asks encouragingly. "Write the....."

"The exact words?" says the student.

NO says the teacher, you don't have to be exact, but you have to try and get as close as you can. The group that gets the closest to the original version will be the winner.

The teacher continues "Look at these words on the board and write (disaster .....scrabble and other words and simple rules.

The teacher reads the text at near normal speed while the student listen. He then says "OK", now I am going to read it again. Listen and write down the words you hear. Remember write down just the key words" He then reads the text a second time. While he does, the

students scribble furiously on their sheet of paper.

### Conclusion

Because of the nature of grammar and its relation with all aspects of the language, it is so difficult to give complete view about the term (grammar) in English. We have today many kinds of grammar: formal grammar, functional grammar, deductive grammar and inductive grammar, prescriptive and descriptive grammar, Task-based grammar and Form-focused grammar.....etc.

Furthermore, we have different books about grammar e.g. grammar for teachers, grammar for students, grammar for linguistics, grammar for (ESP) .....etc.

The important thing we want to say in this paper is that grammar in English is the (motor) or (engine) if we have foreign learners because if we need to create good students communicators we need to start this engine because an English word in its internal structure has grammar and putting words in phrases or sentences we need grammar.

The diversity in dealing with grammar makes the matter of presenting grammar in class needs a lot of thinking i.e. which rules we need, where should they appear, how much time might they take in class, which aspect of grammar comes first (morphology of syntax) how much time should we give to drills, could we teach grammar with other activities: listening, speaking, reading and writing and many many questions still without answers till now.

We think in Iraqi schools and colleges that grammar takes most of the time in teaching from primary school to PhD classes and there are a lot of techniques to show the grammatical material in class but students and teachers suffer and consider the matter like stomachache or a pain without cure.

Moreover, one of the most arduous tasks when learning a language is committing to memory words and grammar of English has a big relation with the meaning of words and its position.

Finally, English grammar is notoriously problematic for EFL learners; its difficulty leads to a great many common mistakes, which

even experienced native speakers frequently fall foul of. But it's not just these basic errors that EFL learners must conquer. English Grammar is full of elusiveness, and its only with experience that non-native speakers will learn to appreciate its nuances. Add to all this the vernacular variations and their subtleties and variations in American grammar and British grammar.

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