Abstract

Grammar is the study or exposition of the principles which underlie the use of language in general. Philosophy is a system of general principles and particular rules for speaking or writing a language; the art of speaking or writing a language with propriety or correctness according to established usage. It is the bedrock of a language. This underlies the importance of teaching of grammar. In teaching grammar, it is best to know the rules and apply them correctly, hence, this paper is aimed at guiding teachers of English, especially those of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to teach students grammar lessons which are both entertaining and educative using the eclectic method. It is a fact that what is being presented here has worked well with students.

The primary objective of every teacher should be to achieve success in the teaching and learning process. Perhaps, one of the greatest satisfactions a language teacher derives comes from knowing that students have learned the language. English language teachers need to practice a less didactic role in the classroom if the students are to be helped to acquire the language. This is because language learning is about practice and use. It is the learners and not the teacher that should be the most active members of the class since they are the one learning the language; they therefore need all the opportunities to practice the use of the language and not the teacher. In line with the new expectation therefore, the role of the teacher should shift from know-all to that of being a facilitator, an organizer, controller or participant. It is often said that grammar is a boring and difficult area of English language to teach and learn and that the inconsistencies (of rules) make the situation worse. This should not be so, especially these days when the approach to language teaching tends to be integrative and learner centred. Every language teacher has a duty to be sufficiently innovative to remove boredom in language classrooms and this would dispute the belief that grammar lessons cannot be entertaining and educative.

Teaching English grammar for Specific Purposes (ESP) students requires that the language teachers adopt some strategies uniquely suitable to this group of students. In view of the above, this paper examines some approaches to the teaching
of grammar and adopts an eclectic method which revolves around a communicative, and interactive methodology. This eclectic method centres on the integration of the four language skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing in the teaching of grammar. In this paper therefore, an attempt is made to present an eclectic method of teaching grammar which researchers have found to be successful in the ESP students.

Concept and Origin

The term ESP is used to mean English for Specific Purposes. This is against the former nomenclature of English for special purposes. By English for specific purposes, it means that English Language courses taught and learn are aimed at achieving different purposes. Therefore, teachers of English by this, are required to identify the different purposes for which learners desired the language. Consequent upon this knowledge or awareness, the teacher is expected to tailor-make an appropriate learning experience to satisfy the needs of his clients. This is particularly so when we realize that at the tertiary level of education, English Language is taught with a view to giving freshmen under-graduates the linguistic impetus with which they can pursue studies in their areas of specialization.

These areas of specialization are varied and diverse, while others specialize in science and science related courses, law, political science, others are in business and other fields. Therefore, the general use of English which is a mandatory course for all the first year students called GS 101 or GST 101 is aimed at satisfying the language needs of these students in their diversified areas. It should be noted however, that the general practice is that all the students are taught the same thing and are required to achieve the same competence. However, our knowledge of socio-linguistics tells us that language use is determined by variables like the subject-matter, the context, the medium, etc. It is for this reason that the English Language which is taught as a mandatory course at the tertiary level is called upon to be diversified in view of the diversity of the context of use as dictated by the areas of specialization. Consequently, proponents of ESP advocate for the diversification of the general English course according to the diversities such as English for legal practice (ELP) English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE), English for Social Science (ESS), and English for Academic purposes (EAP). Suffice it to say that English Language like other disciplines is being diversified into more and more areas of concern. This is justifiable and understandable too in view of the specific language needs of learners at various target situations in which the language shall be put to use.

The advent of ESP is a phenomenon that grew out of a number of converging trends. The first of these was as a result of the Second World War. There was an unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activities on an international scale. This expansion created a world of people unified and dominated by technology and commerce which consequently generated a demand for an
international language. For obvious reasons, English was saddled with this responsibility/burden. There began to be a mass of people who were learning English not just for the sake of a general education but specifically because it was a vehicle for learning science, technology and commerce. This also resulted into greater pressure being exerted on English Language teaching to deliver the required goods which is satisfying the required needs of the learners. For this reason, English course began to be diversified.

A second reason is a revolution in linguistics. There was this realization that the English people speak is greatly influenced by the socio-linguistic context. The language people speak or write vary considerably in a number of ways. For example, who is speaking to whom on what subject, whether the interlocuters are specialized or a specialist is addressing a layman or vice versa. Accordingly, linguists began to investigate and look at these forms of English in various context and disciplines. The above socio-linguistic phenomenon tally up neatly with the findings of educational psychologists that learning a language needs to be learner-centred. Along this line, “learners were seen to have different needs and interests which will have an important influence on their motivation to learn and therefore on the effectiveness of their learning”. (Hutchinson and Waters, 2004).

The above assertion also lends support to the development of courses in which there is relevance to learner’s needs and interest which is paramount. It is assumed that science students will be motivated if comprehension texts are related to their areas of specialization while the Arts students would have Arts related texts being more relevant to them.

Proponents of ESP have always maintained that the general English course has proved inadequate in meeting the communicative demands of our students specializing in the various academic disciplines. In view of the varied domains of language use which is similar to the diversity of the specialization, it is assumed that features of the specific target situations can be determined. This feature then can be incorporated to produce a composite course content for each area of specialization. Therefore, the adage in ESP is “tell me what you need English for and I would tell you the kind of English you need” (Hutchinson & Waters, 2004). This becomes a guiding principle in ESP. It is because of this that even within the ESP courses, there are diversifications. For instance, EST, EBB, ESS, ELP, etc. Further still, there are diversities in terms of English for academic purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP).

**Theoretical Considerations**

Students and language teachers alike have had a number of unpleasant things to say about grammar and its teaching. There is the need to review what some teachers have said and observed.
Harmer (2004) stated that they were able to produce a large repertoire of sentences once we know the grammatical rules of a language subconsciously. However, while some rules are fairly straightforward, others seem to be horribly complex and some grammatical patterning seems to have escaped perfect descriptions so far. He further stated that some grammar rules, if carelessly applied, could lead to oversimplification, and that proliferation of rules makes the aspect of grammar being taught to seem to be more difficult than it is actually. Thus, it is obvious that teaching grammar in isolation gives room for proliferation of rules which in turn makes students perceive grammar as being very difficult.

Lott (2005) observed that teaching grammar can be tricky. Few teachers actually like grammar or enjoy it. However, she pointed out that teaching of grammar is a way of speeding up the learning process by giving students the tools to enable them to generate original sentences in ‘correct’ English by the application of a set of rules. The problem for teachers lies in how to create the same kind of positive learning conditions when teaching grammar that they routinely apply to the other language skills.

The position of this paper is in line with the type of problem highlighted above and can be tackled by the use of methods suitable for specific groups of students. A learner-friendly method, if employed, would eliminate or minimize the problem. The eclectic method is however a case in point.

Burke (2005) observed that grammar teaching is one of the most obvious things about writing. On the teaching of grammar, she stated that sometimes grammar rules can be confusing for a Second language speaker. Dealing with one type of error at a time helps the students to learn the rules and apply them naturally.

The author of key for Writers, Ann Reimes, once said, “always ask the student why he/she made that choice”. By asking such questions, she pointed out that we can find out how the students mis-interpreted a rule or if he or she stumbled upon an exception. She also advised teachers to look first at what the students have accomplished and secondly to look for what they did not.

Lott (2005) also identified two approaches to grammar teaching which are –

(i) Bottom up approach which involves the presentation and repetition of simple phrases and words in a recognizable context, gradually more vocabulary is added.

(ii) Top-down approach which starts by looking at the language as a whole and proposing a set of complicated rules governed by a traditional terminology. The students would then attempt to make all “real” language fit into appropriate, ready-made contexts. She discredits this as being “a long way from the “ideal” learning process.” She then opts for what she calls a “middle out” approach. It consists of teaching or establishing prior knowledge of the relevant grammatical concept and
terminology, possibly even in the student’s first language, thereby establishing a “middle ground”.

The “middle-out” approach which obviously works for her would be unpracticable in Nigeria’s situation. The first snag is the language. In Nigeria, there are over four hundred and fifty (450) languages and it would be impossible to have a class where all students understand one’s first language. The only language common to the students is English instruction. This however, does not mean that there is no place for the mother tongue ($L_1$) in the English Language classroom. It is always being referred to in order to make recourse to it from time to time, but mostly for jokes and illustrations.

The teacher’s dilemma on how to incorporate the best practices of the ELT classroom into grammar teaching can be dealt with by the deliberate application and integration of the four language skills according to Lott (2005). It is in the light of the above that the eclectic method fills in the gap and resolves this dilemma.

The Eclectic Method

Having eclectic method in language teaching means not following one style or set of ideas for teaching but choosing from a wide method of selection. Based on this, the language teachers should understand that the integrative approach implies that they don’t have to teach a single skill in isolation.

Listening and Speaking Skills

The oracy skills of listening and speaking are integrated while teaching grammar in an ESP classroom. In doing so, students were randomly selected to deliver short speeches on specific themes related to their courses of study (sometimes interspersed with general topics to broaden their knowledge). The topics should not be highly technical. In the course of each talk, the other students listen attentively and at the same time write down grammatical errors in the speech. This is followed afterwards by discussions and corrections in the classroom.

In the listening and speaking activities, the students are carefully guided to take into cognizance the correct syntactic orderings. The areas considered here are: the parts of speech, accuracy of intense/aspect sequence, passive voice, concord, total comprehensibility and sequential order of thought in speech as well as the ability to interpret and make a critical evaluation in the course of listening. Other relevant aspects being discussed are appropriate inflectional suffixes. The areas considered under this are allomorphs of both the plural noun forms (‘s’ ‘es’ and ‘z’) and the past tense morpheme of verb (‘d’, ‘eds’ and ‘t’) and the possessive case.

Research shows that positive results were noticed in this regard. This is obvious in the performance of the students in terms of grammatical accuracy and
consequently their functional writing ability. Research also shows that after a series of similar rigorous listening and speaking activities, the students have been able to wonderfully perform certain specific tasks which include reordering of items and matching of appropriate structures. The students also tend to respond positively to listening comprehension component tests. Such tests are in form of dictation with some words and expressions omitted, which are usually based on grammar. The tasks involved in these tests always reflect in the majority of the students, the correct use of syntactic patterns, plurality, parts of speech, tense and illocutionary force in relevant contexts. The listening and speaking skills are meant to be mutually supportive as a means of reinforcing and enhancing fluency and literacy.

Reading Skill
The decision to indicate reading of texts in grammar teaching is justifiable by the fact that modern language teaching places prominence on discourse-based approach over and above sentence-based activities. Teaching of grammar through reading tasks, in this sense, is geared towards reinforcing rules by practical application. Often, these reading exercises in the grammar class are followed by a series of structures (related tasks).

In order to carry out the problem solving activities, the students are usually divided into groups. Each group is therefore expected to bring a joint answer to the allocated task. For example, a group is to identify the phrased verbs in the passage and another group to complete certain missing gaps with relevant lexico-grammatical patterns. The students could also be required to substitute some expressions with structures of similar meanings such as shift ability to form various sentence patterns. Based on the passage which they have read, the students are often required to change the position and order of the direct object with the indirect object and transform from active to passive voice. Other tasks students perform after the reading activity include reverting the position of a complement to subject position and adopting the concept of foregrounding. Most of the sub-skills being discussed under reading do influence in no small way, the students’ mastery of grammatical accuracy and fluency.

Writing Skill
The writing skill improves the grammatical accuracy and fluency of the students. Indeed, grammatical/Lexical competence is known to be an important aspect of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1979).

In order to teach grammar through writing exercise, the first thing to do is to guide students to adopt words reordering in given sentences and rearranging sentences in a given paragraph. From this stage, essay writing comes in which is followed by self-editing, peer-editing, error correction and then redrafting procedure. But more attention should be paid to those students in science and technology who engage in a lot of descriptions, reporting of experiments, and analyses. In view of this, there should always be adequate emphasizes on the use of accurate tense and voice especially in their writing. So, essay topics that require the use of various
tenses associated with different types of description, reporting, generalization, comparison, data analysis and interpretation should be given to them (Science Students). After these, the students, should be able to demonstrate through their writing, the ability to use passive voice in reporting procedures that would follow, and the appropriate tenses in describing scientific and non-technical items. Other sub-tasks involved in the writing exercise are the use of such syntactic resources as cohesive devices and punctuations as a means of promoting grammatical accuracy, which in turn enhances writing performance, modifiers and connectives are also dealt with here in an extensive way. Mastery of such areas is capable of influencing the student’s descriptive power.

**Suggestion and Conclusion**

The integration of the four language skills has been highlighted in the teaching of grammar. The active participation of ESP students paves way for a learner-autonomy using all the four language skills. It is very important to teach each language skill within real contexts. Use of contextless examples in the teaching of grammar creates more room for errors. Application of rules in controlled condition may lead to fossilization of errors and generally fossilized errors if established, may never be corrected. Language teachers should be adept at making grammar digestible, filled with ready-made grammar-based lessons to deal with common problems, complete with jokes and anecdotes and real contexts appropriate to their students (Lott, 2005). In correcting students; the language teachers should use diverse methods. For example, in the case of an error made by a single student, the attention of that student should be called outside the class. But for widespread errors, corrections should be effected instantly. However, in certain situations, errors should be ignored immediately but later on revisited for corrections during another lesson.

Through the eclectic method presented above, the teaching of grammar should be enjoyable, effective and rewarding in such a manner that the students would benefit maximally from it and would also drive an intuitive understanding of the English Language which would enable them to bypass the rules and go straight to spontaneous use of the language which would amount to fluency.

**References**


