

Approaches and Methods in Grammar Teaching

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Abstract:

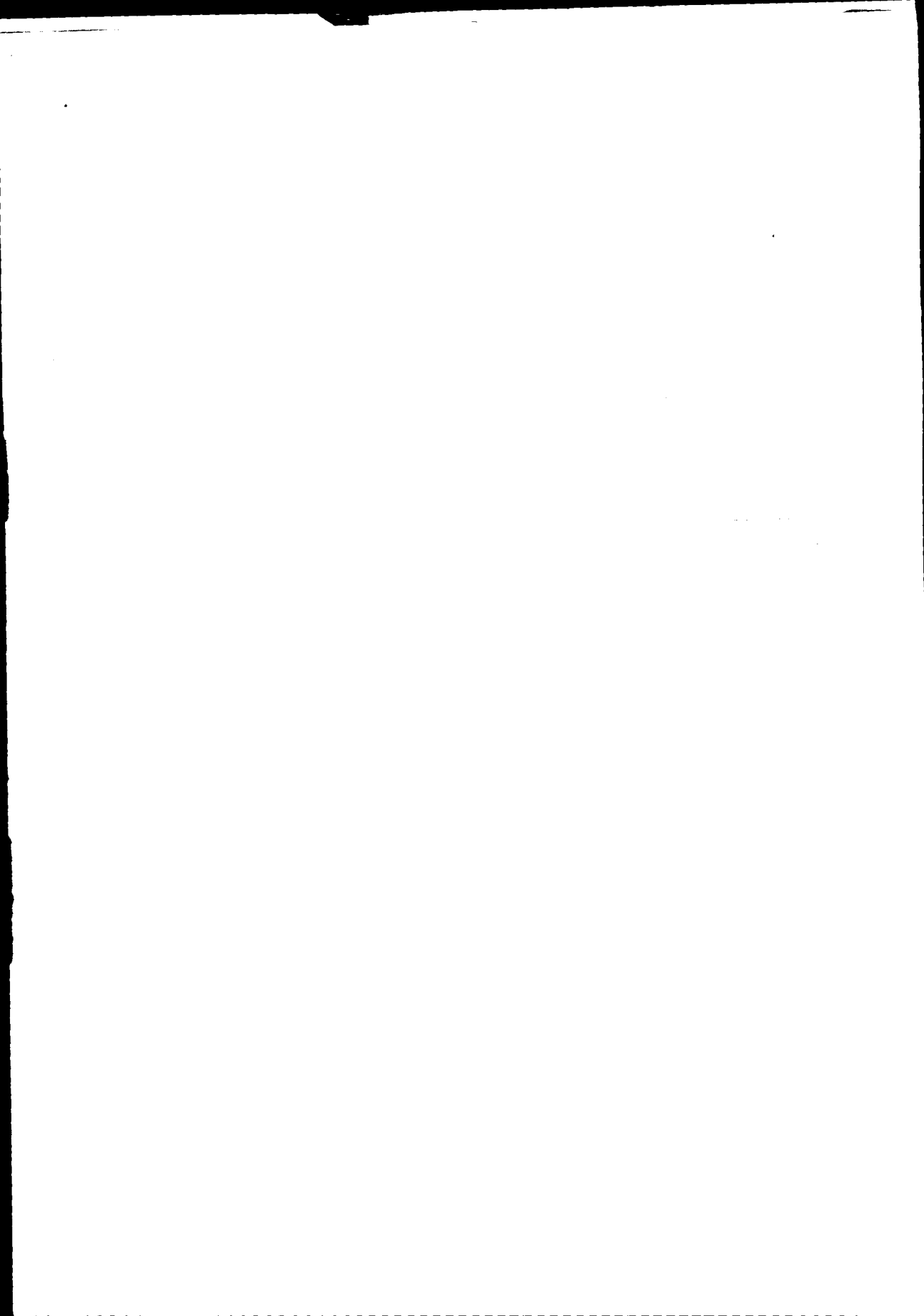
Throughout the history of language teaching, many theories, methods and approaches have been utilized or revised in order to arrive to an adequate and successful way of teaching. Grammar has generally been perceived and practiced as a highly serious subject of study with the aim of continuing the tradition which began with Classical Greek Grammarians. However, the teaching of grammar involves criticism and seems to create a controversial issue among teachers, applied linguists and syllabus designers. This controversy gives rise to different approaches in teaching grammar: the Traditional Approach on the one hand and other Contemporary Teaching Approaches on the other.

Key-words: Theories, approaches, methods, grammar, teaching.

الملخص

مقاربات ومناهج في تعليم النحو

تبين من خلال تاريخ تعليم اللغة ظهور نظريات، مناهج ومقاربات متداولة و مجددة بهدف الوصول إلى النحو الصحيح والمناسب للتعليم، اعتبر النحو عموماً من منظور تطبيقي موضوعاً هاماً للدراسة للمواصلة قدماً نحو الدرب الذي سار عليه العلماء النحويون الأوائل، والمثير للانتباه هو أن تدريس النحو يستلزم رؤية نقدية



لوجود اختلافات كبيرة بين المعلمين والدارسين اللسانيين ومعدي المناهج، هذا الاختلاف في حد ذاته أعطى تبايناً في منهج تعليم النحو بين المنهج الكلاسيكي والمنهج التعليمي المعاصر.

Introduction

Throughout the history of language teaching, many theories, methods and approaches have been utilized or revised in order to arrive to an adequate and successful way of teaching. First, a brief idea about what an approach and what a method is. An approach is the sum of assumptions course designers make about language. This term gives a description of the many ways psychologists and linguists look at language.

On the other hand, a language teaching method is a set of techniques or procedures that usually follow a systematic scheme. Unlike an approach, a method needs not be tied to a particular theory about language or learning, but may simply be claimed as successful in practice. This term describes the way of presenting language materials to students. Besides it lists the strategies derived from a particular approach.

Grammar has generally been perceived and practiced as a highly serious subject of study with the aim of continuing the tradition which began with Classical Greek Grammarians. However, the teaching of grammar involves criticism and seems to create a controversial issue among teachers, applied linguists and syllabus designers. This controversy gives rise to different approaches in teaching grammar: the Traditional Approach on the one hand and other Contemporary Teaching Approaches on the other.

2. Grammar and the Traditional Approach

The Traditional Approach is the oldest approach. It was advocated in the sixteenth century. At that time, the most taught foreign language was Latin. The aim of this approach is to make the students understand the grammar. The emphasis is made on accuracy not fluency. In thinking about the teaching of grammar according to this approach, two areas should be mentioned: grammar as rules, and grammar as form. If we consider, first of all, grammar as rules, we will notice that learning grammar often means learning the rules of grammar. Learners are required to have an intellectual knowledge of grammar. The definite article, for example, is not only used to mark the phrase it introduces as definite, but it has also other uses related to some particular rules.

- The definite article used to specify that is **the** man I saw at the museum
- The definite article used for something unique.....Men have walked on **the** moon.
- The definite article used with superlatives.....He is **the** funniest teacher.
- The definite article not used before names of counties.....We travel to Spain.
- The definite article not used before abstract nouns.....Men fear death. For many students, therefore, prescribed rules give a kind of security.

On the other hand, considering grammar as form, many see it as the form of the structure. This includes the ordering of words, the correct addition of suffixes and prefixes and the correct use of the article. Many people can, in fact, make sense of what is said even if there are mistakes in the form used. As far as simple information is concerned, this can be the case. The student saying, for example, "*I hitted him*" will have communicated information successfully, albeit grammatically incorrect. The danger is that in identifying grammar with form, the recognition of what is right and what is wrong stays at the level of subject-verb agreement, plural markers, possessive markers, tense formation etc..

This approach has proved to be deficient in some respects. The results of such grammar learning has been an obvious inability of the learners to make sensible use of the grammar knowledge they have acquired until the communicative approach took hold in 1970s. Grammar was at the core of foreign language learning/teaching. Views of grammar teaching were not the same in different methodologies. The main concern, however, was to consider what methodology would be appropriate for helping students to understand and use grammar effectively to communicate their messages. No method or approach should be considered to be completely wrong or completely right. Each of the different methods we are going to deal with below has its strengths and weaknesses.

3. Grammar and the Contemporary Teaching Approaches

➤ *The Grammar Translation Method*

The teaching of grammar during the first half of the century was dominated by the grammar-translation method. The emphasis in this method is on the organization of language at sentence level in terms of parts of speech, such as verb, and also the types of word, such as noun, verb, adjective, adverb. Its goals were based on the idea that the purpose of learning a foreign language was to read its literature. Translation was as a way of studying and analyzing the rules of the language. Its focus was on rules; and the grammar class came to be seen as the class teaching the rules of grammar.

Though this method was aimed to study and analyze the rules of the language, it has proved to be deficient in some respects. Thereafter, another method has been proposed below to help learners make use of their grammar knowledge.

➤ *The Direct Method*

The direct method, sometimes known as the natural method, was based on the belief that a language could best be taught by its active use in the classroom. There was no translation; and the focus on explaining and analyzing the rules of grammar was replaced by actual use in the classroom. In this way, learners would be able to induce the rules of grammar. The emphasis was on spoken language.

The purpose in this method was to focus on the use of grammar in communication. This method was very similar to the following one where educationalists attempted to situationalize the grammatical structures.

➤ *The Oral Approach*

The oral approach may seem to be very similar to the direct method in that the emphasis was on the spoken language but it was based on a much more systematic view of language. In the work of applied linguists such as Palmer and Hornby, there had been attempts to analyze English and classify its major grammatical structures into sentence patterns. These structures were often situationalized to provide a context to help the learners, but even so the exercises stood alone and the only relevance was that they presented a pattern for students to practice. The organization for a lesson would be:

Presentation.....Practice.....Consolidation.....

Testing.....Free stage

This method, too, has not proved very efficient; this is why another method has been proposed where learners were required to practice and

form correct sentences by means of drills through the audio-lingual method.

➤ **The Audio- Lingual Method**

The audio-lingual method was based on a behaviorist approach to language learning. The language was broken down into grammatical structures, which learners practiced by means of drills which were concerned with giving students practice in forming correct sentences. An example of such a drill is:

Robert runs ten miles every day

.....walks.....

Jane.....

.....to work.....

.....to school

According to T. Huebener this approach was based on the following assumptions:

.....the language is the everyday spoken utterance of the average person at normal speed....the spoken language is purely an instrument of communication, used in given situations.....In the approach to any language, listening and understanding come first. Almost immediately oral utterance follows. Speech comes first; reading and writing come later.

Initially, the problem here was that all the grammar work was done out of context. Attempts were made to overcome this by putting the practice into situations.

The main points put forwards by this approach were that:

- The language skills should be presented in the following order: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.
- Use of intensive pattern-practice and oral drill was advocated.
- The learners should try to practice the language as much as they can in order to develop automatic speech habits through memorization of dialogues.
- The learning by heart of entire sentences should be encouraged.

- The emphasis should be put on habit formation through conditioning analogy.

However, the problem that arose here was that grammatical structures did not fit conveniently into anyone situation and the whole exercise became very artificial. What we had very often were little more than rather sophisticated forms of drills, which many learners found boring.

Though some linguists and didacticians considered this method as useful, its validity has been questioned with a consequent shift towards a semantically-oriented approach, i.e. the communicative approach.

➤ ***The Communicative approach***

To make language learning relevant and interesting, at the outset of the communicative approach there was a determined movement away from grammar as the centre of a language-learning course. The aim was that the use of language should be the dominant feature.

This is why there has been growing concern for specifying a language syllabus in terms of the communication needs of the learners. One may understand that language is more than the knowledge of lexis and grammatical patterns, more than an awareness of how sentences are formed. Language is no longer perceived as a school subject but as a means of communication, so as to meet the demands of present -day society. Learning a language is not just a matter of learning how to fit linguistic forms together to make correct sentences. Learning a language involves learning to use such forms to perform communicative acts of one kind or another. A learner cannot be said to know the language until he can manipulate the formal devices for the purpose of conveying messages in real-life situations. It is widely recognized that:

The view of language as communication could not easily be adequately contained in the form-oriented, sentence-based linguistics of the time.

(Candlin 1978)

Similarly, Allen and Widdowson claim that the time has come that:
"The language should be presented in such a way as to reveal its character as communication..."

It is of course, of no avail to dismiss the teaching of grammar. This is to state that grammar deserves its fair share of specific attention in language teaching. Language teaching should be viewed as a double-fold objective process: (1) to develop in the learner grammatical competence in the Chomskyan sense, in other terms, the mastery of the formation rules of

the language, and (2) to inculcate in him what is socially appropriate and accepted, i.e. what Hymes (1972) has labeled "the speaking rules."

A communicative teaching of grammar is a new kind of grammar. It is a fresh departure in grammar writing in that it employs a communicative rather than structural approach. The emphasis is made on fluency rather than accuracy. The communicative approach avoids terms like rules, system, and structure speaking about speech, discourse and communication. It is then a new perspective on the subject since it relates grammatical forms and structures systematically to meanings, uses and situations. In this context Wilkins (1976) states: ***"What people want to do through language is more important than the mastery of language as an unapplied system"***.

In this approach, we speak about grammar as resource which helps us to communicate, and choosing the correct form is as important as choosing the most appropriate lexical item. While form is important here, we are looking at how grammar relates to what we want to say and how we expect our listener or reader to interpret what we are saying and the focus of what we are saying.

So, where are the parameters of grammar? In written language, the organization of the sentence is possibly more important than in the spoken language. In spoken language the full meaning of the message can be promoted by the manner in which it is said. The pitch and stress used in utterances are also important in conveying meaning or intention, and that is why some grammarians would include phonology within the sphere of grammar. In this respect Leech and Svartvik (1975) state: ***"You will need some knowledge of English intonation patterns, if you are to understand English grammar"***.

So, grammar incorporates all aspects of language; and while most people would probably separate phonology from grammar in the same way they do with vocabulary, all three clearly integrate to give meaning to utterances and to our interpretation of the utterances. Such an approach presents a number of advantages.

- It serves the communication needs of the learners.
- It is more realistic and more relevant to the learners.
- It gives the learners a sense of achievement.
- It views the grammar learning as a means of communication and not as an end in itself.
- It focuses on function rather than on form and communication rather than grammaticality.

- It stresses value rather than signification.

So, the role of the teacher is that of responding to the developing communicative needs of the learner and to help the learner relate the structures learnt to the communicative functions a language performs.

4. Conclusion

If we consider grammar to be an important part of the language learning process, since it enables the learner to improve his written and spoken skills, the question that arises is the following, what is the methodology which has the best fit, the closest match with all the variables (mainly the learner himself, his profile, his level of proficiency, his motivation and attitudes to learning). It is worth mentioning first, that the individual teacher who is considered as a key variable in the whole teaching/learning process needs to acquire the widest and deepest understanding of all these variables he is likely to encounter in the grammar teaching /learning situation. It is also impossible to decide what appropriate method in grammar teaching is. This highly depends on the relationship which exists between the teacher and the learner and also how the classroom is organized. Therefore, it is the teacher who can decide on the model to follow and how to structure his course having in mind a number of parameters such as the learner's age, interest and objectives of the course to be achieved.

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