**English Language – Challenges in Teaching Grammar**

**By**

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The field of teaching English language has shifted through various modes and methods, in search of one that would serve best for all learners’s. However,experiments from across different geographical contexts have shown that variables such as local situation, strategies adopted by teachers and learners, learning needs and style and many other variables have a tremendous impact on the teaching practices.Moreover, no particular method can guide us or lead us in analyzing the diverse aspects of language teaching – learning: such as designing of curriculum, specifying the syllabus, preparation of requisite materials, strategies of instructions, evaluation and techniques etc.

But there is one aspect which almost all English language teachers agree upon. When it comes to teaching English to any age group of learners, we know that there is no set formula for success in the classroom.It is upto the teacher to find out which strategy works best for him/her, their students and their goals. Throwing light on different aspects of English language like vocabulary, grammar and its functions, reading, listening, speaking and writing; this chapter focuses on teaching grammar and the various challenges which are faced during grammar teaching and learning.

English grammar learning and understanding is difficult for maximum number of learners. The most probable reason might be that, English is a language developed from numerous other languages. Moreover, the grammar rules are also complex, and almost all the rules have exceptions. Few have no particular logic, but have to be learnt, understood and applied. The most general factors influencing the perception of grammar is the fundamental difference between the mother tongue or the first language and English, though difficulties do exist with native speakers too.

The mother tongue or the first language is like an instinct which is triggered by birth and developed with experience of being exposed to it. A person cannot decide what his/her first language should be because it comes to him/her as an inheritance and legacy. The acquiring and learning process of the first language is very rapid. It comes into possession like a dynamic and abstract property, and moreover by the age of 6 years from birth one can acquire 100% efficiency in learning and undertanding mother tongue.Learning mother tongue rarely needs any teaching or instruction.

Further, children and young adults having proficieny in their 1st language /mother tongue are most capable of learning any other language.Looking out from the point of view of learner’s, their perception does not usually make much difference in learning the mother tongue but it makes a huge difference in the learning process of second language, contextually English. English language learners with introvert personality usually make slow progress when compared to learners having extrovert personality. Discussing specifically and in detail about learning English language the grammar part becomes more difficult to learn than other aspects of English.

Why is grammar so difficult to learn? Let us discuss. There are certain important and basic grammatical rules which need to be learnt for practising good communication skills in English Language. All the aspects of English communication ie. Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening require effective knowledge of grammar. At advanced educational stages, English writing skills become more complicated which could develop the probability of facing more grammatical errors specially when communicating through letters, paragraphs, articles, reports and essays. Considering the simple definition of grammar it is a set of rules, or rather structural rules which include the structure and arrangement of words, sentences, phrases, clauses, idioms and whole texts.Let us consider the set of rules in detail.

\*Rule 1 : Every sentence should start with a capital letter in the first word.

\*Rule 2 : Every sentence should end with a full stop or a question mark or an exclamation mark.

\*Rule 3 : Every sentence should have a subject, verb and object.

\*Rule 4 : The subject and verb forms are interelated in the sentence.

\*Rule 5 : Use Either – or (or) Neither – nor, depending on the sentence, while using singular nouns.

\*Rule 6 : Proper nouns should be capitalized anywhere in the sentences, including at the beginning when used.

\*Rule 7 : Common nouns should be capitalized only at the beginning of the sentences.

\*Rule 8 : The words its – it “a” s, and you’re – your are not the same.

\*Rule 10 : Use Indefinite Articles for countable nouns and Defininte Articles with ‘Specific countable and all uncountable nouns.

\*Rule 11 : Use the article “a” for consonant sounds and “an” for vowel sounds.

\*Rule 12 : Use apostrophes to show possessions.

\*Rule 13 : Active voice is more preferred than passive voice in English language.

It is a general observtion that, the above mentioned set of rules and the general English grammar is known to most of the English language learners. What is then the fear about grammar? Why is it that most of the learners go wrong grammatically? Why is it that most of the English language learners lose confidence while communicating in English? The answer to all the questions above is not about the rules and implication of these and other rules; but the fear is more about the exceptions to these rules. Exceptions are very difficult to remember. Added to that, are the psychological obstacles that are related to the human psyche’s misconceptions of learning the foreign language. Further there are a group of administrative, systemic and educational obstacles that include an imbalance in the programms of preparing the English Language Teacher, the methods used in teaching the English Language, lack of co-operation and partnership. Also, there is a lack of expertise and scientific centers specialised in teaching the English Language at the local, regional and global levels.

English language learners often get become frustrated because no rule of English grammar or vocabulary is straight forward. Exceptions are always there. What are these exceptions and how do they become a major hindrance in effective lerning of English? Moreoften than not, these exceptions lead to many common mistakes observed in people speaking or writing English. Let us throw light on this aspect.

Category I : Tense – Verb Exceptions

a) Addition of Auxillary verbs

Generally, the present tense is used to talk about events that happen regularly.

Ex 1: I practice English reading every-day.

Ex 2: I eat lunch now.

The sentence in 1st example is correct but the 2nd sentence is wrong.The correct sentence is “ I am eating lunch now”. So the observation here is using present tense instead of present progressive is one of the difficult and confusing part of grammar learning. Further adding more emphasis to the statement, by putting an auxillary verb/helping verb adds to more confusion as seen in the following example. Ex: I do practice English reading everyday!

Such sentences, having the helping verb end with an exclamation; further demonstrate your fervent desire to learn English. Another common mistake which is done by learners, is to add the auxillary to the conjugated form of the main verb as seen in the following example.

Ex : She does practices English reading everyday.

This sentence is wrong, because the ‘s’ need not be included with the word practice.

b) Use of simple present tense

Simple present tense is used to talk about general truths and habits. Following examples are stated for reference.

Ex 1 : He is a boy.

Ex 2 : They learn new spellings everyday.

Ex 3 : Science teachers work hard.

But, the exception to this rule is when we are talkling about future events that have been scheduled.Few examples to state this exception are mentioned henceforth.

Ex 1 : Classes start fall semester.

Ex 2 : We have spelling and grammar quizzes next Friday.

Ex 3 : Non-native speakers sit for IELTS every October.

In the above examples, the verb is in present tense, but the action happen’s in future.

Category 2 : Exceptions of Adverbs and Adjectives

a) Adverbs ending in –ly.

Consider the averbs formed by adding ‘ly’ to an adjective – gladly, slowly, foolishly, nicely etc. These adverbs are usually adverbs of manner.But if an adjective itself ends with ‘ly’, we cannot normally change it into adverb.Most of the English grammar learners become confused at this juncture and make mistakes. Such words belong to two categories.

1.Words which act both as adjectives and adverbs, without any change – cowardly, daily, early, fortnightly, hourly, surely, nightly, only, weekly,yearly etc.

Examples are stated here:

* She has arrived by an early flight (adj)
* She has come Early.(adverb)
* There is an h ourly change of classes(adj.)
* The classes change hourly.(adverb)
* The Statesman is a daily newspaper.(adj.)
* The Statesman is published daily.(adverb)

2. Words which are used only as adjectives – brotherly, fatherly, motherly, friendly, gentlemanly, godly, goodly, homely, likely, lovely, manly, seemly, unseemly, womanly etc. They can be changed into adverbs by using a phrase like ‘in a brotherly manner’ or ‘in a lovely fashion’, or’in a manly way’. Most of the English language learners are in a confused state here again, and the adjectives are used in an inappropriate manner.Few examples can be quoted here.

* He is a friendly boss.(adj.)
* She received us in a very friendly manner.(adverb)

Errors in the use of Adjectives and Adverbs

Look at the following examples.

* The sky became bright(not brightly)
* This year good apples are rare(not rarely)
* Sho got angry.(not angrily)
* The tea became bitter.(not bitterly)
* The job is difficult though it appears easy.(not easily)
* The price seems to be low(not lowly)

In all the above examples, the verbs to be, to seem, to become, or any other verb having a similar meaning (appear, feel, look, grow, turn – in the sense become) need an adjective and not an adverb to act as a compliment which qualifies the subject to complete the meaning of the sentence. No adverb is required to modify the verb. But if these three verbs “turn’, ‘grow’, and ‘appear’ are used in a different sense they are followed by an adverb, not adjective. These rules and exceptions often create confusion for learners of English language.

Let us understand the same through few more examples as mentioned below.

* The ship appeared suddenly on the horizon.(not sudden)
* These plants have grown quickly.(not quick)
* She turned nd left unexpectedly.(not unexpected)

In the above sentences, not to get confused the verbs ‘appear’ means ‘come to sight”, grow means ‘increase in size’,’turn’ means ‘move in a direction’. Therefore, the need is an adverb, and not adjective.

3. Use an adjective, not an adverb, after verb such as ‘feel’, ‘sound’, ‘taste’, ‘smell’ to show a quality experienced by one of the physical senses.

Let us look at the following examples for more clarity.

* This cloth feels smooth.(not smoothly)
* These pipes sound nice.(not nicely)
* This orange tastes sour.(not sourly)
* That rose smells sweet.(not sweetly)

While discussing about the exceptions of grammar in detail, we also need to understand the common errors in sentence making. The following pit- falls, need to be avoided in order to speak and write correct, balanced and complex ideas and sentences. Once these exceptions are understood grammar would probably be more easier and simple for all the learners.For easy reference examples of a wrong sentence and the correct sentence are given.

**1. Dangling Modifier**

WRONG: Expecting a large crowd, extra chairs were provided by the management.(Dangling modifier beacause the modifier does not logically and sensibly refer to subject of the main clause. It is not the “extra chairs” (subject) which are “expecting a large crowd.”

RIGHT : Expecting a large crowd, the management provided extra chairs.

RIGHT : Sincce a large crowd was expected, extra chairs were provided by the management.

**2. Vague references of “this”, “that”, “which”**

WRONG : He wants to begin immediately and to make his first sale before end of the year. As a result of this, he will probably become a succesful salesman.

RIGHT : He wants to begin immediately and to make his first sales before the end of the year. As a result of this attitude, he will probably become a successful salesman. (“This” must not refer to a cause, sentence, or idea; it must refer to one specific word.)

**3. Lack of Parallel Construction**

WRONG : The man liked meeting and to talk to people. (“and” joins one gerund and one infinitive constructions)

RIGHT : The man liked to meet and to talk to people. (“and” joins parallel inifnitive comstructions)

RIGHT : The man liked meeting and (talking to people (“and” joins parallel gerund construction which express which express ideas of equal importance)

N.B Parallel construction applies as well to the enumeration of points, particularly of recommendations.

WRONG :

1) The company should increase the price of all products.

2) Increase the variety of products.

3) Provide more services.

**4) They should review their advertising programme.**

RIGHT :

The company should-

1) increase the price of all products.

2) increase the variety of products.

3) provide more services.

4) review their advertising programme.

**5. Needless Shift in Tense of Verb**

WRONG : He usually makes sensible decisions although he frequently changed his mind. (Shift from present tense in main clause to past tense in subordinate clause.)

RIGHT : He usually makes sensible decsions although he frequently changes his mind.

N.B Tense should be consistent within the sentence (as in the example above) and from sentence to sentence within the paragraph.

**6. Needless Shift in Mood of Verb**

WRONG : Do this work carefully; you should also do it slowly. (Verb shifts from imperative to indicative mood)

RIGHT : You should do this carefully; you should also do it slowly.

RIGHT : Do this work carefully; also, do it slowly.

N.B Generally speaking, the imperative mood should be avoided in report writing. This mood expresses a command or strong request; a report should suggest or recommend rather than command.

**7. Needless Seperation of Related Sentence Elements**

WRONG : I, hoping very much to find Mrs Singh at home and to sell her one of our new products, knocked at the door. (needless separation of subject “I” and “verb” knocked)

RIGHT : Hoping very much to find Mrs Singh at home and to sell her one of our new products, knocked at the door.

WRONG : I only telephoned those men. (needless separation, of adverb “only” and “those men” which “only” modifies)

RIGHT : I telephoned only those men.

**8. Lack of subject- Verb Agreement**

WRONG : The price of new products were reasonable.

RIGHT : The price of the new products was reasonable. (singular verb to agree with simgular subject, even though a plural word intervenes)

WRONG : The advantage of Product A and Product B is the profits.

RIGHT : The advantage of Product A and Product B is the profits. (singular verb to agree with singular subject, even though a plural word follows the verb as its object/ compliment.)

WRONG : There is a man and woman waiting to see me.

RIGHT : There are a man and women waiting to see me. (plural verb to agree with double subject, especially when “there” begins the sentence and subject follows verb)

WRONG : Everyone on the top three floors work for one company.

RIGHT : Everyone on the top three floors work for one company. (singular verb to agree with singular subject, especially when subject is “everyone” or “each”)

WRONG : There is only one of the girls who play sitar.

RIGHT : There is only one the girls who plays the sitar. (singular verb to agree with “one” the singular word to which subject “who”refers. Important when subject of verb is “who”, “which, or “that”)

WRONG : Neither the report nor its appendix were published.

RIGHT : Neither the report nor its appendix was published. (singular verb to agree with singular subjects joined by “or” or “nor” )

N.B. If one subject is singular and one plural, the verb agrees with the nearest subject. For example Neither the report nor the books were published.

**9. Lack of Pronoun Agreement**

WRONG : Everyone brought lunch to work.

RIGHT : Everyone brought his lunch to work. (Singular verb to agree with “everyone”, the singular word to which pronouns refers to “everyone” or “anyone”)

WRONG : He does not usually make those kind of errors.

RIGHT : He does not usually make that kind of error. (singular pronoun to agree with “kind”, the singular noun which pronoun modifies. Important when “this”, “that”, “these”, or “those” modifies “kind” or “sort”)

RIGHT : He does not usually make these kind of errors. (plural pronoun modifying plural noun)

WRONG : Neither the manager nor his favourite employee could do their work alone.

RIGHT : Neither the manager nor his favorite employees could do his work alone. (singular pronoun to agree with singular words which are joined by “nor” and to which the pronoun refers. Same when “or” joins singular words)

N.B. If “or” or “nor” joins one singular and one plural word, the pronoun agrees with the one nearest to it.

Neither the manager nor the workers were aware of their errors.

**Strategies in dealing with difficultiesin grammar:-**

English grammar teachers should prepare a meaningful plan in teaching. English grammar learning activities should be interesting and enjoyable, with more examples such that the students will be stimulated to explore their ― innovation and creativity‖ inlearning English grammar. This might help in overcoming the fear of grammar. Moreover, the teachers need to provide authentic materials in the teaching-learning activities because they are useful and helpful for the students to relate their own learning experiences to the language used by the native speaker of English.

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