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Contextualization of English Grammar: An impact study on the students of class 10

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Abstract

Bangladeshi students find English grammar as the mean of learning English language since the very outset of their academic career. All through the long path of student life they consider English grammar an alienated thing which must to grasp to cut good marks in exams. But there is confusion whether they really get the necessity of grammar or if they find it interesting. The way they learn grammar makes them conscious about the use of grammar, at the same time it somehow makes them dependent. The students lose their confidence to use grammar subconsciously. In this paper the subconscious use of grammar has been termed as 'contextualization'. The paper deals with one of the grammatical topics included to the NCTB syllabus of secondary and higher secondary level in Bangladesh. The NCTB syllabus includes grammar topics like Voice, Narration, Tag question, Tense, Transformation of sentence etc. This paper will deal with Transformation of sentence. The paper tries to show how the conventional ways of teaching make them frustrated and how contextualization can give them some relief.

Keywords: Contextualization, Transformation of Sentence, Memorization, Time Consuming, Hard and Fast Rules, Grammar.

Introduction

As a teacher I always try to discover students' potential. While teaching basic grammar, I found students indifferent and in some cases even ignored about the practical use of grammar in our day to day life. Rather students were seen to consider grammar the combination of some fixed rules as well as a boring thing to memorize. At the same time I found students having a common belief that they had less ability to do better in English. They also think that without sound knowledge of grammar they cannot cut good marks in English exams. In this study I tried to show how students can learn English grammar easily if they are made familiar to the day to day life use of grammar and this process has been termed here as 'contextualization of English Grammar'. To be informed about the existing problems regarding grammar a questionnaire had been prepared. I have also described my class experience how students found grammar as a subconsciously used thing and how they answered the previously unanswered subjects using their potentials, paying little heed to grammatical rules after contextualization of grammar.

Literature review

In general, grammar of a language means the rules of that very language. The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (cited in Nunan, 2003, p.154) says "Grammar is a description of

the structure of a language and the way in which units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language”. Thornbury (1999) says, “Grammar is partly the study of the structures that are possible in a language”. Grammar plays the role of media for learning a language. So, grammar should be taught in a way which will be very easy and time consuming for students. Students should have that ability to discover a language through learning grammar of that very language. This ability can be developed in them by the teachers. The teacher should play the role of a facilitator. Teacher should contextualize ideas as if students can create something by their own but the students should not be left alone as if they feel helpless.

We believe that leaving learners to discover form-function relationships and the intricacies of a new linguistic system wholly on their own makes little sense. This does not mean, however, that we advocate a constant focus on all forms for all learners all the time. (Doughty & Williams, 1998, p.11)

In conventional ways, students are encouraged to be conscious about memorizing rules but contextualization emphasizes discovery and thinking. According to Larsen-Freeman (2001, p.39-40) “These exercises do not require students to produce the target structures. Instead, students are made aware of the target grammatical item through discovery oriented tasks.” By the process of contextualization students learn to become self-dependent. They can produce answers by themselves. Holec (1981, p.3) defined this ability as ‘autonomy’. He says “It is the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”.

It seems that when a student learns something in his own way, he can discover his hidden potentials. He learns to control his logics and use the brain in a good percentage. Benson (2001, p.47) defined this way of learning as “the capacity to control one’s own learning”. So, contextualization helps a student to stand out of the box. When a student himself can decide whether his answer is right or wrong he even becomes benefitted in his personal life. He becomes proficient in decision making. Little (1991, p.49) describes this as “detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action”.

A student gets the way of learning monotonous if he is taught by fixed rules. There remains no place to discuss with others. Since there are fixed rules, there is no way to justify one’s answer comparing with others. But when a student produces an answer by his own self he can justify the answer. He can discuss with others in order to produce the correct answer. So, this process ensures student’s full participation in the study and the class as well. Little (1996, p.210) describes the way as “capacity to participate fully and critically in social interactions”. So, ultimately learning by contextualization helps learners not only to learn easily but also to be proficient. Regarding this way Dam and Legenhausen (1996) says “learners who participate in them may well gain rather than suffer in terms of proficiency”.

All these reviewed literatures support the reasonability of contextualization. The process may differ in different times but it was seen previously that the best result comes when students are made known about the real lifeuse of their topic. Fotos and Ellis (1991) termed it as ‘consciousness-raising’.

Statement of the Problem

To teach transformation, generally students are started with the classification of sentence. They have to go through long lectures on the classification of Clause and Verb. Students find that they have no other way but memorizing all these classifications to learn how to transform a sentence. At

this point, they start fearing transformation. After all the discussion about classifications it is considered that students are now able to identify which one is Simple/Compound/Complex sentence. Then the students are provided with some fixed rules. According to those rules, some words must be replaced by some other certain words to transform a sentence. For example:

Given word	Transformed form
Only(god)	none but
Only(object)	Nothing but
Too...to	So... that
Superlative form	No other
One of the	Very few
Though/Although	Inspite of/Despite
Etc...	

All through this process students never know why they are taught ‘Transformation of Sentence’. As a result, such a tedious topic makes them frustrated and they lost interest to it. Some students were even found to hate this topic. The only thing a student believes is “Transformation of sentence is one of the Grammar topics and the sole reason to learn it is to cut good marks in exam”.

Objective of the study

- i. To know the present condition of the of the students
- ii. To encourage students to learn English
- iii. To facilitate students to learn transformation of sentences easily
- iv. To make them confident enough to take attempt for solving grammatical problems
- v. To create interest towards English.

Methodology

i. Sampling

It was a qualitative research. In sample 60 students were chosen to collect data. A questionnaire was made in this regard. The students were of class 10 of different schools in Dhaka. There was no precondition to select the students. I consulted with a coaching at Motijheel and with the permission of the authority I arranged the students in a classroom.

SL no	Name of School	Number of students
01	Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Govt. Girls High School	03
02	Motijheel Govt. Girls High School	10
03	Khilgaon Govt. High School	11
04	Motijheel Ideal School and College	12
05	Dhanmondi Govt. Boys High School	01
06	Motijheel Govt. Boys High School	14
07	Motijheel Model High School and College	09

The students were given a motivation first to boost up their confidence. Then they were facilitated to learn the way. After the process is complete, evaluation was taken from them. Before facilitating,

the students were given some sentence practices to know about their condition and those very sentences were given again to them when the facilitating was over.

ii. The common motivation

A common motivation was given to the students before starting. They were told “English is not anything to memorize. It’s nothing but a language like our mother tongue Bangla. To know Bangla we do not memorize any rule rather we just go through this. Language is a thing to feel, to imagine and to create. One thing is to notice only that like different faces/structures of human beings, languages have different structures. First you need to identify that structure by yourself and then you just explore the language. For example, Bangla is a ‘Subject + object + verb’ structured language (আমি + ভাত + খাই) but English is a ‘Subject + verb + object’ structured language (I + eat + rice). If you can recognize the structure of English you will obviously be able to learn English”

iii. Transformation of Sentence

At the very beginning, students were told that they need not to know about clauses or classification of verbs to learn ‘Transformation of Sentence’. They were further assured that no hard and fast rules will be given. These declarations made the students highly relieved. At the same time, they were puzzled if it was really possible.

Students were made known that they themselves use ‘Transformation of Sentence’ in their day to day activities and they do it subconsciously without paying any heed to rules. ‘Transformation of Sentence’ is nothing but telling the same thing differently. Students were informed why they are taught this topic. Initially they considered this a mere topic to get marks in the exam. But this time, they were informed that ‘Transformation of Sentence’ is taught to show the different use of English language.

Students were asked to reproduce a Bangla sentence. They were instructed that I would produce a Bangla sentence and they would have to reproduce the sentence differently without changing the meaning. The sentence was-

তুমি মোটেই খারাপ মানুষ নও (You are not a bad person at all)

When it was their turn, most of them reproduced-

তুমি খুব ভালো মানুষ (You are a very good person)

Then it was brought under their notice that they themselves subsequently have replaced the word ‘মোটেই’ (at all) by the word ‘খুব’ (very). To do this they used their sense not any rule. So, when and how a word should be used that is a habit. Some more Bangla sentences were given and most of them came up with right answers. Now it is proved that they can transform sentences and students already could realize that they have this skill as habitual fact. Since they can transform Bangla sentence they have the ability to transform English sentences because Bangla and English both are language.

At this stage, students were given some clues to identify Simple, Compound and Complex sentences easily. \

Simple Sentence: There will be only one main verb in a simple sentence, does not matter how long the sentence is.

Compound Sentence: There will be more than one main verb in a compound sentence and there will be linkers like **for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so, therefore.**

Complex Sentence: There will be more than one main verb and except the linkers of compound sentence, other linkers can be used. ‘Wh’ linkers i.e **who, what, where, which, how, why** etc are used normally. Beside these, linkers like **as, after, since, so that, unless** etc can be used. Use of these linkers depends on the meaning of the sentence and the sense of the user.

The students were shown a very simple way to identify the main verb. They were given some Bangla examples

Do = করা To do = করতে Doing = করে

I do the work (আমি কাজটি করি)

I *want to do* the work (আমি কাজটি করতে চাই)

Doing the work, I’ll take rest (কাজটি করে আমি বিশ্রাম নেবো.)

In the examples the underlined words are main verbs but the italics are not main verb. If the underlined words are omitted the sentences become incomplete. So, a decision can be taken, if ‘to’ is added before a verb and ‘ing’ is added after a verb (without auxiliary verb) that very verb lost its dignity as a main verb. But

I am doing the work

In this sentence ‘doing’ is main verb because there is an auxiliary verb before it.

Therefore, to transform sentences one needs to count only the verbs. The rest of the transformation depends on the person not on the rules. Because a single sentence can be transformed in many ways, and it depends how differently one can think.

To transform a sentence from complex to simple one needs to keep a main verb and deactivate the other. Similarly, a simple sentence can be transformed into compound by importing another verb i.e two main verbs in total and there will be the previously mentioned linkers according to the meaning. To transform a sentence from complex to compound one needs to change the linkers. Thus, ‘Transformation of Sentence’ becomes a habit.

Sentence practice:

- i. Do and die (Simple)
- ii. All that glitters is not gold (Compound)
- iii. Birds of the same feather flock together (Complex)

Pre session sample answers	Post session sample answer
i. a. Does, you die b. Die before do	i. a. By doing you will die b. Do to die
ii. a. All that glitters and not gold b. All glitters but all are not gold	ii. a. Many things glitter yet they are not gold b. Many things glitter but all of them are not gold
iii. a. It is flock together who are birds b. Birds of the same feather who flocks are together.	iii. a. Birds who are of the same feather, flock together b. Birds who have the same kind of feather, they flock together

Data analysis

i. Pre session analysis

Before starting the process, students were given a questionnaire including 6 simple questions to measure their present condition. It was ensured that their identity would be kept secret.

- i. 'Transformation of Sentence' seems to you-
 - a. Very easy
 - b. Easy(5%)
 - c. Difficult(30%)
 - d. Very difficult(65%)
- ii. What are the topics you were taught to teach 'Transformation of Sentence'?
 - a. Clause(100%)
 - b. Verb(71.67%)
 - c. Sentence(100%)
 - d. Tense(11.67%)
 - e. Others [Punctuation 5%, Voice 1.67%]
- iii. While learning 'Transformation of Sentence' which topic took much time?
 - a. Clause(68.33%)
 - b. Verb(5%)
 - c. Sentence(26.67%)
 - d. Tense(0%)
 - e. Others [Please mention]
- iv. Generally what is your mark out of 5 in 'Transformation of Sentence' in exam?
 - a. 0-1(3.33%)
 - b. 1-2(11.67%)
 - c. 2-3(30%)
 - d. 3-4(40%)
 - e. 4-5(15%)
- v. According to you, is there any real life-application of 'Transformation of Sentence'?
 - a. Yes(0%)
 - b. No(68.33%)
 - c. Not sure(31.67%)
- vi. Why are you learning 'Transformation of Sentence'?
 - a. To increase English grammar skill (18.33%)
 - b. To get good marks in exam (50%)
 - c. To develop communicative competence (0%)
 - d. To know more about the use of English language (0%)
 - e. Don't know (31.67%)

ii. Post session analysis

After conducting a 1:30 hour session on contextualization, immediate feedback was taken from the students. They were provided with a questionnaire including 2 questions only.

- i. Have you enjoyed the process?
 - a. Yes (93.33%)
 - b. No (6.67%)
 - c. Not sure (0%)
- ii. How did you find the process?
 - a. Easy (96.67%)
 - b. Difficult (3.33%)
 - c. As usual (0%)
 - d. Don't know (0%)

Findings

It was found that students have a positive approach towards new ways and are always eager to do something by their own. It is not the content that makes them frustrated rather the process it is which keeps them away from studying. Students do not find any interest to memorize hard and fast rules but they put their full interest and emphasis to the thing which gives them some new ways to discover. From their feedback it was found that they enjoyed the process very much because the process relieved them from memorizing lots of things. Although some of them complained that in this process they are to memorize the linkers but finally they confessed that memorizing few linkers is better than memorizing numerous rules. The students were given the same sentence practices before and after the session. It was seen that the percentage of current answers increased noticeably. Students even made some uncommon sentences which were actually correct, but at the first glance they seem odd. So, all through the process it is found that students may do better in English grammar if they are encouraged to apply their own merit. Contextualization is the process which encourages them to apply their own merit.

Limitation of the Study

The study was conducted among 60 students only. So, the result found through the study may be different in a bigger context. Students were told that they would be able to transform almost 80% of the sentences using this ‘Contextualization’ and ‘verb deactivating’ process. Sometimes verbs may not be deactivated by this process rather noun form of the words may be used. So, students were advised to go through examples. When they will be able to solve at least 80% problems, their boomed up confidence will help them to solve the others problems and they will know the way how to solve the exceptional sentences.

Conclusion

A human being starts walking when s/he is 2-3 years old. Nevertheless, a mature person is seen to stumble sometimes due to unconsciousness or unfamiliarity to the path but that does not mean that s/he cannot walk. Similarly, after getting accustomed to contextualization of grammar, some exceptional sentences may seem difficult; students may be unable to solve some problems. But it would be unwise to consider this a weakness. Regular practice can overcome these problems and above all, a student should keep in mind that English is nothing but a language. Therefore, it is a thing to learn using sense. Memorization will make it difficult and time worthy. The researcher keeps a wish for the students to learn applying sense.

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