

Teaching English as a Second Language in Nigeria: Grammar, the Basic Fundamental to Good Spoken and Written Forms of English.

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Abstract

English remains one of the major features of colonialism in Nigeria. Its adoption as the national language is enshrouded and precipitated by the multilingual nature of the country where the need for a common language of communication arises. Despite its linguistic roles in the country, however, many deficiencies accompany its use. In order to overcome the hurdles bedeviling such deficiencies, grammar has been identified as the major aspect where the learners of English in Nigeria have very scanty knowledge of. This paper is therefore tailored towards arresting the problems of wrong use of English with specific emphasis on the teaching of grammar using Sheppard's eclectic method of teaching in a bid to achieving individual's development with relevance to meeting intelligibility and conformity. The study finally reveals the effectiveness of using the eclectic method to teach grammar in order to equip and develop individuals to ensuring that leaners are more proficient and effective in the use of English.

Keywords: communicative competence, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, error correction, grammar instruction and meaningful drills

Introduction

Language is a tool of communication. It is through language that interaction and communication are made possible among people. English has come to function in Nigeria as a national and official language due to the fact that the need for a common language of communication among the various ethnic groups in the country arises.

The advent of English in Nigeria is dated back to the 16th century when ports(trading ports) were established on the African coasts (Odumuh, 1987). During this period, English people had established themselves at the coastal areas like Calabar, Warri and Brass. Some of the major factors that led to the emergence of English in Nigeria include commercial contact, the missionaries, colonialism as well as the regional closeness of Portuguese to Africa compared to other Europeans.

The emergence of English in Nigeria accorded it several functions. It performs both the intra-national and international functions (Katibi, 2011). At the intra-national level, it remains the language of education, media, science and technology. It is an official language and lingua franca to Nigerians. Bamigbose (1971) observed that "the introduction of English as a subject in primary schools through higher education as a medium of instruction means that Nigerian child's access to the culture and scientific knowledge of the world is largely through English". He went further that since the products of the schools will be absorbed into different types of employment where English is the official language of communication and where, consequently, proficiency in English is a necessary qualification, the pre-eminent provision of English in the educational system is likely to remain a longtime.

At international level, English is a thread that fastens the bond of relationship among nations of the world. It is the language with which official businesses at international relations are being conducted. There is no denying the fact that there is a decline in the standards of performance in English by its learners in Nigeria. This is manifested at the levels of spoken and written forms of English. The nature and standard of English produced by learners of English are evident to justify this.

Bamigbose (1998) rightly asserted that "the introduction of formal education and the subsequent adoption of English as the medium of instruction hindered the inclusion of the use of indigenous languages as the media of instruction". The policy however recognizes that in the first three years in primary school, the indigenous languages of the child or the language of his/her immediate environment should be the medium of instruction while English will also be the medium of teaching as well as a school subject across schools. This fusion of languages actually affects the effective use of English in Nigeria by the learners.

Our concern in this paper is on intelligibility and conformity of the English language used by learners with the correct and standard form of English by emphasizing grammar with reference to using eclectic method of teaching grammar. This will go a long way to assist the learners to possess grammatical competence of English in order to be able to produce correct and acceptable sentence.

Conceptual Framework

The base of English is grammar. English language is a rule-governed and these rules need to be taught because they are not acquired. The brazen use of English by Nigerian learners of English cum the scanty knowledge of grammar which is the bone of grammatical incompetence, calls for special attention in a bid to achieve intelligibility, correctness and conformity. This ranges from malatropism, malapropism, wrong sentences and over-generalization of rules.

It is important to remind ourselves of the linguistic competence which cannot be achieved especially in a target language without effective understanding of grammar which deals with rules about a language. However, competence in language is predicated by the care and amount of effort put forward towards the learning of grammar for adequate knowledge of the language. Grammar, it must be stated, encompasses all the rudiments, syntax and all the rules guiding how a language is used.

A catalogue of causes amounts to why some weaknesses accompany the use of English in this part of the world (Nigeria). English finds itself in an environment where almost all the learners of English have acquired the first language which makes English a second language in Nigeria. This enhances transfer of elements of the first language to the target language (English) which can either be negative or positive. In this sense, contrastive linguists give prominence to the influence of first language over the learning of target language in its wholeness. Over-generalization of rules is another factor that promotes wrong use of English by learners coupled with inappropriateness in the use of lexemes. Of all these and others, the weak knowledge of grammar has often been seen as the most catalyst that hinders the correct spoken and written forms of English. In the light of this, special attention needs to be given to the teaching of grammar in order to develop the individuals and learners to acquire appropriate skills and ingredients needed to effecting correct written and spoken forms of English to meeting the national and international standards of English.

Language teaching especially grammar is based on the idea that the goal of language learning is communicative competence; the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately in order to accomplish communication goals (Sheppard, 1998). However, the desired outcome of language process is the ability to communicate competently. The word 'grammar' has different connotations which can be used in many different but interwoven ways. Olujide (1999) observes that 'grammar' can mean an individual's knowledge of a language which is exhibited through the utterances that he produces. Liles (1971) quoted by Olujide (1999) says that grammar is the knowledge that a fluent speaker of a language possesses which permits him to speak, understand and comment on sentences. 'Grammar' in modern linguistics is used either to refer to the competence of a language user, or a theory about the rules developed by a speaker or a book containing such a theory.

Going by its importance, the teaching of grammar becomes essential and vital for competence and proficient in language use. Joseph (1992) cited by Jiem (2009) observed that "No man can run speedily to the mark of language that is shackled with grammar precepts". He maintained that grammar could be picked up by simply communicating through exercises of reading, writing, instructing and speaking.

This idea was corroborated by Lewis (2000) quoted by Jiem (2009) who submitted that grammar teaching is essential in language teaching field. According to him, “grammar’s rules like the molds of the parts of a machine, without them, workers can only stand by the iron-water”. Lewis further emphasized that English learners without thorough knowledge of grammar rules instruction can neither use English language accurately to make a complete sentence, nor speak English language fluently or accurately. He summarized the relevance of teaching grammar thus;

It is exact that putting grammar in the foreground in second language teaching because language knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is the base of English language. Grammatical competence is one of communicative competences. Communicative competence involves knowing how to use the grammar and vocabulary of the language to achieve communicative goals, and knowing how to do this in a socially appropriate way. Communicative goals are the goals of learners’ studying/using English language. So, grammar teaching is necessary to achieve the goals (Lewis, 2000)

From the above extract, it has been clearly indicated that the teaching of grammar especially in a second language situation attracts greater values and significance. This is because, effective mastery of grammar is an indice to a reputable use of English.

Sheppard’s eclectic method of teaching grammar revolves around communicative competence, grammar instruction, error correction and communicative drills. Communicative competence is made up of four competence areas: Linguistic, Sociolinguistic, Discourse and Strategic competences.

The term “Linguistic Competence” simply means knowledge of the grammatical structures of a language (Oloruntoba-oju, 1999). Chomsky (1957) refers to “competence” as the “implicit” knowledge that the native speaker has of his language i.e. the rules of the structures of the language. He posits further that linguistic competence refers to the knowledge of how a language is constructed, how the clauses of one’s language are arranged, which type of noun or verb should be used to construct a particular kind of sentences. On the whole, linguistic competence is knowing how to use the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of a language. Linguistic competence asks: what words do I use? How do I put them into phrases and sentences? (Sheppard, 1998).

Sociolinguistic competence is knowing how to use and respond to language appropriately, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating. Sociolinguistic competence asks: which words and phrases fit these setting and topic? How can I express a specific attitude (courtesy, authority, friendliness, respect) when I need to? How do I know what attitude another person is expressing?

Discourse competence is knowing how to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole. It asks: How are words, phrases and sentences put together to create conversations? Strategic competence is knowing how to learn more about the knowledge of language. It asks: How do I express my ideas by using appropriate verbs? All these competences would help learners to know what, when and how language is used or should be used in order to avoid offending communication partners and in the use of appropriate words or lexemes.

The goal of grammar instruction is to enable students to carry out their communication purpose. Overt grammar instruction allows them to apply critical thinking skills to language learning. Teachers can take advantage of this by providing explanations that give students a descriptive understanding (declarative knowledge) of each point of grammar. This method stresses that teachers should teach grammar point in the target language or both. This is to facilitate understanding. The grammar points are presented in oral and written ways to address the needs of students with different learning styles. Adequate and appropriate examples are given to students for easy understanding.

At all the levels of proficiency, learners produce unintelligible language depicting acute deviations from the Standard English. However, error correction becomes relevant because it guides the teachers to know when learners are making errors so that they work on improving. Error correction is used by teachers to support language learning when students are doing structured output activities that focus on development of new language skills e.g.

Students (in class): I buy a new car yesterday.

Teacher: You bought a new car yesterday. (Remember the past tense of buy is bought). This goes a long way to include greetings, and conversations.

The use of text books to teach grammar for communication drills usually provides one or more of the following three types of grammar exercises. The first is mechanical drills which emphasize the teaching of exercises which are to be completed by students without attending to meaning. Students are to supply only one correct answer. In meaningful drills, each question has only one correct response and students must attend to meaning to complete the exercise e.g.

Teacher: Where are George's papers?

Students: They are in his notebook.

In this case, students must understand the meaning of the question in order to answer it correctly but only one correct answer is possible because they all know where George's papers are. Meaningful drills can help students develop understanding of the workings of rules of grammar because they required students to make form-meaning correlations. Above all, meaningful drills require students to be aware of the relationships among form, meaning and use of language. In communicative drills, students develop their ability to use language to convey ideas and information (Grace, 1998).

Application and Discussion of Sheppard's Eclectic Method to Teach Grammar

This aspect deals with the application and discussion of Sheppard eclectic method of teaching grammar. The eclectic method was discussed under communicative competence, overt grammar instruction, error correction and communicative drills.

Communicative Competence

It encompasses four methods of teaching grammar vis- linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences. Each of these methods can be applied by teachers to teach grammar. It is pertinent to note that the teaching involves oral interactions between the teacher and students in order to facilitate understanding. The subsequent discussion illustrates communicative competence beginning with linguistic competence.

- i. Linguistic Competence:** -It concerns itself with the knowledge of how language is used, how the clauses are arranged including words that are involved. The method emphasizes what word should the writer/speaker use? And how can such words be put together to construct sentences? The teacher uses this method to teach words recognition in terms of appropriateness, correctness as well as functions. Students are tasked to use the given words for correctness and appropriateness. Here are examples of this:

| VERBS | OBJECTS |
|------------------|----------------------|
| makes, eat, chew | kolanut, water |
| Is, cut, pluck, | Chair, wall, friend |
| Harvest, carve | An orange, basket |
| Mould, ride | A driver, blacksmith |
| Mails, bleasts | Block, bicycle |
| Roars, takes | Horse, doze, drugs |
| Will, buy throw | Journey, wrist-watch |
| Stone | Sip, well |

The table above is further used by the teacher to test students' ability of using words to fit in appropriately and correctly.

Teacher: What do we do to Kolanut?

Students: We eat kolanut.

Teacher: No. we don't eat kolanut, but chew it.

Students: Do we harvest an orange?

Teacher: No. we pluck an orange.

Students: Is it true that we carve a basket?

Teacher: Yes, we carve a basket.

Teacher: What does a goat do?

Students: A goat bleats.

Students: The man drives a horse.

Teacher: The man rides a horse/bicycle.

This method of teaching grammar enhances mental recognition of words. It better guides the students on the appropriate words to be used at the levels of nouns and verbs.

At the level of clauses, the teacher teaches the students by giving some clauses after which they are quizzed to check their level of assimilation of what he teaches.

1. I bought a pen which has red colour.
2. The man is in blue shirt.
3. The cat is under the chair.
4. The boy that came to your office has left.
5. The patient who's injured has been taken to the hospital.

(As the teacher teaches, relevant questions are asked to test the learning of clause by association. Below is the illustration of this aspect)

Teacher: What is it that had red colour?

Students: The pen which he bought.

Teacher: Who is in blue shirt?

Students: It is the man.

Teacher: Who has left my office?

Students: It is the boy that came to look for you.

Teacher: What happens to the patient?

Students: He's injured.

Teacher: Where is he?

Students: He has been taken to the hospital.

The teaching here equally involves both the teacher and students. Through questioning, students are technically and logically mainstreamed into having that grammatical stamina of constructing their own clauses from the ones initially constructed by teacher. The significance of this method lies in the fact that, it allows the students to think faster and learn by association.

ii. Sociolinguistic Competence: - Seeks to provide answers to the questions of how to use language and respond appropriately by considering the setting, topic and the relationships among the speakers.

1. The old granny has gone home.
2. The students have left for home.
3. I am the head of my home.
4. Life is a market.

(Certain questions are asked to test students' understanding of principal words of the sentences based on setting, topic and participants)

Teacher: Where has the old granny gone to?

Students: Home

Teacher: Home is where?

Students: Heaven

Teacher: Market is what?

Students: A temporary place

Context, setting coupled with other sociolinguistic features allow the students to respond to the questions asked by the teacher. The words “home” and “market” reflect different meanings based on what each refers to. However, the ultimate goal of this method revolve around using appropriate words or collocations which create room for intelligent guesses by the students to arrive at accurate and correct answers for the development of expected skills needed for learning English.

In **Discourse Competence**, students’ are better guided on how to interpret the larger context in terms of what makes a text/conversation as a whole. Strategic competence as a method of teaching grammar concerns itself with using appropriate verbs to express ideas. The students’ versions of the sentences below are incorrect while those of the teachers are correct to teach the students what they should know.

Students: Can you tell us your name?

Teacher: Could you tell us your name?

Students: I shall not tell him my name.

Teacher: I should not tell him my name.

Students: Can I stay?

Teacher: May I stay?

} Politeness
 } Politeness

} Politeness

Strategic Competence as a method of teaching grammar creates room for adequate use of verbs to realize meaning. The significance of this method allows teacher to assess students’ grammatical ability of using correct verbs.

Overt Grammar instruction allows the students to develop and apply critical thinking skills towards learning a language. It emphasizes descriptive understanding of what is taught by the teacher. This is considered at the levels of regular and irregular verbs, and the doubling rule of verbs that end in “d”.

Regular and Irregular Verbs

Verbs are used here where questions are asked by the teacher to teach the students on what regular and irregular verbs are.

Teacher: stopped remains the past tense of _____.

Students: stop

Teacher: leave is the present tense of _____.

Students: left

Teacher: seen is the past participle of _____.

Students: see

Teacher: _____ is the past tense of write.

Students: wrote

This method affords students to think independently and equally apply knowledge as well. More so, the significance of this method lies in the fact that it starts from simple to complex. Further examples are further given especially those that take “dd” in past forms and past participle e.g. wedded embedded etc.

Error Correction:-Error correction is important in the teaching of grammar because it allows the teacher to correct students when errors are committed. The illustration below captures the teaching of grammar using error correction method of teaching grammar.

Students: I buy a new car yesterday.

Teacher: You bought a new car yesterday.

Students: She has narrate a story.

Teacher: She has narrated a story.

Students: He write a letter.

Teacher: He writes a letter.

Students: I came back with bus.

Teacher: I came back by bus.

Students: I can't belief you.

Teacher: I can't believe you.

Errors emanating from the above sentences range from wrong tenses, non-conformity with concord rules, and wrong use of preposition to malatropism. These errors are corrected by teachers in order to guide the students from committing such errors in future.

Communication Drills

It involves using textbooks to teach grammar. Both mechanical and meaningful drills are employed. Mechanical drills lay emphasis on the teaching of grammar exercises where students are to complete a given task without attending to meaning; the environment of the sentences and better understanding of the questions asked by the teacher e.g.

Teacher: What is George doing at motor-park?

Students: George is waiting for the bus.

Teacher: Where do we find lawyers?

Students: in a court of law

Teacher: We pound yam with what?

Students: Mortar

Environment and students' experiences allow better responses from the students. In meaningful drills, students are required to give only one correct answer but they must attend to meaning to complete the exercise e.g.

Teacher: Whose book is this?

Students: It is John's.

Teacher: Where did you buy the drugs?

Students: from the chemist's

Teacher: When is the programme starting?

Students: The programme is starting next week.

Students' responses have indicated that they really understand the meaning of the questions which give rise to accurate answer.

Conclusion

Grammar is the base of the English language and as such, it must be properly and adequately taught. This becomes imperative because understanding grammar determines speakers/users' proficiency in the use of English. Several attempts have been made in this paper to look at Sheppard's eclectic method of teaching grammar. It has been discovered that the use of eclectic method to teach grammar is of immense benefit to the learners of English because it develops them towards being proficient in the use of the English Language.

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