

TEACHING OF GRAMMAR

Grammar is the science of language. It is an analytical and terminological study of sentences. Grammar has been defined differently by different scholars. Some definitions are as follows:

Dr. Sweet, "Grammar is the practical analysis of a language—its anatomy."

Thompson and Wyatt, "Grammar presents the facts of language, arranged under certain categories and deals only with what can be brought under general laws and stated in the form of general rules."

*Dr. West*¹, "Grammar is not a code of rules; it is, like etiquette and table manners, a statement of convention; it summarizes what is done by cultured people; and like etiquettes, it is in a state of constant change."

Prof. W. N. Francis, "Grammar has three different meanings. The first meaning of 'grammar'—call it grammar 1—is the set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to convey larger meanings. The second meaning of 'grammar'—call it grammar 2—is the branch of linguistic science which is concerned with the description, analysis and formulization of formal language patterns. The third meaning of 'grammar'—call it grammar 3—is linguistic etiquettes."

1 *Dr. West : English Language Teaching, 1967, p. 27.*

Chapman¹ has given a comprehensive definition of grammar :
"Grammar is a study of language by specialists, made in order to establish the rules and principles which are followed more or less unconsciously or instinctively by the native speakers."

Types of Grammar

Grammar can be classified into :

1. Perspective grammar,
2. Descriptive grammar,
3. Scholarly traditional grammar,
4. Structural grammar, and
5. Transformational generative grammar.

(1) **Perspective Grammar**—It is also called formal or theoretical grammar. It is the old traditional grammar. In it, the main emphasis is on rules and forms. It ties language with rules. Its limitation is that it does not consider 'change in language', whereas change in rules is must.

(2) **Descriptive Grammar**—It is also called functional grammar. It possesses the new concept of grammar. In it, the main emphasis is on the behaviour of language. It overcomes the limitation of prespective grammar because it changes alongwith the changes in the language.

(3) **Scholarly Traditional Grammar**—This type of grammar was developed by the scholars of universities. In developing it, they used bibliographic references, critical evaluation of the work of predecessors and thorough documentation by citations from English literature. The weakness of this type of grammar was diversity. Therefore, it did not influence the school of grammar.

(4) **Structural Grammar**—C.C. Fries, an American linguist was the founder of this type of grammar. This grammar emphasises on structure of sentences. The descriptive linguistics are much influenced by it. But it is not a complete system.

(5) **Transformational Generative Grammar**—In this type of grammar, sentences are of two types : (i) basic sentences and (ii) transformed sentences. Basic sentences cannot be derived from other sentences, e.g., "I am going." The transformed sentences are derived from the basic sentences, e.g., "Am I going?" This grammar is in a developing stage and perhaps in future will give a systematic syntax of English.

Merits and Demerits of Grammar

There are some scholars who advocate the cause of grammar. L. A. Gordon says, "Language is the vehicle of our thoughts and feelings and of our stories, whether true or not and grammar is the machinery by which that vehicle is set in motion." The following are the merits of grammar :

(i) So far as the correct expression in a language is concerned, grammar is essential.

(ii) Language is a complex system. It must have logic, grammar helps in developing a logical approach.

(iii) Grammar teaching is essential if we want to proceed from concrete to abstract.

(iv) It gives an insight into the structure of the language.

(v) It is a systematized knowledge of the language.

(vi) It provides a criteria for judging the correctness of language.

(vii) Its importance in writing is undebatable.

(viii) It helps in developing many mental abilities such as : reasoning, observation and concentration.

(ix) It help in writing correctly.

At present times, grammar is losing its importance. Scholars have freely criticised it. P. Gurrey¹ views, "In secondary schools, the use of parsing and full analysis is a waste of time compared to the effectiveness of many other exercises." Halliday and his colleagues² condemned it by saying, "Much of English grammar taught with the old method is pedantic, or archaic or even erroneous." According to Jespersen³, "Grammar is not a set of stiff dogmatic percepts, according to which some things are correct and others absolutely wrong." This criticism is due to the following demerits of grammar :

(i) Simply learning of rules is not enough for language learning. Language learning is heavily dependent upon practice and habit formation, because it is a matter of skill.

(ii) The errors in a language are not related to the knowledge of grammar, as pointed out by Kittson⁴, "The notion that the

1 P. Gurrey : *The Teaching of Modern Languages*. UNESCO. p. 75

2 M. Halliday et. al.: *Linguistic Science and Language Teaching* Longmans. 1968, p. 265.

3 O. Jespersen : *A Modern English Grammar*, London, 1954.

4 Kittson : *Language Teaching*.

grammatical mistakes made by the learner are due to the lack of grammatical knowledge is wholly false; this is often curiously illustrated in examinations where a candidate will not frequently gain marks in one section of the paper by stating a grammatical rule correctly and will lose only a little if he breaks the same rule in his composition."

(iii) Knowledge of grammar never helps in either fluency of speech or articulation and colloquial expression.

(iv) It never provides ideas.

(v) According to *Palmer*, "It actually hinders the spontaneous learning of a foreign language."

(vi) In the view of *Jespersen*¹, grammar has absurd forms in it which are seldom used.

Place of Grammar in School Curriculum

With the introduction of Direct Method, grammar is fast disappearing from school curriculum. In spite of the demerits of grammar, the education of grammar is essential. The place it should occupy should have following main features :

(i) The descriptive grammar which emphasises on function of language should be taught, because in the words of *Ballard*², "Formal grammar fails to provide a general mental training, does not enable teachers to eradicate solecism, does not aid in compositions and takes up time which could much more profitably be devoted to the study of literature."

(ii) It should be taught incidently and informally at the early stage. At the middle stage, inductive or deductive method is more useful. At the higher level, it can be taught in the traditional method.

(iii) It should occupy a secondary place. It should be a means to the end, not the end itself.

(iv) It should follow the language. *C. E. Eckersley* says, "The rules of grammar are like the laws of nature. The laws were not made for Nature to obey, but are simply a few facts which wise men have observed as to the way Nature acts. So, the grammarian merely examines the language of the best speakers and writers and deduces rules from their use of it."

(v) Teaching of grammar should only start when pupils acquire some command over the language.

¹ *Jespersen : A Modern English Grammar*, London, 1954.

² *Dr. Ballard : Teaching and Testing*.

(vi) During the first year only function of the words and the way they are used should be taught. It includes : subject and predicate, subject and verb; use of small and capital letters; use of fullstop, comma and question mark; singular and plural; simple present, past and future tenses; use of first, second and third person; genders. During second and third years, sentence pattern, phrase pattern, structural words and the ways in which English uses a few inflexions should be taught. At the senior stage, synthesis, direct and indirect narration, transformation, compound and difficult sentences.

Methods of Teaching Grammar

The methods of teaching grammar are as follows :

1. The Traditional method,
2. The Informal method,
3. The Reference or Correlation method, and
4. The Inductive-Deductive method.

(1) **The Traditional Method.** Under this method, grammar is taught with the help of a grammar book. This grammar book contains definitions, rules, examples and exercises. Teacher's task is to make the definitions and rules more clear to students with the help of examples. He proceeds from definitions and rules to examples. Then he asks student to do some exercises and memorize the definitions and rules by heart. This method has the following demerits :

1. It emphasises on rote learning.
2. It defaults the educational principles; proceeds from simple to complex, from known to unknown and from particular to general.
3. Students find it least interesting.

Due to all these demerits, this method is in obsolescence these days, although it enjoyed a high place some decades ago.

(2) **The Informal Method.** This method advocates the teaching of grammar not by rules but by usage. By continuous practice of using words while speaking, reading and writing, grammar can be learnt. This method proves useful at the early stage when pupils are taught orally. According to *Suri and Bhardwaj*, "The informal method connotes teaching of no grammatical rules, but explaining correct usage informally during correction work. This method is a necessity in the early stages when the pupils have not mastered enough of vocabulary and are yet baffling with speech." This method has the following demerits :

- (i) All rules cannot be taught.
- (ii) Students do not get systematized knowledge of grammar.
- (iii) It consumes much time and labour of students.

(3) The References or Correlation Method. It is also called incidental method, since in this method grammar is taught incidently. While teaching the text-book, translating a passage or doing composition, complex structures, grammatical rules and their implications are explained. In this way, two works are carried simultaneously. Since grammar is taught by relating it to the text-book translation and composition, it is called reference or correlation method. The advantage of this method is that students know the practical use of grammatical laws. But it has the following demerits :

- (i) It is not a complete method.
- (ii) It may interfere with the normal teaching.

For overcoming the first demerit, this method should be used alongwith other methods especially with inductive-deductive method.

(4) The Inductive-Deductive Method. This method is considered to be the best method because it follows some educational principles. As a matter of fact, inductive-deductive method is used to teach science. Since grammar is a science of language, it is successfully used in teaching grammar. Some grammarians think that both inductive and deductive are difficult methods. But it will not be appropriate to treat them as such, as pointed out by *Thompson and Wyatt*, "Even when the facts are discovered inductively, the knowledge acquired has to be applied deductively, or it is apt to be forgotten for lack of use."

Inductive means to proceed from observations to law and deductive means to proceed from law to observations. For teaching grammar inductively and deductively, the following steps should be followed :

Inductive Process

- (i) Presentation of examples in a systematic way.
- (ii) Observation and analysis of examples.
- (iii) Generalization.
- (iv) Verification and application of the rule.
- (v) Practice.

Merits. Some out of the many advantages of inductive-deductive methods are :

(i) It is in accordance with these educational maxims : from known to unknown, from simple to complex, from concrete to abstract and from particular to general.

(ii) Pupils remain active throughout the period.

(iii) Pupils find learning grammar interesting.

(iv) There is no need of rote memorization of rules.

(v) It helps in developing reasoning and thinking in pupils.

(vi) According to *P. C. Wren*, "Teach grammar inductively, other rules are reflected methods but the rules need not be learned beforehand. How can a boy be able to define a foot-ball or a cricket bat before he plays with one ? then, why should he define a noun or verb before he can use one ?"

Demerits. This method has been criticized by some scholars due to the following demerits :

(i) It is only applicable at an early stage.

(ii) This method is not full in itself.

But the merits of this method have made it the most successful method of teaching grammar.

It is advisable that grammar should be taught informally at the early stage, with the inductive and deductive method and incidental method at the middle stages and with traditional method at the higher stage.

Suggestions for Successful Teaching of Grammar

(i) The lesson should be planned beforehand.

(ii) The material should be taken from the text-book.

(iii) The method of teaching should be chosen keeping in view the age and general standard of students.

(iv) Appropriate material aids should be used, e.g., pictures, flash-cards, substitution tables.

(v) Sufficient spoken and written work is essential.

(vi) The teacher should be particular about the correction work.

(vii) For evaluation, the objective type tests should be conducted¹.