



WHY IS THE TEACHING/ LEARNING ENGLISH GRAMMAR CONSIDERED DIFFICULT?

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ABSTRACT



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Globalization has increased the importance of English language. It almost became unimaginable to think of a situation in the world without English. All departments of academics are indebted to the language. In spite of this inevitable importance attached to it the language still poses some challenges to the learners. The status of second language is the formidable disadvantage which keeps the learners hesitant towards its mastery. The different facets of the language which really alarm the learners are vocabulary, grammar, syntax etc. Grammar has in particular attracted the attention of the learners and teachers. Many methods have been designed to make learning grammar easy, but it always remains a hard nut to crack. Any research in the direction of resolving the problems faced by the instructors and learners is well worth rewarding. The present paper is a humble attempt to expatiate the problems related to grammar and suggest some pedagogical instructions and learner friendly methods to tackle the problems faced while writing grammar books.

Keywords: Grammar, Teacher, Learner, Verb, Form, Function, Sentence Patterns, Textbooks

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English has been taught/ learnt as the second language in India for various reasons. The teaching/learning of English grammar has had an important role in our curriculum. In fact grammar as the backbone of a language is taught / learnt for greater communicative competence in schools and colleges but teaching /learning English grammar is considered very difficult for various reasons by both teachers and learners.

The teaching / learning of English grammar can be viewed from three different angles – (1) the content itself, (2) a teacher, and (3) a learner.

As grammar is an abstract subject, it is difficult to understand it. The terminology of English grammar includes derivatives from Greek and Latin. It is like describing a language using another language. A teacher of grammar should try to digest the abstract expressions occurring, to impart them to learners. A learner should have an analytical mind to understand such a difficult subject.

Though English grammar is an important subject in schools and colleges, students do not show interest in learning it. At the very mention of grammar some hearts are filled with fear, some, with repulsion, and for some, it is just boring. Even some teachers find it difficult to explicate certain items in grammar. There are a number of reasons for this kind of attitude among teachers and learners of grammar. Some are as follows:

1. There is lack of adequate knowledge on the part of most teachers.
2. There are many books which do not deal with correct information.
3. There is lack of analytical ability on the part of learners.

Most English teachers rely on the text-books prescribed for the courses, for information. Only a few have the inclination to go through different books on English grammar for correct information. The adjective 'different' implies that there are books on English grammar written by native and non-native speakers of English, in various ways – from different aspects, though the subject is the same.

It should be noted that some of the teachers of English happen to be the textbook writers too. Some English teachers, without adequate knowledge in English linguistics take up the task of writing English

grammar books. They rely, mostly, for information, on Wren and Martin (1985-Rvd.ed.), which does not explain, adequately, some of the grammatical items. Examples will be given where necessary. As a result, there occur some errors which most English teachers do not notice, because they lack the ability to do so for want of linguistic knowledge.

The evidence that errors occur in textbooks come from the following examples taken from some books prescribed for the Intermediate and Degree Courses in A.P., and also Wren and Martin (1985—Rvd.ed.)

In Wren and Martin, an expression – **What a shame!** is given as an example for an exclamatory sentence. In another grammar book, **what a beautiful flower!** is stated as being an exclamatory sentence. They cannot be considered regular sentences as they do not contain any verb. A verb is the most important constituent of the predicate (Greenbaum 1991:19). The fact that they are elliptical cannot satisfy the doubtful mind of a learner, when the writers are describing the “sentence types” at sentence level, but not at discourse level.

It is stated that the finite verb in the sentence - She **has gone into the room**, is the VP **has gone**. But here the auxiliary **has** is the finite verb, and gone is the non-finite **-ed/en** participle. Take a look at the following sentences: **Sekhar likes mangoes**, and **Sekhar likes to eat mangoes**. These two sentences are given as examples for finite verb in the two sentences really cause ambiguity. In a book, a table showing the different forms of the verb **love** is given. In this table **love** is used in the progressive aspect **I am loving**. The word **love** is a stative verb and cannot be used in the progressive aspect. As **love** is a transitive verb it should be followed by an object. The same word, i.e., **love** with its different verb forms is given in Wren and Martin (1985:157-159, Rvd.ed.).

In some grammar books the possessive determiners – **my, our, you, his, her, and there are** said to be possessive pronouns. There is a lot of difference between possessive determiners and possessive pronouns.

In the sentence, **The boy wants to go home**, it is stated that **go home** is the NP. Here go is the verb and **home** is the noun. In a book the following sentence is taken as an example for adjective



phrases: **A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.** Here the prepositional phrases **in the hand** and **in the bush** are mentioned as adjective phrases (PPs) functioning as adjectives. Examples for adjective phrases: **a bit doubtful, quite happy** etc. (Quirk and Greenbaum 1973). Notice the sentence: **The doctor is in.** Here the word **doctor** is given as the noun used as the subject. But here both the determiner **the** and the noun **doctor** constitute the noun phrase which functions as the subject.

In a book, regarding certain sentence patterns, the question words **What, when** etc., are stated as subject complements. In the case of a subject complement, the complement follows the subject. But here, since **What** etc. are question words (interrogative pronouns), they are fronted.

The description of predicate is not done properly in a book. It is stated that the predicate must contain a verb. Actually, the predicate is the functional property of a particular part of a sentence. It contains not only the verb but also such elements as complements, objects and adverbials.

The prescribed textbooks lack clarity. There are many structures given in the books only to confuse the learners. Some writers do not know the needs of the learners. They do not describe the simple sentence well. They do not describe grammar on formal and functional grounds.

For ex:

| | | | | |
|----------|-------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|
| | Ram | ate | an | apple. |
| Form | noun | verb | article | noun |
| | NP | VP | | NP |
| Function | Sub | verb | | object |
| | Sub | | | predicate |

It is a pity that some writers do not give complete information, may be because of lack of proper knowledge in grammar or because of lackadaisical nature they give limited information. Lack of precision and accuracy confuses the readers all the more. These writers do not take pains to go through good and authentic grammar books written

by such writers as Quirk and Greenbaum, before taking up the task of writing grammar books. A textbook writer should be very careful in giving the correct information to avoid confabulating the minds of the readers.

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