

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AND ITS GRAMMAR IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to give answer to the question: should Grammar be taught in Junior High School? In order to do that some recommendations and precisions about the importance of teaching English as a second language in Cuban Junior High School are presented. This is done by using a communicative approach but without forgetting the three linguistic elements (phonetics, lexis and grammar), with emphasis in the last one. Today it is usual for Cuban students who are in the last years of their training as English teachers to spend most of their time doing practicum in Junior High Schools. They spend one or two hours to teach grammar, forgetting the communicative approach that is best for teaching foreign languages. This issue is also present in most of graduated teachers. Nowadays in Cuba English is taught by means of the communicative approach. It is supposed students should learn, mainly, how to speak, but using accuracy pronunciation, words or vocabulary they have already known and grammar structure. So it tries to suggest how to teach grammar inside the communicative approach. Teachers should work with it since students start to study the language.

KEYWORDS

Grammar; teaching; English; foreign language.

ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO SEGUNDO IDIOMA Y SU GRAMÁTICA EN EDUCACIÓN SECUNDARIA

RESUMEN

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Este artículo busca dar respuesta a la pregunta: ¿se debe enseñar gramática en la escuela secundaria? Para ello se presentan algunas recomendaciones y precisiones sobre la importancia de enseñar inglés como segunda lengua en la Escuela Secundaria Cubana. Esto se hace utilizando un enfoque comunicativo pero sin olvidar los tres elementos lingüísticos (la pronunciación, vocabulario y gramática) con énfasis en este último. En estos momentos es usual que los estudiantes que se encuentran en los últimos años de su formación como profesores de inglés dediquen la mayor parte del tiempo realizando prácticas en las escuelas secundarias básicas. Ellos dedican una o dos horas clases para enseñar gramática, olvidando el enfoque comunicativo que prima para la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. Esta cuestión también está presente en la mayor cantidad de profesores graduados. Hoy día en Cuba el idioma inglés se enseña por medio del enfoque comunicativo, lo que supone que los estudiantes deben aprender, principalmente, a hablar, pero usando la pronunciación con precisión, palabras o vocabulario que ya dominan y la estructura gramatical. Así que intenta hacer pensar en cómo enseñar la gramática dentro del enfoque comunicativo. Los profesores deben trabajar con este enfoque desde que los estudiantes comienzan a estudiar el idioma.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Gramática; enseñanza; Inglés; lengua extranjera.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of education in Cuba is the harmonic and multidimensional formation of children, adolescents and young people, that's why it is essential the formation cultivated students with an academic and political- ideological formation with full capacity to face and to solve problems presented in the real life, as well as to assume the advances of the science and the technique where they can interact in an active way in the society.

The educational system in Cuban has overlapped to important changes and transformations in the search of improving the teaching - learning process and the success of the development of culture in students and teachers. The teaching of English in our educational system responds to the contemporary demands (Enriquez, 2001). The students in Junior High School fluctuate between 11 and 15 years of age. The students of eighth and ninth grades are, because of their age, in the summit of fullness of the adolescence contrary to those students of seventh grade, because in these two last grades very few reminiscences of the childhood are appreciated.

It does not mean in no way that we can find a great homogeneity or likeness in the personal characteristics of the students in the classrooms of ninth grade. On the contrary, taking into account the development of the students they define more and more their individual particularities and they differ more from the others. The students of this grade, being more typically adolescent, show us

with more clarity one of the basic features of this age, the search of the individuality, of their own identity like person.

The characteristics of the contents of these grades (8th and 9th) demand from the students, new methods of assimilation and, at the same time, it supposes the development of better ways of cognitive processes, widening their possibilities to know the natural and social phenomena of the world surrounding them. The subject English in the National System of Education responds to the political, economic and social and cultural importance of the foreign languages in today's world.

Cuba has relationships of cooperation and exchange with a high number of countries, in the political, scientific, technician, educational, cultural and in the sports branches. In this regard, there are authors such as Vázquez & Gamboa (2014) or Gamboa (2018) finding alternatives to train teachers for potential collaboration in English-speaking countries, based on typical activities related to the characteristics of the countries. The exchange of delegations, technicians and students is increased every day; the membership and participation in seminars, conferences and international events is developed; the sources of information in the English language are increased every day. The development of the technologies of the information and communications make us closer and closer and create new places for the exchange and the cooperation among the towns and in this context the English language plays a very important role to guarantee the relationship of Cuba with many other countries of the world.

The subject of English contributes to the scientific formation of the world in the students. This is done taking the language as starting point like a social phenomenon and the relationship thought-language-culture, as well as when providing the analysis of the language to enter in its essence.

In the school curriculum of the General Education, the teaching of the English language, a language of a wide international diffusion, has as end the development of the communicative competence, what is said as the role of the man in his verbal and non-verbal activity in communicative situations that involve the interaction between two or more people, or between a person and an oral or written text, in correspondence with a certain social context.

DEVELOPMENT

1. General considerations

A review of previous works about how to teach English as a second language is presented in this section. This is done in order to provide reasoning, evidence, and examples that support the author's thesis on the question addressed.

This topic has been the theme of many researchers and authors in the beginning of this century. Teaching English as a second language is what teachers know or should know what they believe and what they think (Borg, 2006). This paper is giving an idea of the way teachers of English as second languages are thinking and what they are doing in class taking into

consideration the syllabus they have to teach and the context where they interact as well as the possibility they have in order to adequate the syllabus according with the kind of students they have. To realize what teachers do in the classroom it is needed to understand their cognition. Some spheres of teaching English as a second language have been scanned on what teachers do, know and think being the way we teach grammar the reason to focus this work.

The teaching of the English language contributes, not only to the functional linguistic competence, but also to the ability of building and rebuilding new knowledge (Aguilar, 2004). At the same time, some authors present the idea of communicative areas based on the dual purpose listening procedure to contribute to the development of persuasive oral presentation skills (Pérez, Borrero & Leyva, 2016). It means to develop the knowledge, habits and basic skills in the students, which allow them to communicate in the foreign language to understand oral and written information and to be expressed orally on topics related to their school and social life, as well as to write simple and brief messages.

Teachers in Junior High School teach in an essential and harmonic way the development of four basic skills, what is said, listening, speaking, writing and reading. Procedures are also included for the understanding of narrations, stories and simple texts that are presented in a written way or oral by teachers (in the classroom or in the television) conveyed by visual or audiovisual images, to familiarize them with the use of the dictionary, basically the bilingual one (Enriquez, 2001). What the students listens to and what they have to write, it means sounds and writing is also studied, the main rules of spelling, basic elements of formation of words that contribute to understand and express orally better in English, some learning strategies are begun to be developed that allow the students to learn how to learn and getting the knowledge of some important elements of the Cuban and universal culture, mainly of those of the English-speaking people.

The idea of the traditional pedagogic focuses is overcome which used to conceive the learning of the language starting from the mastering of its structural elements as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, without making a lot of reference to its functional use and the meaning of the structures. Therefore, the most important thing for the students is that they learn how to communicate in English as a foreign language and to use this language in different and diverse communicative situations and also to use it to complement the learning of other academic areas.

How to teach grammar has been a problematic in the last 16 years, if it should be approached deductively or inductively or if teaching it as a fragment of the communicative lesson is better than teaching pure grammar as a lesson of every unit in the syllabus (Borg & Burns, 2008) even though knowing grammar enhances learning. Although, some Cuban Junior High School teachers do not like grammar they feel the necessity of teaching it and give the students activities just to practice grammar, so they are in the uncertainty if explaining

grammar in a lesson where the goals are communicative or if they teach a lesson just to show the students the grammar they should master in the unit.

The goals of each unit are derived directly of the goals of the subject as the development of communication skills, of independent work and of the logical creator thought. The accuracy of the objectives is expressed in the postulate of the contents of each unit, which are detailed in terms of communicative functions, its corresponding linguistic structures (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation), and specific skills of reading comprehension and written comprehension.

The English subject doesn't have final exam in Junior High School that's why the evaluation is systematic, daily and mainly orally and, at the same time, it should propitiate, essentially, the confirmation of the knowledge of the communicative functions. Grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation associated to these functions should be evaluated in the way they have been treated during the lessons by the way the students express themselves and the way they understand the different communicative purposes.

When we mention the term grammar in the teaching learning process, we always think of grammar structure or in the nine parts of speech, even in grammatical tenses. The study of grammar by itself will not necessarily make you to speak or write better but by the acquisition of it we will understand how the language works and it helps us avoid making errors and being misunderstood or misunderstanding to someone. And knowing about grammar offers us an easier way of how sentences are built, therefore it also helps us how to communicate easily. The teaching of English grammar has usually been taught in a certain dogmatic way giving the students mainly, grammatical tenses as it is done in our mother tongue.

Using language grammatically and being able to talk reliably are important aims for students. Students' mastery of grammar improves when they understand and produce grammar in speaking contexts at the discourse level. A lot of authors have defined the term "grammar" in many ways, none of them in the same way. But most of them agree how important it is in the teaching learning process of a foreign language.

Many years ago, English was mainly taught by means of grammar. Teachers used to teach grammatical tenses and students liked the way they were learning the language. Nowadays most of the teachers like teaching English by means of grammar, even those young teachers who were just graduated recently and they learned the language by means of communicative approach and Common European Framework Reference.

In the last three years we have been observing lessons seniors students who have taught in Junior High School in Cuba as well as some others teachers' lessons who are mentoring students from the university. We could realize that most of them think grammar plays an important role in the teaching learning process when teaching English. According to Borg & Burns (2008) most of the

teachers do not agree grammar should be taught alone, it means, a lesson just to teach a part of speech or a structure, that grammar should be taught integrating some others aspects according to the didactics for the language teaching.

According to Richards & Reppen (2014), Grammar can be viewed both as knowledge and as ability. In the knowledge point of view, the focus is on rules for sentence formation. When viewed as ability, the focus is on how grammar is used as a resource in the creation of spoken and written texts. They proposed twelve principles as the basis for a pedagogy that focuses on acquiring learning to use grammar in texts, which are useful for classroom practice.

Uysal & Bardakci (2014) present contextual causes of the traditional teacher beliefs and behaviors of grammar teaching and failures, while Larsen-Freeman (2015) introduces corrective feedback as an important function of grammar pedagogy. Another important perspective is presented by Braga & Busnardo (2017). They distinguish the risk of not taking into consideration the peculiarities of the local context in the application of imported teaching methodologies. Contrary to what "natural approaches" predict, the teaching of Reading of a foreign language in a non-immersion situation demands some kind of teacher intervention. This view presents metacognition as a path for intervention and suggests that written material has great potential for fostering language awareness and learning within our particular situation.

At the same time, Graus & Coppen (2016) state that the role of grammar teaching in foreign language education is a controversial one both in second language acquisition research and language pedagogy and, as a result, a potential source of confusion to student teachers. They introduce an insight into the beliefs on grammar teaching of student teachers of English as a foreign language.

Some methods were applied to teach English as a second language last century and grammar was one of them but the aim of teaching should be practical, educational and cultural so teaching of a language must, first, lead the students to practical mastery of it, that's why with the communicative approach students learn more and easier (Pérez & Leyva, 2016). There are four skills to be trained: listening, speaking, reading and writing, with understanding as the main ingredient of each. This means that the teacher's main concern should not be only over difficulties of grammar or pronunciation or vocabulary but over language skills. In fact students' needs are in speaking and listening not grammar.

2. *Teaching grammar stages*

It is obvious that students need to communicate in English, so if they are taught a grammar's lesson, then they (teachers and students) are moving away from the communicative approach and therefore of the teaching of the four skills previously mentioned. Why? Because a lesson to teach grammar should,

for the teachers and students, follow some stages to achieve the understanding of this one.

The teaching of grammar stages (Celce-Murcia & Hilles, 1988).

- Presentation stage: in which we introduce the grammar structure, either inductively or deductively. There are a variety of techniques and resources that can be used during this step. Selection should be made according to the teacher strengths, student preferences and the nature of the structure.
- Focused practice stage, in which the learner manipulates the structure in question while all other variables are held constant. The purpose of this step is to allow the learner to gain control of the form without the added pressure and distraction of trying to use the form of communication.

The teacher should not proceed to the next phase until most students have mastered at least the form of the structured.

- Communicative practice stage, in which the learner engages in communicative activities to practice the structure being learned. According to Marrow & Johnson (1981) a communicative task incorporates the actual processes of communication, the more of these features an exercise incorporates, the more communicative it is. The processes of communication are:

- Information gap. In the course of doing the activity, one participant should be in a position to tell one or more other people something that the others do not yet know

- Choice. The speaker must have some role in deciding exactly what he will say and how he will say it. (Options can be presented in advance by the teacher) this also means that there should be some certainty in the mind of the listener(s) about what the speaker will say next.

- Feedback. What the speaker says to the person(s) he is communicating with depends not only on what the other person(s) says, but also on what the speaker wants to accomplish via the conversation.

- Teacher feedback and correction. Although this is usually considered a final step, it must take place throughout the lesson. We also feel that a teacher's correction strategy should probably change according to the phase of the lesson. For example, during the second part of the lesson, correction should be predominantly straightforward and immediate. During the third part, however, communication should not be interrupted. Instead, the teacher should take note of errors and deal with them after the communicative exercises. There is one element of correction, however, that we feel should remain constant, regardless of when correction is made, teacher feedback should always attempt to engage the student cognitively rather than to simply point out the error and provide the appropriate target form. In any case the

match in language factors, techniques, and resources will be used in each part of the lesson.

These four stages mentioned do not mean that teachers should teach grammar in Junior High School. This, on the other hand, is an argument in favor of not having to teach isolated lessons of grammar, without considering the communicative approach in Junior High School.

3. *Examples in the Cuban context*

According to the authors experiences and testimony of some students and teachers who are teaching in Junior High school, it is frequently seen a teacher teaching a grammar lesson, it means teaching the structure of a determined grammatical tense.

To teach grammar in Junior High School in Cuba, a context should be created by teachers, where students feel the necessity to communicate, which also gives the teacher the possibility to bring the diagnosis up to date and identifying weakness in the students as well as their strength.

English language in Junior High School is taught by means of communicative approach so, it means that there is no a lesson to teach just grammar therefore, when presenting a new content it is taking into account communicative approach and grammar rules should be inducted by students although it would be explained in sometime of the unit.

In presentation stage controlled input of new language through grammar need to be carefully taught because at this time grammar rules are not still explained and it is recommended to tell the students some examples of the rule demanded according to the context.

In focused Practice Stage and Communicative Practice Stage where drills are very important to be developed by students as well as role plays, games and information gaps activities, it is obvious that students must master grammar rules because if they do not, they are not able to communicate in the English language, what it becomes again in another possibility for teachers to bring the diagnosis up to date.

As linguistics studies are not taught in Junior High School, just some elements of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar, there is a question that a lot of teachers would give a different answer: Should students at that level be taught grammar? The answer is yes, because if students do not know grammar, they probably would have serious problems to communicate, but teachers should teach grammar integrated with the communicative functions he or she is teaching and not take a lesson to teach "pure grammar". How to teach grammar? Here we can see an example:

To teach simple past tense, students do not need to be explained the structure as such, you may support your lesson in the previous knowledge the students have telling the class they are going to be talking about some activities they

usually do. If we take into account they have already studied that content before, they are going to be able to say some activities they usually do as presented in the following example.

- Teacher: what do you usually do on vacation?
- Student 1: I watch TV at nights, I usually play games in my tablet and my parents and I always go to the beach. (Mentioning a very well-known beach by students)
- Teacher: did you go to the beach yesterday?

Maybe the student does not know how to answer that question but he/she can understand the words “go”, “beach” and the word yesterday is easy to illustrate by means of the date, therefore the student will know they are talking about activities they did in the past. This procedure should be repeated many times using some other verbs. If the student answers the question saying “yes, I do” just tell him or her that he is being asked with “did” so he or she has to answer with “did”.

It is evidently senseless for the teacher to try to teach children about grammar, teachers wouldn't underestimate children's learning skills or intelligence. The knowledge of language is not only communicative activity, in the teaching learning process of language; grammar is not just the teaching of abstract rules or structures, it means that language is not acquired by means of communicative activities if we agree that to communicate properly in any language we, of course, need to know the grammatical structure (Rutherford, 2014).

Students do not need to know what a definite and indefinite article is, not yet, but they need to know how to use them. Therefore you may teach them by means of “jobs” saying you are a teacher, his or her father is a/an lawyer/architect and given them some other examples (Shintani, Ellis & Suzuki, 2014). The enhancement of the English lessons in Junior High School with the linguistic elements that students should know would be sustained in: A good mastering of the knowledge of the English language in the teaching learning process (based on communicative approach, taking into account: pronunciation, lexis and grammar).

The conception of the English lesson should be as a process, integrating the communicative competence with the linguistic elements (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). English lesson should be focus in communicative approach without forgetting the linguistic elements.

It is evident there is a “hole” in the theory referred to the teaching-learning of foreign languages for teachers to be that limited the teaching of those linguistic elements as pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Even though students know all of them they do not know how to teach them in a lesson where the most important aspect is the communicative competence. Therefore it is

obvious the necessities of transforming the way teachers are teaching grammar in Junior High School.

The methodological procedure to teach grammar in English in the educational system in Junior High School constitutes a tool to put into practice some of the different stages by teachers with the purpose of satisfying the necessities to eliminate some difficulties present in the students when they are speaking English. It means, to get as a main goal, the communicative competence with good vocabulary, good pronunciation and mastering the grammatical rules.

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching English as a second language is a complex process. When it is done by means of effectively methods and procedures in which students learn it easily and fast. Speaking English most of the time in a lesson and encouraging students to imitate, becoming them active speaker of the language and showing them the language system appropriately in any circumstances is suggested. Students at Junior High Schools should learn English in the same way a child learns his mother tongue. Therefore “pure grammar” should not be taught but it does not mean the teacher should not correct grammatical accuracy at some stage. Some mistakes in the use of correct grammar will, in some occasions, lead to incomprehension or misunderstanding that is only the aim of the language should be used in class. So the ability of speaking should be taught by connecting it with actions, objects, mime, gestures, and situations and teach grammar only inductively, that is, grammar rules should not be taught to the learners.

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