

English Language Teachers' Preferences in Presenting Target Language Grammar

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Abstract

This article reports the findings of a quantitative study conducted among English language teachers at secondary schools. In an attempt to explore the preferences of grammar presentations of the teachers, a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered to 63 participants who actively involved in the observation. The research instrument included the statements that aimed at identifying the perceptions of teachers in presenting target language grammar. The participants (n=63) were comprised of prospective English language teachers who were supposed to make an observation at secondary schools for four hours a week throughout the 2012-2013 academic year. The data collected from the research was analyzed using SPSS16 programme. Results showed that English teachers at secondary schools in Turkey most frequently preferred to use the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Total Physical Response (TPR) techniques while presenting target language grammar.

Key words: Grammar, method, approach, teaching, foreign language,

Introduction

In the field of foreign language teaching, presenting grammar has always remained a controversial issue for both practitioners and researchers. As Barnard & Scampton (2008) claimed that some attention to grammatical form is useful, perhaps necessary, but many issues related to the teaching of grammar still need further research, especially into the key social factors that are an inescapable element of classroom learning. Writing in the same context Rivers (1991) attests that grammar is the framework within which the language is operating. That is to say, grammar exists in languages and will be learned or acquired in a way (Çakır, 2005. p.43). To define this inevitable fact existing in foreign language learning, it can said that grammar is a set of rules that define how words are combined or changed to form acceptable units of meaning within a language (as cited in Chang, 2011). According to Chang (2011), guaranteeing the accuracy of the sentences mainly depends on the learner's mastery of grammar, which is an indispensable part of a language. Chang (2011) adds that grammar is so important that the teachers and students have always attached great importance to teaching

and learning of it. Simply put, to be able to teach and learn it appropriately has become the primary concern for both English teachers and researchers.

Over centuries many methods and approaches have been offered to teaching second and foreign language starting with Grammar Translation Method (GTM) which left people with a tendency to teach the grammar of the target language and to focus on teaching the rules explicitly. Many different methods coming after GTM handled grammar teaching differently, some of them suggested teaching grammatical rules in meaningful contexts (Communicative Language Teaching-CLT) while others advocated the use of dialogues to underline the grammatical structures (Audio Lingual Method- ALM) and even some others offered to use visual aids and demonstrations to teach grammar (Direct Method-DM). Not all the methods have placed the same emphasis on grammar because the recent experiments and researches have directed people to the ways in which they can use language communicatively; in other words, learning the language rather than learning about the language (Harmer, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Ellis, 2006; Spada, 2007).

In Turkey, the traditional approach to grammar teaching has been Grammar Translation Method; in which the grammatical rules are given in isolation and students are expected to memorize all the rules. Communication has been left aside; the reasons for this might stem from (a) Turkey being geographically far away from the countries in which English is the native language, (b) finding few chances to speak the target language in Turkey, and (c) the difficulty to go to the native countries to practice. None of these reasons are barriers for communicating in the target language any more thanks to the technological innovations; therefore the language policy of Turkey has shifted from being grammar centered teaching to the Communicative Oriented Curriculum (COC) in 1997 (Kırkgöz, 2008). The grammar based English course books have been replaced with more contextual ones recently; in which grammar is intended to teach implicitly and communicative skills are underlined through meaningful input.

This shifting has been neither easy for the students nor for the teachers. One reason is that teachers have been used to give the grammatical rules in isolation in general and the other reason is that Turkish teachers of English tend to display some common features through their teaching culture, which tends to be mainly transmission oriented (Kırkgöz, 2008). This tendency has affected the students' way of learning; they have been used to see all the grammatical rules on the board and to memorize them and in this way, they have felt more secure. But now, teachers are expected to change their methods of teaching from which grammatical rules are given explicitly (GTM) to the methods in which the grammar is taught implicitly (ALM), Direct Method (DM), Total Physical Response (TPR), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)). In this respect, particularly COC puts much emphasis on CLT.

Considering the facts given above, this study aimed to figure out the grammar instruction preferences of the teachers of English at secondary schools in Turkey. The study has also intended to present to what extent current grammar teaching methods and techniques have been adopted by the teachers of English in question to fulfill the task of teaching target language grammar. To this end, five of the specifically identified methods of foreign language teaching (GTM, DM, ALM, TPR and CLT) have been questioned throughout the research.

Literature Review

What is grammar?

Grammar is defined as the rules of a language for combining words. However, as Swan (2010) suggests, grammar is far beyond from being just sentence-building. Furthermore, the definition gives no information about the functions of such rules. As for the other definitions, Richards and Schmidt (2002) defined grammar as a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in a language. According to Widdowson (1990), "...grammar is not a constraining imposition but a liberating force: it frees us from a dependency on context and a purely lexical categorization of reality," (as cited in Cullen, 2008, p. 221). That is, if a learner does not know grammar, he will have to rely on lexis, gestures, intonation or other nonverbal features to express his or her meanings. Thus, in order for the communication to exist, people have to know language and its rules, which we call "grammar".

Historical Background of Grammar Teaching

Grammar teaching has an irreplaceable place in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because of the fact that without a good command of grammar learners can use the language in a limited way; they may not achieve to fully express their intentions or comprehend the meanings of messages in a communication. It has been witnessed that throughout the history, the attention given to grammar teaching has differed from time to time.

In the beginnings of the twentieth century, grammar teaching was regarded so crucial that other aspects of language were ignored as it was thought that it was necessary to know the grammatical rules in order to communicate appropriately. This notion was challenged in 1970s and it was argued that knowledge of the grammatical system of the language was one of the many components which underlay the notion of communicative competence (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Thus, in order to use a language competently, it is not sufficient for a learner only to know the grammar rules as s/he should also know how the rules are used in real communication. During this period, grammar teaching began to lose its popularity and even abandoned in some cases.

Recently, grammar teaching has flourished again in language curriculum by receiving considerable attention. It is regarded as a very crucial part of language which should not be overlooked by the practitioners. Today, it can easily be asserted as true that the necessity of teaching grammar is not questioned; instead, issues such as the most effective ways and different techniques of teaching grammar or the selection of grammar items have become central questions.

The Place of Grammar in ELT Methods

Many arguments about the best way of teaching grammar have been held and many different methods have been discovered since it was realized that grammar teaching is necessary. The significant ones to note are Grammar Translation Method (GTM), Direct Method (DM), Audio Lingual Method (ALM), Silent Way (SW), Desuggestopedia, Total Physical Response (TPR), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Task-Based Learning (TBL) and so on. In addition to these, teachers can include different techniques from different methods, by this way s/he has an eclectic method for teaching. As five of the methods mentioned above are the ones to be handled for the scope of the research, it would be better to give a brief information about them.

Grammar Translation Method is a traditional method which was used for teaching classical languages like Latin or Greek. "Grammar translation is a way of studying a language that approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and tasks into and out of the target language," (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p.5). The focus is given on rote memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary, learning syntactic structures and translation of literary texts (Thanasoulas, 2000). In this method, grammar is taught deductively and a syllabus is followed for teaching grammar in an organized way. However, as the main focus is on learning the grammatical rules, memorizing vocabularies and translation of texts, it neglects learners' needs for communication. Accordingly, pronunciation receives almost no attention (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 20).

Direct Method became popular when GTM which was not effective in promoting students to use the language communicatively. "Direct Method receives its name from the fact that meaning is to be conveyed directly in the target language through the use of demonstration and visual aids, with no recourse to the students' native language" (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). The very basic principle of this method is that no translation is allowed and there is a direct association between forms and meanings. Grammar is taught inductively by means of demonstration, objects and pictures. Correct pronunciation is also emphasized here as opposed to GTM.

In Audio-lingual Method, which is also known as the Army Method or Michigan Method, speech is viewed as more basic criteria than the written form and that is why it intends to teach the language and not only the rules of the language (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p.55). Grammar is introduced with the use of dialogues which students imitate and repeat. Thus, students induce grammar from the examples and explicit instruction is avoided. Techniques such as dialogue memorization, repetition, backward build-up, chain, substitution, single/multiple slot substitution drills are mainly used. Students are imitators of the teacher and try to respond to the teacher's directions as accurately as possible.

Total Physical Response also favors stress-free environment where there is no force to produce the target language until learners feel that they are ready. The primary focus in TPR is oral communicative which can be achieved through listening and speaking respectively. Thus, listening is also important and majority of class time in total physical response is spent on listening comprehension. Grammar is also included in TPR; the lessons are organized particularly around the verb and commands. The aim is not to teach the target language grammar explicitly, but induce it subconsciously. Everything to be learned needs to be meaningful, which distinguishes TPR from other grammar-based methods such as grammar-translation. In this sense, comprehensible input, as Krashen (1981) purports, needs to be the key factor for teachers to keep learning meaningful.

Lastly, Communicative Language Teaching is based on the notion that experience is the best of all schools (Gomes, 2011) and supports learning by doing. CLT emphasizes practical language usage instead of only practicing language skills. In CLT, functions are more important than the structures as the main aim is to achieve communicative competence. Apart from functions, vocabulary is considered as paramount factor that should be dealt with. According to Canale and Swain (1980) communicative competence is made up of four major strands: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Scarcella and Oxford (1992) regards grammatical competence as an umbrella concept that includes increasing expertise in grammar (morphology, syntax), vocabulary, and mechanics (cited in Ma, 2009). In order to convey meaning, EFL learners must have the knowledge of words and sentences; that is, they must understand how words are segmented into various sounds, and how sentences are stressed in particular ways. Thus, grammatical competence enables speakers to use and understand English language structures accurately and unhesitatingly, which contributes to their fluency (Ma, 2009; Özsevik, 2010). Therefore, we understand that although it does not apparently focus on teaching the target language structure, CLT puts emphasis on grammar learning. In this method, grammar is taught by following an inductive approach because the grammar and vocabulary items to learn are expected to be acquired from such contexts (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, chap. 9). Unlike Grammar Translation Method, the language items are learnt in a natural process

practicing the activities based on four skills. As cited in Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011), "students work on all the four skills from the beginning," (p. 125).

Approaches to Grammar Teaching

Some approaches are also used to teach grammar; one of them is deductive approach and the other is inductive approach. Deductive approach is a way of teaching which derives from deductive reasoning and goes from general to specific. In deductive approach, rules, patterns, principles are presented first and these are followed by examples. According to Paradowski (2009), in this approach learners are provided with ready-made grammar rules and a detail of the formation of the new structure, what are its components and in which contexts it can be used. Deductive approach is also known as rule-driven teaching. For example, the traditional Grammar Translation Method purely uses the deductive approach (Gollin, 1998, p. 88). In order to teach the target language grammar properly, the foreign language teacher should be competent in both learners' mother tongue and the target language. Some possible activities in deductive approach are rule-explanation, translation, doing worksheet and self-study grammar.

Inductive approach, on the other hand, is a way of teaching grammar implicitly without stating the grammar rules directly to the students. In inductive approach, lesson starts with examples or situations which contextualize the language items to be learnt. Then, students discover and infer the rules from the context. It can also be called as a "rule discovery" technique where students are not merely provided with ready-made grammar rules (Paradowski, 2009). Inductive approach is often correlated with Direct Method and Natural Approach in English teaching. In both methods, grammar is presented in such a way that the learners experience it.

Studies that have tried to find out which approach is better to grammar teaching, have had similar results in favor of inductive approach. In a study, (Haigh, Herron, & Cole, 2007) the effectiveness of deductive and guided inductive approaches for teaching grammar in college French classrooms was investigated and the results showed that the guided inductive instructional approach to teach grammar proved to be more efficient according to the post tests. In another study, Mohamad (1997) aimed to examine the effectiveness of an inductive approach as compared to a deductive approach in teaching subject-verb agreement rules with ITM Terengganu learners. The investigation revealed that the learners who were exposed to the inductive instruction performed better than or as well as those who were under the deductive condition after the instructions. Authors of one another research study (Henry, Evelyn & Terence, 2011) investigating the effectiveness of adopting an inductive approach to the teaching of English grammar with six Secondary students reported that brighter students benefited more from the inductive approach than the average or weaker students. Through

the lights of these studies and the literature, the aim of this study is to reveal the way of teaching grammar at secondary schools of Turkey. Especially, we intend to find out which methods (GTM, DM, ALM, TPR, and CLT) and approaches (deductive / inductive) are frequently used. The teachers to be observed were chosen among the ones working at secondary schools considering the fact that grammar teaching should be delayed until learners have acquired necessary linguistic input and become linguistically and lexically competent enough to elicit the target language grammar when presented explicitly (Ellis, 2006).

Methodology

Purpose

The study reported here aims to investigate the various methods and approaches the EFL teachers make use of in public secondary schools in Turkey. Hereby, the research questions are;

- 1-Which methods and approaches are frequently used by EFL teachers to present grammar?
- 2-Have they adopted more recent methods in accordance with the new communicative oriented curriculum introduced in Turkey?

Context / Participants

Grammar teaching is included in various levels of education in many parts of the world in ESL and EFL contexts; therefore the studies conducted in investigation of grammar teaching are generally scattered to all levels. However; the main purpose of this study was to investigate the methods and approaches used in teaching grammar in public secondary schools in Turkey where grammar teaching is given more importance and considered to be more crucial during language learning to enhance accuracy. To achieve this purpose, the EFL teachers in secondary level were observed by the students from university level. These students were fourth grade ELT students who continuously went to the public schools to observe the teachers of English and the class to have an understanding of how the class management and teaching process went in the classes. The participants attended the observation task four hours a week, which can be admitted enough to observe someone's approach to teach. The other point that needs to be stated is that within the scope of the study the teachers were informed about the procedure.

Measurement

More or less, deductively or inductively, most of the EFL teachers teach grammar, therefore, it is the independent variable in this study. The dependent variables are methods and approaches that the teachers make use of in their classes while teaching grammar. In the previous studies, the efficacy of one method over the other is frequently searched through conducted experiments generally on the students. In this study, the attention was put on the teachers' preferences in grammar teaching because it would clarify how the teachers of English can go with the recent curriculum and the methods in accordance with this curriculum.

The research instrument

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, which was developed and piloted by the researchers, was devised to obtain the objective results to the study. It comprises fifteen declarative statements which were specifically prepared in accordance with the principles of particular methods and approaches in grammar teaching. The 5-point Likert scale included the options of (1) Never, (2) Sometimes, (3) Often, (4) Usually, and (5) Always. 63 students from English Language Teaching (ELT) department of Erciyes University took part in the study voluntarily. The students were kindly asked to indicate degree of frequency of the each statement that the teachers used in their classrooms.

Data Analysis Method

Descriptive analysis was determined to analyze the data taken from the questionnaires considering the fact that it would give more detailed information by means of the responses of students to scaled statements. SPSS predictive analytics software was used to analyze the data taken from the questionnaires. Mean (X) and standard deviation (SD) of each item was taken and analyzed to find out which methods' and approaches' principles are frequently used to teach grammar at secondary schools in Turkey.

Limitation of the study

The present study is limited to;

- EFL teachers teaching English in Kayseri, which is a large city in central Anatolia Region in Turkey.
- The use of questionnaire as the research instrument.

However, the observations are valuable in themselves, indicating the proportions of the adopted methods and approaches in grammar teaching by EFL teachers.

Results

This section presents the results of investigating the various methods and approaches that the EFL teachers used to teach grammar at secondary schools of Turkey. In total, sixty three questionnaires were collected from sixty three different students of ELT department. Fifteen different statements of the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS program according to descriptive statistics. The standard deviations and means of the each statement are shown in tables below. The statements are divided into groups according to the methods and approaches in order to make a clear distinction among them. The first three questions are about GTM and 5th and 9th questions are about DM, 6th and 7th questions are about ALM, 8, 10 and 11th questions are about TPR and 12, 13 and 14th questions are about CLT. There are two questions which ask if the teachers use deductive or inductive approaches in grammar teaching; question 4 asks deductive approach and question 15 asks for inductive approach.

Table 1. Responses to the statements on Grammar Translation Method

	Statements	N	X	SD
1.	The teacher uses L1 (Turkish) while teaching grammar.	63	3,82	1,05
2.	The teacher translates the sentences into L1 to explain the grammatical structures of the examples.	63	3,68	1,10
3.	The teacher makes the students translate the sentences into Turkish to practice grammar.	63	3,46	1,24

GTM is the most frequently used method by the observed EFL teachers. That may be result from (1) sharing the same mother tongue with the students and its being easy to explain the rules in their own language. It may be caused (2) by the effect of the way the teachers were taught English through their learning process. The reason also may be (3) the practicality of GTM for large classes with more than 30 students, which are quite common in secondary schools in Turkey.

Table 2. Responses to the statements on Direct Method

	Statements	N	X	SD
5.	The teacher uses the techniques of, mime, gesture, demonstration and visual aids to practice grammar.	63	2,76	1,32
9.	The teacher makes use of dictation.	63	2,60	,99

The results indicate that Direct Method is the second least used method to teach grammar by the teachers in our study. This may be resulted from the short time available for the classes when we consider the curriculum to be covered in one semester. Since the techniques existing in DM require teachers to use the target language as much as possible, most of the teachers avoid using the principles of this method. The other aspect of this method is that direct presentation of target grammar is not permitted.

Table 3. Responses to the statements on Audio Lingual Method

	Statements	N	X	SD
6.	The teacher makes students repeat the dialogues stressing on the underlying grammatical structure.	63	2,36	,93
7.	The teacher uses repetitive drills to ensure automaticity in using the grammatical structures.	63	2,22	,97

As the figures in the table above prove that some of the basic teaching techniques pertaining to ALM techniques such as repetition, drills, and dialogue memorization are not adopted very much by the participants to present and practice the target language grammar.

Table 4. Responses to the statements on TPR

	Statements	N	X	SD
8.	The teacher ignores pronunciation errors while teaching grammar.	63	2,65	1,28
10.	The teacher provides a bright and cheerful classroom environment before teaching grammar to eliminate the barriers to learning.	63	2,44	1,42
11.	The teacher commands and asks students to act what s/he commands to teach new structures.	63	2,53	1,10

TPR is the second most preferred method by the observed teachers. Against the more traditional way of teaching grammar (GTM), some of the teachers who consist of a big majority of the teacher observed have started to use more recent methods such as TPR.

Table 5. Responses to the statements on Communicative Language Teaching

	Statements	N	X	SD
12.	The teacher uses meaningful contexts to teach grammar instead of giving the rules in isolation.	63	2,46	1,26
13.	The teacher uses authentic materials, real objects, to teach grammar.	63	1,79	1,08
14.	The teacher emphasizes the authentic language use in the cultural context of the target language (everyday English).	63	2,06	1,11

CLT is included in grammar teaching by nearly half of the teachers observed however; it is not the most frequently used one as it may not be adapted and understood clearly by the EFL teachers in Turkey. It may also be caused by depending on the coursebooks which are provided by the government for all the students and teachers. The teacher may find them enough to cover the grammar subjects.

Tale 6. Responses to the statements on deductive and inductive presentations

	Statements	N	X	SD
4.	The teacher gives the grammatical rules deductively.	63	3,42	1,32
15.	The teacher encourages students to figure out the rules themselves (eliciting the rule) implicitly.	63	2,09	,96

The aim of the statements 4 and 15 was to find out if the teachers presented the target language rules deductively or inductively. Similar to the results in Table 1, teachers generally prefer to teach target language deductively. It is apparent that they are not so willing to spend time on encouraging learners to elicit the rules themselves out of the activities that they are provided.

According to the results shown in the tables above, it can be concluded that of all the methods GTM is the most frequently adopted method in grammar teaching at secondary schools in Turkey. The data obtained from the questionnaire also revealed that the teachers preferred TPR activities while introducing the target language grammar in the classroom. CLT is following TPR and there is a slight difference between these two methods in frequency of use. According to the results we can conclude that, the teachers make use of DM's principles more in teaching grammar rather than ALM's which is the least frequently used method in grammar teaching at secondary schools. Additionally, the questions which ask for the deductive and inductive approach usage tell us that deductive approach is more widely used by the observed teachers. Still the usage of inductive approach is not too little.

Discussion

With the major curriculum innovation project COC, CLT to teaching English was introduced in 1997 (Kırkgöz, 2008) and it was expected that grammar teaching has been implemented through this method and inductively, in accordance with this method. By means of this project, it was especially aimed to teach English to young learners; hence, to give up traditional methods such as GTM which might be more suitable for adult learners rather than young learners. However, the results of our study show us that neither CLT nor inductive approach is the most frequent method and approach among the rest. On the contrary, despite much effort, it is sad to express that GTM and deductive approach are two most commonly favored approach and technique by foreign language teachers working at secondary schools.

The results paint a picture of the approaches and methods to grammar teaching taken in EFL classes at secondary level which may be encouraging to those who advocate GTM for grammar teaching but as this study was carried out in one location in Turkey and as it is a small-scale study, generalizing the findings to include all other schools in Turkey may not be possible. However, much remains to be investigated. Therefore, further research can be

directed towards increasing the number of analyses or case studies across the nation in order to see if these results are valid in the other parts of the country. In particular, further activity and evaluation is required to test the findings with larger groups of teachers.

Conclusion

To conclude, it would be better to clarify the issue that further research would do well to investigate the reasons why the teachers at secondary schools prefer some specific methods over others. Some certain factors affecting their preferences such as the number of the students in classes, level of the students in the classroom, duration of the lessons, work load of the teachers and the curriculum need to be evaluated. Furthermore, the efficacy and appropriateness of these methods for foreign language teaching policy of Turkey should be elaborated. One another study would be better if workshops are arranged to train some teachers according to the principles of foreign language policy and COC and then compare the untrained to the trained teachers to see if this situation stems from not getting enough orientation in implementing this innovative curriculum in different strands of language teaching, including grammar teaching.

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