

Importance of Grammar in ESP

O. Syvak

Zhytomyr State Technological University, Zhytomyr, Ukraine
Corresponding author. E-mail: olena_syvak@ukr.net

Paper received 27.10.18; Accepted for publication 05.10.18.

<https://doi.org/10.31174/SEND-Ph2018-183VI54-13>

Abstract. This article examines whether grammar is really vital while teaching ESP. At least two aspects have been taken into consideration: first, students' perception of grammar, i.e., most of them associate grammar with long and boring exercises practicing English tenses, sets of rules as well as exceptions to the rules; the second one refers to communication that is seen as the application of grammatical rules in oral and written practices. The author supposes that efficient communication cannot take place without the correct usage of grammar. Grammar knowledge plays important roles in cultivating grammar competence, especially for ESP learning. Teachers should support ESP students to use effective learning strategies that transform them into autonomous learners who are able to take control and master the language.

Keywords: *ESP, grammar, learning strategies, Zhytomyr State Technological University.*

Introduction. The ever-growing demand facing professional communicators in the 21st century as well as the fast changing business environment set new challenges to language learners and teachers. Competitive companies attempt to recruit employees who have excellent linguistic competence coupled with nonlinguistic competences and skills. The ability to perform the grammar knowledge in the language skills, such as reading, speaking, listening and writing, is necessary in ESP teaching. That is why grammar in ESP class is still essential element. Teaching grammar is not easy especially in ESP class in which class hours are limited. Grammar learning strategies should be highlighted in ESP learning, which is usually paid little attention by ESP teachers and learners. This study is expected to give ESP teachers and learners some useful suggestions. ESP lecturer should find not only effective but also efficient teaching strategies to teach grammar.

Review of publications on the subject. There have been different opinions and attitudes concerning the importance and role of grammar in the learning-teaching process. The teaching of grammar has always been controversial, especially under the influence of the communicative approach [1; 6]. Some researchers [5; 15] feel that the grammar of the language does not necessarily help learners to use the language. However, Tarone [12] and Rutherford [10] argue that grammar should be taught, because without some understanding of grammar students would not be able to communicate efficiently in English. The suggestion being made, then, is that teachers must somehow teach the grammar of the language, for this is central to language use.

Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to highlight the role of grammar in ESP classes as well as to present various techniques which can be employed by material designers to present grammar to students in the most acceptable and interesting manner in ESP classes.

Methods of research are determined by the aim of this article. General scientific methods such as analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, and generalization are employed to provide a systematic review of the literature and to determine the types of intentions that compose the speaker's general intention.

Discussion. English plays a significant role in the contemporary modern life. It is already accepted by everyone that English is the most powerful source for technical progress and development. Students of technical universities should master all English skills for their professional communication. Efficient professional communication cannot take place without correct usage of grammar. Ignoring

grammar rules may lead to misunderstandings or even cause scientific errors. ESP students should be encouraged and motivated to study grammar.

ESP courses are meant to prepare specialists who are able to use the English language as the main professional means of communication in their future jobs and in real-life situations.

English teachers at Zhytomyr State Technological University (ZSTU) are being trained in using modern methods of English teaching. The teachers at Zhytomyr State Technological University (ZSTU) design curricula based on the students' needs and interests.

ZSTU has six faculties, Faculty of Information and Computer Technologies, Faculty of Computer-Integrated Technologies, Mechatronics and Robotics, Faculty of Economics and Management, The Faculty of Mining and Ecology, Faculty of Accounting and Finance, Faculty of Public Administration and Law. Students enrolled at ZSTU can take an English course, that is either general or ESP courses. From my teaching experience I can say that students face some difficulties while using grammar. The limited number of English classes at ZSTU, the students' insufficient specialized knowledge and their low English proficiency are some of the problems the ESP teachers are confronted with.

English for specific purposes course (ESP) in ZSTU includes technical English, scientific English, English for: Accounting and Taxation; Finance, Banking and Insurance; Public Management and Administration; International Economic Relations; Economics; Management; Entrepreneurship, Trade and Stock Exchange Activities; Tourism; Software Engineering; Computer Engineering; Biomedical Engineering; Telecommunications and Radio Engineering; Applied Mechanics; Industrial Machinery Engineering; Transport Technologies; Ecology and Mining.

All faculties in ZSTU require their students to study a foreign language. Our students have foreign languages in the curricula as an obligatory discipline for three hours per week in the first year. Most of the students have studied English in high school for several years and they want to continue their studies. Unfortunately many ESP students are low-level students, with little and not satisfactory experience in their second language. Consequently, they encounter difficulties in expressing their ideas during the English classes.

Mastery of the specialized vocabulary and the ability to naturally use it in almost any context go hand in hand with solid knowledge of grammar. Grammar teaching cannot be neglected. It is a task for ESP lecturer to apply teaching strategies which are interesting, motivating and engaging.

The ESP teachers' main goal is to make their students efficient users of the English language. We, as teachers should avoid extreme language teaching methods and adopt combined methods in teaching grammar as part of the language itself. Grammar should be "a master skill" that facilitates competence in all skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing [11, p. 2].

Research on grammar teaching indicates that the following strategies can be taught (table 1).

Vicenta [13] has made a study on grammar learning through the macro-grammar strategy training. It consists of metacognitive and cognitive strategies which including a rule, filling in the blanks with the right tenses, correcting mistakes, translating, rewriting, and writing. In students apply when carrying out the designed activities: matching, reading and answering questions, the metacognitive strategies, selective attention, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation

are selected; in the cognitive strategies, elaboration, inference, deduction, repetition, translation, and transfer are selected.

Table 1. Grammar teaching strategies in ESP

| <i>Grammar teaching strategies</i> | | <i>Authors</i> |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Metacognitive Strategies | Selected Attention, Planning, Self-management, Monitoring and Evaluation | Weinstein, 1986; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1989 |
| Cognitive Strategies | Organisation, Inferencing, Summarising, Deduction, Transfer and Elaboration | |
| Socioaffective Strategies | Cooperation, Question for Clarification and Self-talk | |

The cognitive strategies or cognitive approach to learning and teaching grammar emphasised that language learning involved active mental processes, that it was not just a process of habit formation (Table 2).

Table 2. Cognitive approach to learning and teaching grammar

| <i>Cognitive Approach to Grammar Learning</i> | <i>Explanation</i> |
|---|--|
| Deductive learning (explicit): – the Grammar Translation Method | learners are taught rules and given specific information about a language; they then apply these rules when they use language |
| Inductive learning (implicit): – Direct Method; – Communicative Approach; – Counseling Learning) | learners are not taught grammatical or other types of rules directly but are left to discover or induce rules from their experience of using the language; language teaching methods that emphasize the use of the language rather than presentation of information about the language |

Cognitive approaches are suggested applying to teaching ESP grammar. One is the deductive approach or explicitly teaching grammar; teachers should teach ESP learners rules and give them specific information about ESP, then have them then apply these rules when they use ESP. The other is the inductive approach or implicitly teaching grammar; teachers leave ESP learners discovering grammatical rules from their experience of using ESP.

The role of grammar should arouse our attention; the necessary trend for the development of grammar instruction is the integration of both implicit and explicit grammar instruction.

Vicenta's [13] general conclusion is that students, specially fair and poor learners, following the grammar strategy instruction, can learn grammatical structures better and become a little more autonomous than the students who do not follow the instruction.

O'Malley and Chamot [7 p. 128, 206] discuss the connection between grammar and strategies by enumerating the strategies that successful learners would use to learn grammar such as deduction, induction, translation, and transfer. Thus, they point out that more associating strategy use with learning grammar need to be conducted.

Ellis [3] pointed out that successful learners (1) attend to language form, (2) also concern meaning or communication, (3) are actively involved in language learning, (4) are aware of the learning process, and (5) are more flexible to use strategies in accordance with task requirements. Most of the researchers agree to these five differences.

Strategies directly affect language acquisition [7, p. 196], and consequently grammar acquisition; and on the other hand, the lack of grammatical knowledge may affect the effectiveness of a strategy [2, p. 12] and consequently language acquisition [13]. Cohen's [2, p. 123, 221] study shows the connection between grammar and learning strategies by stating that it is likely that the use of strategies contributes to more grammatically accurate speech, and by claiming that determining what grammatical features are needed is one of the steps followed by learners when talking.

If such strategies are taught effectively to students, the frustration often associated with grammar teaching can be reduced.

Teachers can apply some strategies to ESP teaching and combine them with new technologies. Combining grammar and technology, though it may not sound like two things that go together at first, is transforming grammar instruction to become more exciting, easier, more effective, and fun. For example, at our classes We integrate technology into grammar.

We believe using technology to further the education of grammar is a positive step in the right direction. Using technology to teach grammar will enhance the instructional and learning process, rather than detracting from it. Currently, there are any number of ways to use today's technology in the course of instruction.

Teaching grammar using technologies at ESP classes is very useful and exciting. Students practice grammar with great pleasure. Hear some examples of how technology and grammar go together (Table 3).

Students may choose several suitable apps they like and practice grammar during the class as well as at home.

Also there are some websites for teaching grammar. They are as follows: Grammar Bytes (provides a glossary of common terms, fun interactive activities and exercises for students to test their grammar knowledge, instructional presentations and tons of tips on teaching grammar); Road to Grammar (provides lessons, quizzes, games free materials to use in class), Grammar Snack (provides short videos illustrating how grammar is being used in real life situations, conversation style explanations and interactive exercises) and others. These websites help students to improve their grammar knowledge and polish their writing skill. They offer grammar lessons, teaching materials, free downloadable worksheets and presentations for teaching grammar at ESP classes.

Thus, teachers should be aware and emphasize that they could provide strategies-based instruction of grammar to ESP learners and find what kinds of strategies are useful and effective for ESP learners to learn grammar. As facilitators

of learning, teachers can help ESP learners select and become proficient in the use of effective grammar learning strategies, and as Jones et al. [4, p. 56] have indicated, teachers try to change ESP learners' attitudes about their own abilities by teaching them that their failures can be attributed to the lack of effective strategies rather than to the lack of ability or to laziness. Teachers guide ESP learners to have

proper and positive attitudes towards learning grammar, and instruct them to learn ESP grammar not only autonomously, but also cooperatively with the aim that learning grammar is better to facilitate their skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and accordingly, helps to improve ESP proficiency on the whole.

Table 3. Mobile Apps to practice grammar at ESP classes

| Mobile App | Characteristics | Price |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| Grammar Up | focuses on business-related content and uses graphs to help identify grammatical strengths and weaknesses | The basic version is free |
| English Grammar Book | offers a wide range of topics and immediate feedback via quiz scores | Free |
| LearnEnglish Grammar (UK edition) | offers 1000s of questions to help practise and reinforce English grammar skills, is suitable for learners of all levels and offers grammar activities at Beginner (CEFR level A1), Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced (CEFR level C2) | Free |
| English Grammar Test | offers tests and exercises, grammar units in every test, simple explanations, total score and progress analytics, chat, daily English lessons and exercises | Free |
| English Grammar Practice 2018 | offers test, explanations for all levels of learners | Free |
| English Grammar Handbook | offers explanations, tests, Vocabulary, tips, preparation for speaking, reading, writing, videos | Free |
| Learn English Grammar by Video | offers videos to teach English grammar in categories including the basics, tenses, verbs, adverbs, pronouns, conditionals, passive voice, clauses, nouns, adjectives, modal verbs, articles etc., access to special grammar games, business grammar, videos for kids learning and funny songs to remember the rules | Free |
| Learn English Grammar Rules - Grammar Test | cover all necessary English Grammar Rule that are used in international tests like IELTS, TOEFL, TOIEC, grammar lesson that prepared by expert from famous university like Cambridge | Free |

Conclusions. In general, grammar can basically play two parts in ESP learning: one is to enhance comprehensible input and the other is to monitor effective output. To enhance comprehensible input means that learners use grammar knowledge they have learnt to solve some puzzles in their ESP reading comprehension. When learners cannot understand the meaning of a complicated sentence, they need to analyze the sentence structure, the functions and interrelation of sentence components in order to comprehend the sentence. To monitor effective output means monitoring the oral or written expressions. Many learners have learnt ESP for several years, but they would make some mistakes in the oral or written expressions. It shows that they have not made the best of their mastered grammar knowledge to monitor and adjust the ESP learning output.

To sum up, in learning ESP, grammar can not only help ESP learners construct more accurate sentences but also help learners use various structures to express thoughts in ESP communication occasions. Therefore, grammar enables students to control the way they shape words into sentences and paragraphs. The teachers should keep a balance between grammar and communication, as there is no communication without correct grammar.

All things considered, ESP grammar learning strategy training can not only be beneficial to reaching the final goal of grammar learning, but also to develop ESP learners' learning ability that is vital for ESP learners' learning at the university as well as even lifelong learning.

REFERENCES

1. Chaudron, C. *Second Language Classrooms: Research on Teaching and Learning*. Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
2. Cohen, A. D. *Strategies in Learning and Using a Second Language*. Essex, U.K.: Longman, 1998.
3. Ellis, R. *Grammar teaching and grammar learning*. Proceedings of the 2nd conference on Second Language Acquisition in a Chinese Context. Hong Kong: Chinese University, 1992.
4. Jones, B.F., Palincsar, A.S., Ogle, D.S., & Carr, E.G. *Strategic teaching and learning: cognitive instruction in the content areas*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1987.
5. Harmer, J. *Teaching and learning grammar*. London: Longman, 1987.
6. Kilfoil, W. & Vander W Ali, C. *Learn 2 teach: a guide to the communication teaching of English as a second language at secondary level*. Pretoria: Academia, 1989.
7. O'malley, J., Chaniot, A U., Stewner-Manzanaraes, G., Kopper, L. & Russo, R. *Learning strategies used by beginning and intermediate ESL students*. *Language Learning*, 1985. 35: 21-46.
8. Popescu, A. V., Vida, M. I. C., Constantin, E. C. *Do ESP students need grammar?*, *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 2017. 7(2), P. 71-75.
9. Prokop, M. 1989. *Learning strategies for second language users*. London: Longman.
10. Rutherford, W.E. *Second language grammar: learning and teaching*. London: Longman, 1987.
11. Savage, K. L., Bitterlin, G. & Price, D. *Grammar Matters teaching grammar in adult ESL programs*. New York, NY: Cambridge University, 2010.
12. Tarone, E. & Yule, G. *Focus on the language learner: Approaches to identifying and meeting the needs of second language learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
13. Vicenta, V. G. *Grammar Learning Through Strategy Training: A Classroom Study on Learning Conditionals through Metacognitive and Cognitive Strategy Training*. Universitat de Valencia Servei de Publicacions, 2002.
14. Weinstein, C. & Mayer, R. *The teaching of learning strategies*. (In Wittrock, J. (ed.). *Second language teaching and learning*. London: Longman), 1986.
15. Willis, J. *Teaching English through English*. London: Longman, 1988.