

Grammar as a Tool for Text Analysis

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Introduction

The teaching and the learning of grammar constitutes a major subject for debate among educators and students. Most people, when they hear the word grammar, think of lots of useless, boring rules that they were forced to learn in school. It is precisely this attitude that has brought about the elimination of grammar in today's second language classes. In its place the experts in the business of selling second language courses have given us the communicative method in which they guarantee that the students, with little or no effort, will begin to speak the target language from day one. In this method the students are taught sets of phrases corresponding to common everyday situations and, under the direction of the teacher, are carefully guided through simulated conversations. The false sense of achievement is astounding. They have learned what to say but have no idea how or why. Reality hits when the students, after having paid for the course, have to defend themselves out in the real world. Studies have shown that teaching grammar doesn't bring any improvement in writing or reading¹⁵. Yet, other studies have proved that explicit knowledge of grammar is very helpful to students. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to consider the role grammar has and the benefits it brings to improve the students' reading skill.

Grammar as a tool

Grammar is an important tool in reading. It is a combination of the phonics and the holistic argument. We don't read words one

¹⁵ Weaver, 1996 argues that teaching grammar in isolation doesn't seem to have much effect on the students' writing or reading.

by one, meaning is contained not so much in individual words as in collections of words conveying broader or more specific ideas. Readers thus make sense of a sentence by breaking it into meaningful chunks and examining their interrelationships. Skilful writers focus not so much on individual words, as on creating and rephrasing larger phrases and clauses. We don't say:

I left my raincoat on the chair We say:

I left my raincoat on the chair.

When we break a sentence into portions, whether by pauses or intonation, we are actually doing grammatical analysis. We break the sentence into chunks to facilitate understanding. Interpreting Shakespeare is made easier once one considers his grammar. In *Mac Beth*, the reader should follow the verb "to do" and a common thread is immediately seen in the play. Another play *Hamlet* can be unlocked by its grammar too, follow the noun "ear" and its verb counterpart "hear" which rhymes and has a defining correlation and the reader is instantly privy to the skeleton of this play. Grammar gives the reader a base upon which further interpretation can be had. Grammar is the handle of literature. Consider the word "art" and "heart" in the "*Tempest*", or look at the grammar of "*Julius Cesar*" and how it is intricate in the art of persuasion. The grammar between *Romeo and Juliette* is a key to their words of love and eventual tragedy.¹⁶

The key to getting thought a poem is knowledge of grammar. The poet's unconventional use of grammar emphasizes the need of the later. He uses punctuation in a true sense of direction and guidance. If the reader heeds the grammar, then the reader will unlock the poem, if not, the reader will remain confused by it. Poetry is built on grammar by its very nature of brevity. The poet utilizes grammatical conventions to present which means the reader

¹⁶ Basset Patrick English Grammar Can We Offer Not to Teach It? Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1980) 64

must be aware of those conventions to interpret. The grammar of poetry is often called Literary terms which when examined are grammatical. A simile and a metaphor are the same except in their grammar. A simile uses a preposition "like" or "as" while a metaphor uses a verb "be" in making the comparison. Literary terms are grammatical in nature.¹⁷

In reading fiction, the reader oftentimes gets lost in the complexity of the story and doesn't know how to find the essence. Start with the grammar. Locate the verb in the sentence then the subject and the object and immediately the conflict or plot is found in the verb, the characters are discovered in the subject and objects and the rest are just modifiers in the form of adjective and adverb words, phrases, and clauses. When I have a reader confused by the literature we just step back and analyze the grammar of a paragraph and miraculously the reader begins to see better.

The subtly of non-fiction is built on grammar. Irony and satire are grammatical conventions. We see them when we see the grammar. Authors revel in grammar when they write. Teachers use grammar when analyzing literature. They show patterns, that is grammar. Readers can follow arguments that are well written because of the grammar. Parallelism is an important writing tool because it provides reader clarity. The reader needs parallelism to interpret, describe and analyze the style of any author or piece of writing.

The importance of grammar learning for reading comprehension: Grammatical structures provide readers significant information that allows them to understand the relationships among words and among sentences in a reading text.

¹⁷ BRIGGS, Lynn and Watts PAILLIOTET A Story about Grammar and Power
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