

Knowledge Of Grammar Resulting On Better Writing

Article by: Sharon White

Until the 1960's the vast majority of schools in England, and at that other parts of the traditional English speaking world such as the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, taught grammar in schools. Deemed by some academics as pointless it was found that by 1980 the tradition of teaching grammar had disappeared in state funded comprehensive schools.

In the 1960's many reports were published which stated that the teaching of grammar does not benefit children's abilities to write in fact some research material adversely claimed that grammar had a detrimental affect on children.

In fact according to Dick Hudson from the University of Central London a list of studies through out the 60s and 70s were considered to be classic support for the view that grammar teaching does nothing for children's writing.

Since the 1990's schools have reintroduced grammar in the form of linguistics and many linguists have been able to contribute to grammar in the National Curriculum.

Upon delving into the essay question it can be noticed that the subject matter is rather wide. For the purpose of this essay in order to abstain from lengthening the paper it has been decided that certain words should be clarified and hence accordingly discussed. Points that need to be kept in mind have been listed below.

a. To begin with, the question uses the word 'grammar', for the purpose of this paper, in order to refrain from lengthening the paper; we shall exclusively concentrate on the grammar of the English language and at that as taught in schools in England. The history of English grammar in schools situated in Wales and Northern Ireland has been relatively different where as the education system in Scotland has been totally independent in relation to England. It should also be kept in mind that results of studies carried out abroad have been included at times.

b. Another issue which needs to be touched upon presently is regarding the meaning of the wording in the question 'ability to write'. The wording has two most obvious implications which I have listed below.

1. 'Ability to write' could mean good creative writing which would be writing which is interesting, captivating and enjoyable but also open to grammatical corrections.

2. The second understanding one could assume would be the development of flawless English which is free from error and flows. It would also be considered to be at times perhaps enjoyable and creative and at times not.

Structured Grammatical Exercises:

Professor Richard Hudson says that structured grammatical analysis where in which a child is taught grammar in a covert manner with less usage of metalanguage and the teachers purposefully diverts from the traditional teaching form of grammar most certainly benefits children's writing. In fact in some studies Hudson keenly points out that the overt method of teaching grammar produces better results than the more traditional teaching methods of grammatical analysis. The Bullock Report

The UK government's Bullock report in the 1960's on English teaching was a classical study investigating the 'grammatical analysis' approach to teaching grammar. The Bullock Report found that the teaching of grammar needed some drastic changing it concluded: 'What has been shown is that the teaching of traditional analytic grammar does not appear to improve performance in writing. From the above it seems that the report was merely intending to encourage teachers to improve standards of grammar teaching rather than end its' being taught. But with in the space of the next decade rather than improving standards England saw a dramatic end of grammar in English schools.

People who are of an opinion which is anti-grammar forward the argument that the Bullock report supports the move to the abolishment of grammar. But when we look in to the Bullock report it can be seen that is was more in favor of improving the teaching of grammar rather than totally ending it.

At the moment in the UK it can be said that there is a growing trend showing that the teaching of grammar could improve writing standards. This growing trend is most evident with the presence of grammar as being one of the main pillars of the newly introduced National Literacy and the National Curriculum for English. Hudson says, "one of the reasons given for this major change of teaching policy is the beneficial effect of grammar teaching on the children's writing."

Geoff Barton

In the UK, Geoff Barton, a secondary school teacher with a training in linguistic, reported (1998) that some of his weakest students benefit 'dramatically' from an exploration of simple compound and complex sentence types.

Mary Mason

Mary Mason, a linguistically qualified teacher, designed a complete 3 year course in academic language for 12 to 14 year olds which now have been taught over a number of years in several schools. The course improved writing skills dramatically.

So which grammar is best?

Hudson points out that studies regarding grammar have explored three types of grammar, the traditional grammar, transformational grammar and systematic grammar. Fundamentally it still remains unclear as to which form of grammar is best. Many different researches have suggested their own opinions regarding this but it still remains debatable and open to scrutiny. So with regards to the research material available regarding the affects of grammar on the writing of children we can safely say that the vast majority of such material is clearly indicative that some sort of grammar in fact benefits the writings of children.

Looking at the research evidence it seem that the actual content of old fashioned grammar and the method of teaching was probably the main problem why many studies that were undertaken by academics concluded that grammar does not benefit language and writing skills.

From the above it can be said that although there is a disagreement as to which type of grammar is advantageous for children in enabling them to write English but fundamentally the studies show that there is a majority thinking that some sort of grammar is much better than none.

An observation

After having completed my secondary education in a comprehensive school with no knowledge of grammar what so ever I, like many other 16-17 year olds embarked upon studying at the internationally acclaimed seat of learning for traditional Islamic theology and classical Arabic, Darul Uloom al-Arabiyyah al-Islamiyyah, Bury.

Arabic was taught by learning Arabic grammar which involved learning by rota, Nahw (syntax) and Sarf (morphology). Students would learn the Arabic and Urdu texts of classical grammar manuscripts some of which dated back to over a thousand years. Students were also required to learn and inculcate in themselves the method of translating Arabic to Urdu. Looking back at the course structure it now transpires that the course never really emphasized writing Arabic, in fact one would estimate that in the first three years of study (the course was a six year study) students spent a mere hardly any time involved in creative writing. But nevertheless out of the six former luminaries of Darul Uloom who are presently at study undertaking the 3rd year English in Education Module, 4 of them received As in their A level Classical Arabic Examinations, an examination the vast part of which required students to write stories in Arabic which as the syllabus stated was supposed to be creative and free from error. The remaining two students received a B and a C, marks clearly reflected the competence of the students in their mastering of concepts of grammar.

From the above it can be noticed that a mere strict and rigid study of grammar where in which metalanguage does improve children's abilities to write.

Richard Hudson

This top-down pressure for KAL was further increased by one of the first steps taken by the new Labour government in 1997, the trial introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (extended to all primary schools in 1999). This is a highly focused programme for raising reading and writing standards in primary schools (years 1 to 6); it was paired from the start with a National Numeracy Strategy, and more recently it has fed into the English strand of a National Strategy for years 7 to 9 in secondary school.[1] The government has given this programme very high priority both in terms of publicity and in terms of resources, so schools have been bombarded with guidance and training materials and all serving teachers have had a certain amount of training. Not surprisingly there has been some resistance, but by and large the Literacy Strategy is accepted as part of primary education, and most teachers seem to agree that its benefits outweigh its weaknesses. During the first few years after it was introduced, literacy standards improved dramatically before stabilising at a higher level, but it is hard to separate the effects of KAL from all the other changes that were introduced at the same time.

Cont metalanguage yes Hudson

In the world-wide debate about grammar teaching one of the main questions concerns terminology: should the teacher use specialist metalanguage? In the UK context this is not an issue: technical terminology is accepted as a necessary part of explicit teaching. Indeed, the documents that launched the National Literacy Strategy included a glossary of 200 technical terms, of which about 90 related to grammar. These are terms which teachers are expected to use in class, and which children learn to use; so the UK's primary schools are now full of five-year olds talking about phonemes and adjectives. Since these documents had the official stamp of approval, this glossary counts as the first-ever government-sponsored glossary of grammatical terminology in the UK.

The Bullock Report

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grammar does not appear to improve performance in writing.'[6] (HMSO 1975:169)

The Bullock Report was intending to encourage teachers to improve standards of English grammar teaching but with in the space of the next decade rather than improving standards England saw a dramatic end of grammar in English schools. The article was produced by the member of masterpapers.com. Sharon White is a 5-years experienced freelance writer and a senior manager of dissertation writing services support team. Contact her to get custom term paper tips and buy dissertations.