

Explicit Grammar Teaching and Literature: Reflections on Gramsci's Conception of Grammar

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ABSTRACT

Grammar teaching has been a constant issue of debate in English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) circles. This debate was intensified with the rise of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Under the hegemony of this approach, explicit grammar teaching has been underemphasized. We argue that this underemphasis is symptomatic of neoliberalism. Employing Antonio Gramsci's conception of grammar, we more specifically suggest that lack of exposure to explicit grammar teaching is detrimental to obtaining a deep understanding of the English language and its literature. Being denied access to a direct discussion of English grammar, learners suffer from a deficit that makes it difficult for them to become critical readers and users of English grammar rules. In particular, we focus on the role of explicit grammar teaching in the context of teaching literature and conduct a small-scale empirical study to validate our claims. We hope that our analysis will help revive interest in critical and dynamic grammar and/through literature teaching.

Keywords: Grammar teaching, Gramsci, Literature.

Introduction

Language pedagogues have conceived of grammar teaching in different ways. In antiquity, grammar was closely associated with the study of philosophy and science and was thought to assist in exercising the mind and developing rhetorical skills (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). During the Middle Ages, when Greek and Latin were predominant, grammar, together with vocabulary, was emphasised as the main component of knowing a language. This emphasis on grammar was based on the belief that grammar was the means to creating a more thorough understanding of the Scriptures which were exclusively circulated in Latin and Greek. Explicit grammar teaching but in more secular settings continued to be the norm until the second half of the twentieth century, and particularly during the heyday of the Grammar-Translation and Audio-lingual approaches to language teaching, but was later demoted to a subsidiary position with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). (Ur (2012, p. 510) makes a distinction between implicit and explicit grammar teaching as follows: "Implicit teaching means exposing students to or getting them to use grammatical forms and meanings but without actually discussing the rules, whereas explicit teaching involves verbal explanations of form and use.")

Indeed, CLT has been the dominant, or rather hegemonic, method of teaching since the 1970s. CLT is, until now, claimed to be the 'best' approach to teaching an L2. In English language teaching (ELT), for example, CLT is promoted as the single approach to developing fluency in the language, especially in the circles of English as a foreign language (EFL). Its adherents have consistently focused on communication as the primary goal behind learning a language. Precision and correctness were degraded, especially in light of current linguistic variations exemplified by the emergence of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and the development of various World Englishes (WEs) alongside an absence of an exact definition of 'standardness.' This situation has resulted in the semi-death of teaching grammar.

In this paper, we reflect upon the semi-death of teaching grammar and ask why there is very little interest in explicit grammar teaching. We argue that the answer partly lies in the fact that we live in a neoliberal world that is interested in producing individuals who are capable of communicating with one another without their being conscious of the medium. In other words, students and others are deprived of the training to develop linguistic, as well as social and political,

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consciousness, the development of which consciousness would potentially unsettle our market-based world. We would like to argue that CLT is consistent with neoliberalism as a hegemonic system in which learners of English become tools and objects to be exploited on the world market; that is, commodities. Employing the philosophical meditations of the Italian thinker-cum-philosopher Antonio Gramsci, we suggest that not teaching grammar to ‘nonnative’ English speakers is detrimental to their critical thinking of and in the English language. (According to Brown (2015, pp. 4-5), neoliberalism is “a normative order of reason developed over three decades into a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality... [which] transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic.” In other words, neoliberalism turns all aspects of human life and humans themselves into capital and when so doing dismantles possibilities for collective action through creating the hyperindividualistic figure of the “homo oeconomicus [which] is an intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio value across all of its endeavors and venues” (italics in original; Brown, 2015, p. 5).) We further suggest that explicit grammar teaching using literary texts is paramount, as it pertains to honing students’ critical and theoretical abilities.

Reflections on the Communicative Approach in a Neoliberal Context

In a sharp break with the Grammar-Translation and Audiolingual methods of L2 teaching—alongside the demotion of Structuralism and Transformational-Generative theories of language—CLT took ascendancy in the 1970s. This break has had its influence on the teaching of grammar: CLT and its attendant practical realization, task-based language teaching, have consistently placed explicit grammar teaching on the back burner, stipulating that explicit grammar teaching is dispensable. This tendency was solidified in the 1980s as a result of developments in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) when researchers likened second language grammar learning to first language grammar acquisition. Krashen’s (1982) Monitor Model, in particular the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis (or implicit vs. explicit learning), and the Natural Order Hypothesis led to the belief that learning (which is an explicit process) does not mean or result in acquisition (which is an implicit process) and that “[g]rammar instruction could contribute to *learning* [emphasis added] but this was of limited value because communicative ability was dependent on *acquisition*” (Ellis, 2006, p. 85, emphasis in original). Krashen’s assumptions established the idea that declarative knowledge, which a learner gains through learning, is unlikely to be transferred into procedural knowledge. In fact, some scholars still believe that there is “little connection between formal knowledge of grammar rules and the ability to deploy them in communication” (Larsen-Freeman, 2014, p. 262).

Krashen’s assumptions led to the belief that grammar teaching is unnecessary because grammar can be subconsciously ‘picked up’ when introduced in communicative tasks. To attempt this, theoreticians advanced a novel way of dealing with grammar in CLT classrooms: Focus on Form or Form-Focused Instruction (FFI). FFI meant that grammar should not constitute the locus of a lesson but can rather be brought to the attention of students through apparently meaningful and communicative tasks. FFI has been promoted as a replacement of the *Focus on Forms* approach (the plural is important), the traditional view of looking at grammar that “emphasizes formal aspects of language by isolating them for practice through exercises, rather than drawing attention to forms through meaningful activities” (Hummel, 2014, pp. 119-120). However, various linguistic development studies provided evidence that implicit grammar teaching as promoted in FFI does not necessarily lead to full mastery of the L2. Ellis (2008, p. 846) points out that:

While there is general recognition that much of the L2 can be learnt naturally (i.e. without any form-focused instruction), it is also clear that most L2 learners (especially adults) do not achieve full target language competence as a result of exposure . . . and thus need assistance. That is, there may be certain linguistic properties that cannot be acquired by L2 learners unless they receive instruction in them.

In an earlier discussion, Ellis (2006), upon examining eight controversial issues surrounding grammar teaching, reminds us that, contrary to some short-lived arguments “that learners can and do learn a good deal of grammar without being taught it” (p. 91), the consensus is in favour of the efficacy of explicit grammar teaching. But he succinctly remarks

that none of the approaches to teaching grammar proved more effective than others and that most studies in this regard have produced conflicting results. Thus, Ellis (2006, p. 102) argues that while FFI can be of special value in L2 grammar teaching “[a] focus-on-forms approach is valid as long as it includes an opportunity for learners to practise behaviour in communicative tasks.”

In keeping with Ellis, Kramsch (2014) argues that, in teaching grammar, time-honoured decontextualized practices are not useful and urges teachers to relate a linguistic form to its pragmatic situations for better learning: “as communicative language teaching has long recognized, it is not only a matter of teaching grammar, but of situating the grammatical forms in their social and cultural context” (p. 251). The problem is that the context to which she refers, which is portrayed as universal, is in the majority of contexts native-speakerist. That is, it is based on native-speaker standards. Indeed, the content of materials used for teaching grammar as well as the use of words and phrases like ‘descriptive grammar,’ ‘natural,’ ‘authentic,’ and ‘automatic’ entails that ‘native’ speakers represent the best model. This concern was first articulated by Gramsci in his questioning of the idea of universal grammar: “[I]n all the countries of the world, millions upon millions of textbooks on the subject [i.e., grammar] are devoured by specimens of the human race, without those unfortunates having a precise awareness of the object they are devouring” (Antonio Gramsci, Letter of 12 December 1927 (1994 vol. 1, p. 160). Part of the “precise awareness” that Gramsci mentions is that of the restricted context of grammar.

This restriction of context precludes many people who communicate using English without necessarily being perceived as intelligible by ‘native’ speakers. This exclusion of other possible contexts in which grammar might be a necessary learning component is evident in the emphasis on the learner, the singular. The context to which such accounts refer is almost always individualized, one-to-one interactions. (John Gray (2012) comments on this obsession with individualism in our neoliberal world. He writes, “The figure of the celebrity can in many ways be seen as the individual writ large and it attracts and beguiles in many ways, in large part because of the agency which celebrities appear to possess” (p. 94). In other words, celebrities’ agency replaces learners’ by providing the latter with the illusion of agency. As long as ostensible agency is mentioned, there is no need to make mention of systems and grammar. What is neglected then are not only systems and society but also societies.) Interestingly enough, Ellis (2006) suggests that teachers should replace grammar syllabi with “a personal theory of grammar teaching” (p.103) so as to socially and culturally contextualise their teaching of grammar in their immediate contexts. The fear is that this personal teaching theory might be in keeping with the dominant, neoliberal global mode, which stresses individualism. An alternative should perceive the teaching of grammar, and all teaching for that matter, in a way that takes into account globalisation and multiculturalism and their geopolitical ramifications. How can one then retrieve part of the role of society in language pedagogy, or more precisely, the role of language pedagogy in the transformation of societies? And what is the connection between grammar and society/ies? The Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci may lend a helping hand in approaching these questions, especially when one utilizes his development of the concept of hegemony.

The Hegemony of English

Hegemony refers to a structure of power in which people are governed through consent rather than violence despite the fact that their needs are not met by the dominant class (visible violence is substituted for by the threat of invisible violence). Hegemons convince their subjects of the idea that their own desires are the same as those of their subjects. However, only the needs of the governing classes are met. As Ives (2004, p. 45) puts it, “[i]t is a question of the formation of consent and the role of coercion.” One of the examples of hegemony which cannot be camouflaged is the dominance of the English language, especially because it is often celebrated as the language of civilisation. Burnett (1962), for example, wrote:

Today English is written, spoken, broadcast, and understood on every continent, and it can claim a wider geographical range than any other tongue. There are few civilized areas where it has any competition as the lingua franca—the international language of commerce, diplomacy, science, and scholarship. (p. 12)

That promotion of English as a civilising language is not new. Phillipson (2008, p. 14) cites the closing of a book

written by Richards (1968):

There is an analogy between the conception of a world order and the design of a language which may serve man best. The choice of words for that language and the assignment of priorities among their duties can parallel the statesman's true tasks. And it is through what language can offer him that every man has to consider what should concern him most. If rightly ordered, and developed through a due sequence, the study of English can become truly a humane education. May not such a language justly be named "EVERY MAN'S ENGLISH"?

What is more deleterious than the universalization of English that Richards promotes is Robert Burchfield's (1985) more recent argument that not knowing English is a form of deprivation. He wrote:

English has also become a lingua franca to the point that any literate, educated person on the face of the globe is in a very real sense deprived if he [sic] does not know English. Poverty, famine, and disease are instantly recognized as the cruellest and least excusable forms of deprivation. Linguistic deprivation is a less easily noticed condition, but one nevertheless of great significance. (pp. 160–161)

Burchfield further writes:

The English language is like a fleet of juggernaut trucks that goes on regardless. No form of linguistic engineering and no amount of linguistic legislation will prevent the cycles of change that lie ahead. But English as it is spoken and written by native speakers looks like remaining a communicative force, however slightly or severely beyond the grasp of foreigners, and changed in whatever agreeable or disagreeable manner, for many centuries to come. (p. 173)

Based on the foregoing, one can clearly recognise the underpinnings of English being an international language. The promotion of English has been deliberately conducted by "seemingly benign promoting agents, particularly the British Council and the Ford Foundation" (Holborow, 2012, p. 27), but that benignity covers up a superior and imperialistic attitude. Other driving forces of the promotion of the hegemonic associations of English in today's world is CLT which is also a "seemingly benign" philosophical orientation that is seen as "a prop for neoliberalism" (Holborow, 2012, p. 27).

In the next section, we discuss Gramsci's conception of language and grammar in order to problematise the hegemonic promotion of English by CLT. We argue that learning English grammar within CLT—in its overemphasising fluency at the expense of accuracy—results in a lack of deep understanding of the language itself and its literature. In so doing, we agree with Kramersch in that CLT has only produced students who "play with language" in their daily interactions because they are "impatient with the grammatical and lexical rules of the L2" (Kramersch, 2014, p. 250).

Gramsci, Hegemony and Grammar

When discussing hegemony, and particularly the hegemony of English, many forget that Gramsci, initially a student of linguistics, was introduced to the construct through the field of linguistics. Boothman (2012) found the word *hegemony* (*egemonia*) in Gramsci's transcriptions of the lectures of his professor and Italian linguist Matteo Bartoli (p. 14). In other words, the roots for the critical household (at least in theoretical circles) term *hegemony* are closely associated with linguistics. In addition to his interest in politics and culture (particularly his development of such terms as the *social bloc*, the *will of the people*, the *philosophy of praxis*, among others), Gramsci continued to think about language and its overlaps with politics, as is clear in his *Prison Notebooks* in *Quaderno* (notebook) 29, entitled "Notes for an Introduction to the Study of Grammar." The most important premise in this notebook is the idea that language is not just about words (Gramsci, 1971), nor is it merely the realm of the individual. In it, he dwells on and critiques the vision and strategies of Alessandro Manzoni, the head of the Italian government commission on consolidating the Italian language, who—because of political reasons that would legitimize the hegemony of the dominant class—suggested that Italy adopt Esperanto as a national language and later the language of Tuscany (Ives, 2009, p. 666).

Gramsci rightly thinks that the imposition of that particular variety is problematic, as it marginalizes people further. He writes

The advocates of a single language are worried by the fact that while the world contains a number of people who would like to communicate directly with one another, there is an endless number of different languages which restrict the ability to communicate. This is a cosmopolitan, not an international anxiety, that of the bourgeois who travels for

business or pleasure, of nomads more than of stable productive citizens. They would like artificially to create consequences which as yet lack the necessary conditions. (cited in Ives, 2009, p. 666)

According to Gramsci, such an imposition mostly benefits the privileged, as it increases their mobility.

On the other hand, Gramsci is also critical of the imposition of a regional variety as the dominant one and thinks of it as part of what he calls “common sense.” Gramsci contrasts “common sense” with “good sense” (1971, 327) and argues that governments generally want people to inhabit a state of “common sense” and forget about “good sense” (Ives, 2009, p. 669). Transforming individuals from the “common sense” stage (which is formed because of hegemony) to the “good sense” stage, Gramsci contends, raises the consciousness of individuals who can in turn exert change when they understand the powers that oppress them further. Teaching them grammar facilitates that transformation. For Gramsci, studying grammar makes it easier for people to understand the dynamics of power. According to Gramsci, as Ives (2004) puts it very clearly, “the structure of language, as evident in grammar, documents a society and illustrates aspects of its history as well as existing power relations” (p. 40). As a result, Gramsci does not advocate any disconnection between what he calls “normative grammar [the official grammar normalized by the state as opposed to ‘immanent grammar’ (the multiple possibilities of rules in a language)] from logic, aesthetics, and philosophical inquiry” (Ives, 2004, p. 42).

Gramsci’s vision is instructive, particularly if we consider his stance against the Fascist Education Act of 1923 in Italy, which was intended to eliminate or downplay the teaching of grammar. Gramsci thinks that that elimination is an exclusionary act. He writes,

In practice the national-popular mass is excluded from learning the educated language, since the highest level of the ruling class, which traditionally speaks standard Italian, passes it from generation to generation, through a slow process that begins with the first stutterings of the child under the guidance of his parents, and continues through conversation (with its “this is how one says it,” “it must be said like this,” etc.) for the rest of one’s life. In reality, one is “always studying grammar” (by imitating the model one admires, etc.). (1971, p. 359)

According to Gramsci, the idea that learners can learn a language or a variety of it by mere exposure is possible but restrictive. Restrictive because it applies to a privileged minority, for not everybody has access to the communication chain that is available to the dominant classes. It is possible to inherit and imbibe (unconsciously learn) the rules of the language through constant use, but that absorption is only open to a minority and deprives one of the possibility for consciousness-raising.

This situation applies to English, as this view makes it a must for learners of English to travel to English-speaking countries. But it is not possible for most learners of the language as a second or foreign language to have access to such ‘natural’ processes for socio-economic reasons, hence the creation of a privileged class. Thus, depriving learners of explicit grammar teaching (and of the consciousness that results from it) makes it extremely difficult for them to learn the language. More specifically, they are denied access to an understanding of “external hegemony” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 344).

In contrast, members of the dominant group in any linguistic community can accordingly have the choice to be active, critical, and coherent ones (Gramsci, 1971). The emphasis on spontaneity is a case in point. Learners are given the impression that all language should be spontaneous. They might even internalize the notion that spontaneous input leads to spontaneous output, a native-speakerist idea. This idea makes learners think less and renders them passive recipients. Moreover, it gives learners the wrong ideas: first, the language that they are learning is natural and spontaneous all the time (Gramsci explains that pure spontaneity does not exist (1971, p. 354)). Second, it is regular, when language is in fact a complex system with many irregularities. Third, it forces students to accept an unfair comparison between the language that they are learning and their own languages.

On the other hand, members of the marginalized group are forced to have a “disjointed and episodic” understanding (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci writes

The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Such an inventory must therefore be made at the outset. (1971, p. 326)

As this quotation shows, marginalized learners are provided with a fragmented picture, “traces,” without a holistic picture, “an inventory.” Indeed, this approach produces nefarious conformism on a large scale. Gramsci explains that feedback on language “create[s] a grammatical conformism, to establish ‘norms’ or judgements of correctness or incorrectness. But this ‘spontaneous’ expression of grammatical conformity is necessarily disconnected, discontinuous, and limited to local social strata or local centres” (p. 354). Gramsci goes on to suggest that

The number of ‘immanent or spontaneous grammars’ is incalculable and, theoretically, one can say that each person has a grammar of his [sic] own. Alongside this actual ‘fragmentation,’ however, one should also point out the movements of unification, with varying degrees of amplitude both in terms of territory and ‘linguistic volume.’ Written ‘normative grammars’ tend to embrace the entire territory of a nation and its total ‘linguistic volume,’ to create a unitary national linguistic conformism. This, moreover, places expressive ‘individualism’ at a higher level because it creates a more robust and homogenous skeleton for the national linguistic body, of which every individual is the reflection and interpreter. (1971, p. 354)¹

Gramsci here confirms the critique with which we started: Individualism in a neoliberal world is a façade behind which many harmful processes are hidden. This individualism, Ives (2006) argues, “facilitates the growth and spread of multinational corporations and trade” (p. 137) and promotes “English triumphalism” (p. 129). But is there anything that one can do pedagogically to resist this triumphalism?

Literary Alternatives?

While all of the foregoing exposition might be restricted to the Italian context, it is clear that it has important implications for the teaching of English in our neoliberal world, whose teaching methodology is controlled by CLT, which de-emphasizes explicit grammar teaching. The question in which we are interested is whether the absence of teaching the grammar(s) of English, and of any language for that matter, is not only detrimental to language acquisition or learning but also to awareness of socio-political issues. It is useful to re-pose Gramsci’s question:

Granted that traditional normative grammar was inadequate, is this a good reason for teaching no grammar at all, for not being in the least concerned with speeding up the process of learning the particular way of speaking of a certain linguistic area, and rather leaving ‘the language to be learnt through living it’? (1971, p. 358)

One way of approaching this question is through anecdotal evidence. In an Introduction to Literature course taught by the first author, students had to read Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963). In it, King quotes a senior citizen of colour as saying “with ungrammatical profundity: ‘My feet is tired, but my soul is rested’” (p. 108). This quotation was a strategic moment for the instructor, especially because his students had made many grammatical mistakes in the context of subject-verb agreement. After the instructor explained this grammatical rule, he pointed out the concept of grammaticality and ungrammaticality and their social implications. He then asked students about whether the sentence was considered ungrammatical in the African-American community from which the woman hails and pointed out the fact that in African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) this utterance is grammatically acceptable. This acceptability demonstrates the existence of multiple grammars. The instructor then correlated the phrase “ungrammatical profundity” with justice to exemplify the idea that breaking an unjust law (akin to breaking a hegemonic grammatical rule) that applies to only part of the community is justified, as just laws apply to all the members of the community. This way, King enacts a method of resistance against white supremacy in the U.S., rather than a purely linguistic matter. Students were able to think about the connection between the explicit teaching of grammar and raising consciousness.

In another class called *The Novel* taught by the same instructor, students had to read Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*. The instructor highlighted a passage in the text to help students reflect on similar issues of grammaticality and ungrammaticality. The passage included a different variety of English (the dialect of people from Kent)² from

¹ See Ives for a critique of Gramsci’s conception of normative grammar as being only written.

² See “The Purpose of Dialect in Charles Dickens’s Novel *Great Expectations*” for a more detailed discussion of dialects in the novel. (please check citation)

Standard English. In addition to discussing the novel thematically (Joe Gargery's past background in the field of education), the instructor selected the passage to encourage students to think about connections between form and content. The passage reads

'Consequence, my mother and me we ran away from my father, several times; and then my mother she'd go out to work, and she'd say, 'Joe,' she'd say, 'now, please God, you shall have some schooling, child,' and she'd put me to school. But my father were that good in his hart that he couldn't bear to be without us. So, he'd come with a most tremenjous crowd and make such a row at the doors of the houses where we was, that they used to be obligated to have no more to do with us and to give us up to him. And then he took us home and hammered us. Which, you see, Pip,' said Joe, pausing in his meditative raking of the fire, and looking at me, 'were a drawback on my learning. (Book 1, Chapter 7)

Students had difficulty analyzing the text, so the instructor asked students to translate the text into 'Standard' English. The instructor then asked students why they had difficulty understanding the passage and whether they thought that the passage is grammatical or ungrammatical. The majority of students suggested that it was ungrammatical, as the extract included mistakes in double subjects, nominative case, and subject-verb agreement. Then, the instructor asked whether Joe's wife (the protagonist's (Pip's) sister) or other villagers would find these sentences ungrammatical. The instructor then asked his students to reflect on the idea of literacy, orthography, and grammar. Students started to show awareness that the grammar that one employs in a certain situation might speak volumes about the person; that is, grammars show social conventions.

After these moments, the instructor noticed that—when similar situations occurred—students were not only conscious of grammatical rules but were also cognizant of their practical as well as theoretical implications. They were able to comment—linguistically, politically, and socially—on inversions, cleft sentences, the use of restricted relative clauses, conditional sentences, verb patterns, passive constructions, etc. The instructor realized that this had important visible implications: Students' grammatical knowledge improved, their grammatical choices were much more conscious, they knew when to break grammatical rules creatively, they used grammar as a method of developing consciousness, and they resisted the Anglophone neoliberal order. Moreover, explicit grammar teaching through literature enabled the instructor to introduce students to the WEs (World Englishes) paradigm, improving students' multicultural awareness. It also helped students know more about the English language debate in Africa and was a useful occasion for introducing postcolonial studies in the classroom. Indeed, it transformed students' thoughts about literature as such, as it made it easier for students to come to grips with other understandings of literature than those that are solely aesthetic. It is our hypothesis that the introduction of this theoretical toolkit would enable students to hone their critical skills and develop consciousness. Although these anecdotal pieces of evidence are statistically insignificant, they do indicate a change in students' linguistic practices that testified to an increased consciousness and to the many benefits of using grammar to teach literature and vice versa. Nevertheless, in order to empirically validate these claims, we designed and conducted a small-scale study, on which we elaborate in the next section.

The Study

Procedure

The researchers designed a two-phase test to gauge the impact of explicit grammar teaching on students' understanding of literary texts. In the pre-intervention phase, the student participants (N=11) (a different group of students from the one taught by the first instructor) were given a task to reflect in Arabic on the grammaticality and understanding of a short literary text, the second text discussed by the instructor above (see Appendix A). Upon the completion of this phase, the second researcher led a discussion on the use of English grammar in general and in literary texts in particular and the relationship between the two. Two weeks later, in the post-intervention phase, the same students were asked to reflect on the grammaticality and understanding of another short literary text, the first text quoted in the previous section (see Appendix B).

Participants

The participants were 11 EFL students (10 female and one male) in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the University

of Jordan. They were all specialised in English-related majors such as Applied English, English Language and Literature, and English-double majored programs. Their ages ranged between 19-21.

Analysis and Discussion

Three main themes emerged upon analyzing the tests: grammaticality judgement, reasons for (un)grammaticality, and understanding the text. The following table summarises the findings of the study in the pre- and post-intervention phases.

Table 1 A Presentation of the findings

Themes	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
<i>Grammaticality</i>	- All students judged the text as ungrammatical.	- 72.7 % of students judged the text as grammatical. - 18.1 % decided that it is ungrammatical. - 9.1 % thought it can be both.
<i>Reasons for (un)grammaticality</i>	- The character is uneducated or has received poor education. (8 Ss) - Family problems led to his poor education. (4 Ss) - The character belongs to a low social class. (3 Ss) - The character is probably young (school age). (2 Ss) - The character is not native or has had incomplete acquisition. (1 S)	- The character has a strong personality. (1 S) - She is probably uneducated and belongs to a low social class. (5 Ss) - The character has some authority and power. (1 S) - She is well-educated and belongs to high social class. (3 Ss)
<i>Understanding the text</i>	- None of the students had a complete understanding of the text. - Three students had a very limited understanding of it. - Eight had a partial (to varying degrees) understanding of it.	- Five students had a somehow complete understanding of the text. - Three had a partial understanding of it. - Three had a very limited understanding of it.

Table 1 above tentatively shows that explicit grammar teaching is useful in changing students’ perceptions about language and in expanding and enriching their appreciation of literary texts (and possibly other texts). The findings presented above support our hypothesis that not teaching grammar explicitly deprives students of deeper understandings of and reflections on the language and content (i.e., meaning) of texts. In the short discussion raised in class after the completion of the two tasks, it was observed that the students—upon understanding how grammar can be used to reflect social and political themes—had to read the second text very carefully to look for deeper meanings and reasons for the use of grammar in the text. This was also apparent in their reflections on the meaning of the second text³ (in the post-intervention task) for, as Behrens and Sperling (2010) argue, while using marked forms may reflect the informality and ignorance of the person, “the connotations of using marked forms can go further than that” (p. 15).

On the other hand, two students judged the second text as ungrammatical despite the intervention. This may best be explicated in their reasons for the ungrammaticality of the text. Both thought so because of the prescriptive grammar rules that they have been taught. This warrants a call for rethinking the way in which grammar rules are taught, at least

³ It should be noted that there were some students (three) who, despite the intervention, did not provide a sound understanding of the second text (i.e., post-intervention task). We acknowledge that this may be due to other linguistic features of lexis and discourse which—in addition to grammar—contribute to our understandings of texts.

in tertiary education. Indeed, exposing students to descriptive grammar and discourse grammar in addition to prescriptive grammar can lead to a better understanding of language, as we found in this study, as well as to more self-confidence when using the language in communicative situations in a way that is sensitive to the context in which language is used. As Behrens and Sperling (2010, p. 12) argue, teachers often use prescriptive rules to “decide who graduates successfully from an educational institution and who does not; and who gains power in society, and who does not have an equal opportunity to succeed. In fact, we’re embracing and modeling adherence to the hierarchy.” This situation represents the clash between teachers and linguists on one hand and prescriptivists and descriptivists on the other. Fallon (2010) criticises how prescriptivists (or purists, as some prefer to call them) regard the dictionary as “the gatekeeper to our language” by preserving “the original and correct meanings” while “[a] most all dictionary makers...view their role as recorders—as descriptive” (p. 82). Based on the foregoing, we argue that not teaching grammar rules and types explicitly may result in an incomplete understanding of linguistic, social, and political phenomena around the world for which language is used, especially in the field of literature.

Conclusion

The lack of grammatical exposure is harmful in many ways. In light of the simplification prevalent in most teaching circles, one can observe three levels of linguistic harm exerted on students in the absence of teaching grammar. From a linguistic point of view, this absence creates a situation in which learners lack exposure to different aspects of the language. The second level is pedagogical. Not teaching grammar has proved to be an impediment to improving students’ competence, without which their sense of lack intensifies. Swan (2001) explains that learning grammar explicitly does not necessarily lead to “correct spontaneous production in the short term: but in the long term declarative knowledge...often seems to aid the development of procedural knowledge” (p. 182).

From a psychological standpoint, not teaching grammar deprives learners of the capacity to function in their societies since knowledge of grammar enables learners “to present themselves to others in the way that they wish to be seen” (Larsen-Freeman, 2014, pp. 256-257). Lack of grammatical knowledge, on the other hand, causes learners to lose the chance to improve their metalinguistic abilities, the distance required to think critically about language in particular and culture in general. Indeed, teaching grammar should be a welcome endeavour because it is enabling to students, as it provides them with the mechanisms that help them to think critically, to understand that grammar is a social construct, and not to blindly obey such constructs.

Most practically, lack of grammatical input creates negative effects in a socio-political sense, especially at the workplace. Our students, most of whom are prospective English language teachers, are badly affected by these pedagogical tendencies that focus on the individual at the expense of the group. This individualistic tendency creates an unequal distribution of opportunities on the job market. Since most ‘native’ English-speaking teachers (NESTs) were found to be unwilling or unable to teach grammar and lack the metalinguistic knowledge that ‘nonnative’ English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) have, this lack of grammatical input facilitates the hiring of NESTs, as they do not have to teach what most of them know little about. As for NNESTs, they teach without having to discuss systems, hence less ego boost, fewer reasoning abilities, and fewer jobs.

To counteract—in part—these tendencies and assumptions, the post method perspective on language teaching, or what is sometimes referred to as ‘critical pedagogy,’ has been developed (See Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). Within this perspective, teachers are freed from the restrictions of any method and are asked to stop blindly copying what others have ordered them to do and to start thinking more critically about teaching as “a personal theory”—to use Ellis’ (2006) phrase—that can be developed upon careful examination of the context in which they teach and learn. Kumaravadivelu (2012) elaborates on this perspective by suggesting three main principles that should guide language teaching: particularity, practicality, and possibility. He points out that one’s theory of teaching should be sensitive (i.e., particular) to students’ immediate contexts and practical in that it should be adopted by teachers based on an assessment of the context in which they are teaching. More importantly, that theory needs to be critical in that it should facilitate the transformation and the empowerment of both teachers and students by raising awareness of the socio-political impacts

of language on the individual and the society at large. Such critical perspectives on language teaching, of which grammar instruction is a linchpin, necessitate the need to incorporate social and political awareness-raising among learners. As Akbari (2008, p. 281) eloquently puts it, “CP [critical pedagogy] can provide the needed insight for...learners so that through social activism they can transform the lives of those who are marginalized and help them attain better economic and social conditions.” Helping students to have the ability to transform is what made us turn to Gramsci’s thinking.

We accordingly advocate a return to the explicit teaching of grammar in mainstream ELT classrooms and an adoption of critical pedagogy as a feasible attitude to L2 grammar teaching, particularly by deploying literary texts. Once these steps are taken, we predict that students will understand that language is not as rigid as “normative grammar” makes it look and that they will be enabled participants, not mere viewers. This is to emphasize their creativity as individuals and groups, to live up to what Chomsky and others stressed about language, without—like these same critics—making creativity an exclusive activity to ‘native’ speakers. It is imperative that learners be given the choice to take stock, both literally and metaphorically, of the inventory, in the face of a “deterministic, fatalistic, and mechanistic” point of view (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 336-337). The plural is important here, as Gramsci calls for a new grammar that “embrace[s] diversity in its unity” (Ives, 2004, p. 52).

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تدريس القواعد الصريح وعلاقتها بالأدب: تأملات في مفهوم غرامشي للقواعد

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ملخص

ما زال تدريس القواعد في بيئات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية (ESL) واللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) يمثل قضية جدلية أزلية. وقد اشدت هذا الجدل مع ظهور منهج تعليم اللغة التواصلية (CLT). فقد تم التقليل من أهمية تعليم القواعد النحوية بشكل واضح بسبب هيمنة هذا المنهج. نرى في هذا المقال أن هذا الأمر يعد من إرهاصات النيولبرالية (الليبرالية الجديدة). ونرى أيضاً أن عدم توافر بيئة يتم فيها تدريس القواعد النحوية يضر بالحصول على فهم عميق للغة الإنجليزية وأدبها، مستخدمين في معرض نقاشنا لهذا الرأي مفهوم أنطونيو غرامشي للنحو. فإن المتعلمين في هذا السياق غالباً ما يعانون من عجز يجعل من الصعب عليهم أن يصبحوا قارئين ومستخدمين لقواعد اللغة الإنجليزية ذوي حس نقدي من خلال إغفال نجاعة المناقشة المباشرة لقواعد اللغة الإنجليزية، ونركز بوجه الخصوص على دور تدريس القواعد الصريح في سياق تدريس الأدب، حيث نختبر فرضياتنا من خلال دراسة مصغرة. ونأمل أن يساعد تحليلنا على إحياء الاهتمام بتدريس القواعد والأدب أو تدريس القواعد من خلال الأدب بطريقة نقدية وحيوية.

الكلمات الدالة: تدريس القواعد، غرامشي، الأدب.

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