

A study of methods, approaches, and models of teaching English grammar to EFL students: A case of “Mehmet Akif” colleges, Tirana, Albania

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate various methods, approaches, and models of English language teaching. Methods and approaches to teaching English as a foreign language reflect different attitudes regarding the teaching of grammar. This paper briefly analyzes the role of grammar in each of the teaching methods, and how the grammar should be explained according to each method. Particular importance is given to two major approaches; the inductive and deductive approach. The PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Production) Model and the TTT (Test, Teach, Test) Model of teaching language are also briefly analyzed. The study was based on quantitative and qualitative research method. 126 high school students from Mehmet Akif Colleges and five English teachers from the same schools participated in this study. The data obtained through the interviews and the questionnaires is the basis of the study. The results of the study reveal that the students and the teachers preferred more the deductive grammar teaching. Another main finding of the study is that all the English teachers used the direct method of teaching.

Key words: English, teaching, grammar, methods, approaches, models

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays people mostly try to learn English more than any other languages. The English language is termed as the language of business, politics, communication, and science. We face English every day; the software programs of our smartphones, computers and other electronic devices are all in English. Most people today find the learning of English necessary for various reasons. Some people want to learn the language for study, some people want to learn in order to establish business connections, however some of them want to learn as a hobby. Knowledge of English today is a window to the world.

According to different teaching methods, each student must be trained in reading, listening, writing, and speaking. An inseparable part of the English lesson is grammar, although many scholars consider it to be “the most boring and obscure” part (Allen & Corder, 1975, p. 45). According to the Oxford Dictionary, grammar is “the whole system and structure of a language or of languages in general” (Oxford Dictionary, 2017) Grammar teaching is often debated by scholars. Some believe that grammar is the basis for language learning, while others claim that it is unnecessary for communication and they give more importance to the vocabulary. The first foreign language teaching method, grammar-translation, obviously had the grammar as an inseparable element. Additionally, other methods like audio-lingual and direct method also emphasized grammar, but they gave more emphasis to practice.

Grammar is a subject discussed among English teachers in Albania as well. Public and private schools in Albania give great importance to teaching foreign languages and especially English. Albanian students begin to learn English in the third grade and they strengthen their knowledge in high school.

2. METHODS AND APPROACHES TO TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

2.1. Grammar-Translation Method

The Grammar-Translation Method was used for the first time in Germany in an attempt to adapt the language learning tradition to the circumstances and requirements of schools (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004, p. 151). A typical Grammar-Translation lesson consisted of three main parts. First the grammatical rule was introduced, then the new words were introduced and in the end, a text from the native language was translated into the foreign language (Fotos, 2005, p. 36). Teaching the language rules was done gradually, depending on the degree of difficulty and students learning level. In this method, a special attention was given to paraphrasing and dictation based on the argument that they helped strengthening the gained knowledge. It is worth emphasizing that only reading and writing were the focus while the improvement of other skills such as speaking and listening were not mentioned at all. According to Flowerdew and Miller, the only listening, students did, was the listening of the grammar rules of the foreign language but the rules were explained in their native language (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 4).

After introducing grammatical rules and new vocabulary, students try to provide the best translated version of the text. This helps them understand abstract words that are difficult to be explained or understood in the foreign language as well as to develop their translation skills. Translation of grammar rules or explanation in the native language can also accelerate their understanding, as it creates the possibility of comparing the same structures in foreign language. However, the translation of many words or structures may not be possible because they may not exist as concepts in the native language.

In typical grammar-translation teaching, the benefits in the verbal communicative aspect almost do not exist because the aim of this type of lesson is not the goal for the students in the foreign language (Fotos, 2005, p. 38).

2.2. Direct Method

After strong negative reactions to the grammar-translation method, there was a need to create another method for teaching foreign languages. At the end of the 19th century the direct method was introduced and it brought many innovations in the process of learning foreign languages. For the first time, direct method was officially used in France and Germany, shortly after its formalization as a method in 1901 (Fotos, 2005). The direct method is based on the principle that the second language should be learned by establishing a connection within the students' minds and between what they think and what they express, thus avoiding the use of their native language and translation of the foreign language. This increases the contact and exposure of the student with the foreign language (Whong, 2011). The use of foreign language in the class led to the avoidance of the new words translation.

The direct method used to teach grammar inductively through conversations or materials with cultural content, however, grammar was still essential for foreign language learning (Field, 2000). The new vocabulary was introduced through the visual material and texts. Different grammar structures were introduced through the same text. Special importance began to be devoted to speaking and correct pronunciation of words. This made compulsory the usage of the visual materials or objects to illustrate different words. Writing skills were also of particular importance and students were required to write compositions using figures or episodes shown by the teacher (Stern, 1991, p. 469). It is worth mentioning that even in the direct method there is little attention paid to

listening skills. Listening strategies were not part of the teaching or its purpose yet (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 5).

2.3. Audiolingual Method

The audio-lingual method emerged during the 1950s and some of its main features were: language presentation through dialogues, emphasizing certain techniques such as imitation or memorization, usage of language laboratories, and the formation of a linguistic and psychological theory as the basis of the teaching method (Stern, 1983, p. 462). The audio-lingual method continued the tradition of direct method in terms of the non-usage of native language in teaching. Grammatical knowledge was not given the same importance as in grammar-translation method but it was not neglected as Stern points out, the strategy used to teach grammar is largely implicit. Grammatical forms were also practiced through listening, where students listened certain grammatical structures recorded or spoken by the teacher and then they repeated them (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, pp. 8-10). This argued that repeating sentences or phrases increased good language skills and so that students would remember. The main purpose of listening was not simply to develop it as a skill but also to use it as a tool for learning language structures. Special importance began to be devoted to pronunciation so that the students could make the distinction between sounds (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 68).

A typical lesson of the audio-lingual method started with the listening to a dialogue through which vocabulary and new grammatical forms were introduced by repeating it several times (Cook, 2013, p. 243). After the listening, the students repeated each sentence of the dialogue and proceeded further with the grammar exercises. This kind of exercise was also based on repetition of the same structure using dictionaries or different situations in order to reinforce habits to the point that

patterns became automatic (Krashen, 1982, p. 130). Following, there were exercises and activities where students could be active and to some extent, prepare students to face real-life situations.

2.4. Total Physical Response

The founder of the Total Physical Response theory is the psychologist James Asher. Asher proposed that the ideal solution features in the following model, which he calls strategy and which combine ideas of psychological and linguistic theories (Asher, 1969). Asher claims that this method is mitigating, effortless, and motivating for students, and forms consistent knowledge (Asher, 1964, 1966). The main objective is to teach speaking skills at the initial level, enabling understanding as means to achieving language proficiency (Richards & Rodgers , 2014, p. 278). Students manage to communicate freely and without hindrance with native speakers of the language. The essence of the method is that the students should be relaxed, listen to command, and work together with the instructor. The aim for them is to understand better what they hear and to be able to articulate even sentences they hear for the first time (Asher, 1969). Asher argues for concentrating student on skill, specifically listening, with the teacher understanding that other skills are practiced at the level of student abilities (Asher, 1969).

The role of the teacher is essential in the first steps of learning in providing commands the learner applies. According to Richards and Rodgers, this makes it necessary for the teacher to be active as the one who determines what will be treated in the lesson, as well as with what tools or materials used (Richards & Rodgers , 2014, p. 278). Further, they emphasize that the way the teacher introduces the material is extremely important. The student has two roles. Firstly, the student is the attentive listeners and verbally responds to what

the teacher says. Secondly, the student is a good performer. In addition to the use of known words or structures and their distinction in different situations, there is an expectation that the learner will also produce his own combinations. As one of the goals of this method is to create a relaxed atmosphere, students are not forced to speak before they feel ready (Doggett, 1986). Since studies have shown that the use of translation reduces the effectiveness of the method (Asher, 1969), native language is used only at the beginning of the course to explain its purpose. While the emphasis is on grammatical structures and vocabulary combined with the teacher commands, this does not mean that the language learning is conceived as a lesson of special rules (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 109). It should be borne in mind that grammar is explained in an inductive way, so student focus is more on the meaning rather than on the form.

2.5. Suggestopedia

Suggestopedia was developed and processed by the psychologist Lozanov. According to Lozanov, this method is based on three main principles: the first principle relies on reducing tension and concentration. It implies freeness by the student, but without violating the principles of good conduct and without reducing the student's internal motivation; the second principle is the unit of awareness, pre-consciousness and integral brain activity, which implies that teaching and learning should be organized in such a way as focus on the conscious functions and responses of the learner, as well as the pre-conscious ones; the last principle is the suggestive link at the level of the reserve complex, which means the development of the untapped spare capacity of the student (Lozanov, 2005, p. 266). A lesson based on the suggestopedia method consists of three main phases: pre-session, session and post-session. The first phase consists of two lessons where students are familiarized with new material and try to memorize a good part of it. The session phase, one

lesson, begins with the sound of the music while the teacher reads or recites dialogues to adjusted tone and music rhythm. The students follow in a book where the text is translated into the native language. The students listen again to the text read by the teacher, again with the music, but this time with books closed. At the end of the lesson, students are asked to read the text at home once before sleeping and once after they get up. The after session phase aims at assimilating and processing the material. We should appreciate the fact that this method considers the reproof of student mistakes very important but the reproof is not done immediately, but only in cases when the teacher creates such situations where the same mistake is repeated (Lozanov, 2005, p. 279).

2.6. Silent Way

This method was developed by Caleb Gattegno and its main principle is that teaching should depend on the learning process and that students should have the opportunity to correct their own mistakes (Pentcheva & Todor, 1999, p. 39). According to Richards, the teacher in this method speaks as little as possible and the student tries to reveal and create the language instead of memorizing or just repeating what he/she has learned (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p. 290). In the lesson, the teacher concentrates on the articulation of certain sounds or phonemes and then allows the student to repeat. This lets them understand and without constant teacher correction. In fact, the silent element is that the teacher orientates and corrects students by means of signs, gestures, or facial expressions. Furthermore, the practice of word groups and structures are visually accompanied by colors. It is worth emphasizing that grammar is not treated as a separate part of the lesson, but the teacher creates situations where the student focuses on the grammatical forms. There is no direct explanation of the grammatical rules in this method, but the student gains

understanding through repeated use of structures (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 54; Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p. 290).

2.7. Natural Approach

The natural approach was created as a combination of Tracy Terrell’s experience as a foreign language teacher combined with the principles of linguist Stefan Krashen. Terrell states that this method gives students the opportunity to learn the language through two important factors: acquisition and learning (Terrell, 1982). Accordingly, the acquisition process leads the student to the subconscious knowledge of language while learning is a product that comes as a result of conscious attention to the elements of the target language (Terrell, 1982). He argues that this method gives special importance to classroom engagement activities because they help to develop communicative skills (Terrell, 1982). According to Krashen, during the lesson where natural approach is practiced, more attention is given to acquisition input where the teacher speaks only in the foreign language while the learner corrects mistakes only in response to damaged communication (Krashen, 1982, p. 138). It should be emphasized that the grammatical topics are not explained in a certain way. The teacher focuses on conversations that are related to grammar, for example, asking students what they have done a day before (Terrell, 1982). According to Achard, the natural approach is ranked as a method without grammar (Achard, 2004).

2.8. Communicative Approach

The communicative approach is one of the most practiced approaches to foreign language learning. According to Richards and Rodgers, communication skills are the main objective of this approach and also the main focus is the developing of the four skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking (Richards & Rodgers, 2000, p. 84). Harmer emphasizes that this approach

differs from others because it gives more importance to the development of communicative skills rather than linguistic skills (Harmer, 1991, p. 84). According to Cook, we have less grammatical knowledge than we have the sufficient ability to use grammar for a given purpose (Cook, 2013, p. 248). Since the main focus is on communicative rather than linguistic competence, attention is paid to the functions of the language rather than to its forms; all language knowledge is put into the service of communication. Grammatical knowledge, forms, and meanings are considered parts of communicative competence. The use of native language is not prohibited, but the use of the foreign language is always recommended.

2.9. Inductive Approach

According to Nunan, the inductive approach is a process by which students discover grammatical rules with the use of examples (Nunan, 1999). In this way, students examine one or more sentences to understand the grammar rule. Thornbury points out that in the inductive approach, students receive examples that reflect grammar rules to be explained (Thornbury, 1999, p. 29). After the examples, students have time to think and discover the grammar rules themselves. Then, they practice the grammar rules by giving their own examples for each. The main advantage of this approach is that students have the opportunity to think actively about the language (Thornbury, 1999, p. 49). But of course, there are some disadvantages. This approach requires significant time and effort from the student if help is not forthcoming from the teacher.

2.10. Deductive Approach

The deductive approach is one of the more traditional approaches where information about the rules of language and grammar are introduced at the beginning of the lesson (Nunan,

1999). The main focus of this approach is to give the theoretical side of the grammatical rules, then illustrate with examples with the main objective that the students learn these rules early in their studies. According to Nunan, this approach is effective in classrooms where the grammatical-translation method is applied (Nunan, 1999). Thornbury emphasizes the fact that deductive instruction has three main elements. The deductive lesson begins with the introduction of the rules by the teacher, and then proceeds with a presentation of examples emphasizing the grammatical rules. At the end of the lesson, the students practice the rules presented and provide examples for each of them (Thornbury, 1999, p. 29). Various studies have shown that this approach is more widely used than other approaches. This approach is also considered systematic and easier for the teacher. The main obvious disadvantage of this approach is that the lesson is teacher-centered and tends to leave the students in a passive state of learning.

2.11. Models of teaching English grammar

As technology evolves the models of foreign language teaching evolve. There are many models used for teaching English grammar, but the two most important models are the PPP Model and the TTT Model.

2.11.1. PPP Model

PPP model is the most prevalent model where PPP stands for *presentation, practice, and production* (Thornbury, 1999, p. 128). A lesson of this type of model has three main stages: in the first phase, one aspect of language or a grammar rule is introduced; the second stage is practice in which students with the help of the teacher are given an activity to practice the grammar rule introduced in the first stage; the final stage is production, where students use the grammar rule they learned in the first stages, but without the help of the teacher. This

type of model has had different criticisms because some authors think that dividing language learning into small steps can negatively influence the process (Council, 2007).

2.11.2. TTT Model

An alternative model to the PPP model is the TTT model. TTT stands for *task*, *teach*, and *task* (Thornbury, 1999, p. 129). Hamer has called this model the “ESA model” which stands for *engage*, *study*, and *activate* (Harmer, 1998, p. 30). In a typical TTT model based lesson, students perform a task without the help of the teacher; the teacher then introduces the grammar rule based on the mistakes the students have made; and the lesson ends with students doing another assignment and practising the grammar rule they learned. The TTT model is a useful model because it helps teachers identify the students' needs with regard to a certain grammar rule (Council, 2007).

3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate different methods, models, and approaches to English grammar teaching, and the importance of studying grammar in context. In order to give accurate answers to the research questions, data are collected by using qualitative and quantitative research methods, with the use of these instruments; interviews with teachers, and questionnaires with students. Additionally, the study is focused on two private secondary schools in Tirana.

In order to collect quantitative data a questionnaire consisting of five statements has been applied to 126 secondary school students. This study was conducted on 10-th grade students of two private secondary schools. There is a total of 126 participants from two secondary school, where 42% were male and 52% were female.

In order to collect qualitative data interviews consisting of eight questions were conducted with English language teachers of the students who participated in the questionnaire. In total five teachers who have been teaching English for several years were interviewed. The interview questions were about methods, approaches, and models of English grammar teaching.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Questionnaire

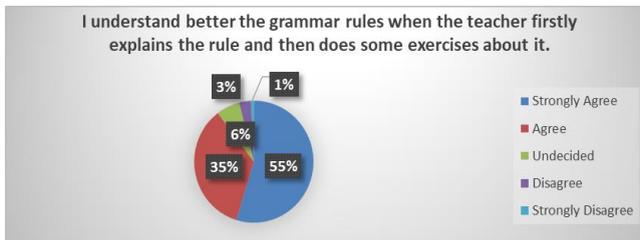


Figure 1

Students are asked to give their opinion about learning grammar rules. The results show that 55% of the students strongly agree to the fact that the students understand better the grammar rules when teacher firstly explains the rule and then does exercises about it, and 35% of them agree to it. The explanation of the grammatical rules at the beginning of the lesson and then their practice is part of the deductive approach. So from the results, we understand that the vast majority of the students prefer more or find more effective the deductive approach. Only 6% of the students are undecided, 3% disagree, and 1% strongly agree. Also in the interviews with teachers, three out of five stated that they use the deductive approach in grammar teaching.

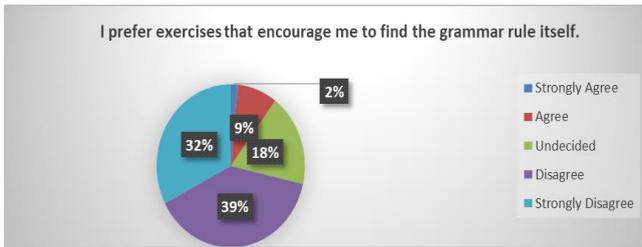


Figure 2

This question is related to inductive teaching. The inductive approach is a process in which students try to discover grammatical rules by referring to examples (Nunan, 1999). From the results we understand that only 2% of the students strongly agree and 9% agree, while 39%, that is, the vast majority, disagree with it as well as 32% strongly disagree with the statement. It reveals that the students prefer more the deductive approach.



Figure 3

As it is mentioned in the study, in the grammar-translation method the explanation of the grammatical rules is done in the native language. In this question, students are asked whether they understand the grammar rules better when they are explained in Albanian and the results show that most students agree to it (28% strongly agree and 29% agree). Whereas, 17% have chosen the option “Undecided”, 17% “Disagree”, and 9% “Strongly Disagree”. From interviews with the teachers, we notice that only one teacher out of five states that he/she uses the student's native language when explaining the grammatical rules.

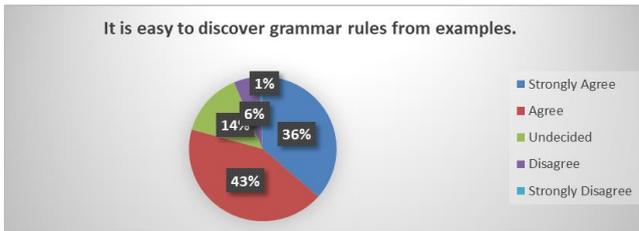


Figure 4

In these questions students are asked to give their opinion regarding the statement “*It is easy to discover grammar rules from examples*”. The majority of the students agree to this (36% strongly agree and 43% agree). Whereas, only 14% are undecided, 6% disagree and only 1 person counting 1% disagrees. The discovery of grammatical rules through examples is a practical part of the inductive approach.

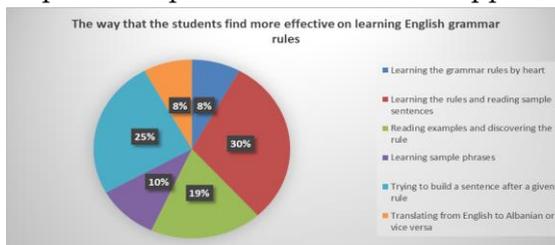


Figure 5

Many times, students do not know what is the most effective way to learn grammar rules. In this question students were asked to give their opinion on some different ways of learning grammar rules. From the results we understand that most of the students (30%) prefer to learn the grammar rule first and then read examples about it. Learning or explaining grammatical rules at the beginning of the lesson is part of the deductive approach. According to the result most of the students have stated that they find the explanation of the grammar rules at the beginning of the lesson more effective. Another part of the students, about 25%, say that they find more effective learning of grammar rules by heart and only 19%

prefer finding grammatical rules through examples. 10% have chosen the option “Learning sample phrases”, 8% “Trying to build a sentence after a given rule”, and only 8% have chosen “Translating from English to Albanian or vice versa”.

4.2. Interviews

As mentioned above, five teachers from two private secondary schools participated in this study through interviews. Two of them were female and three were male. Most of them have a five to ten years teaching experience while only one of them has 26 years of teaching experience. They were asked eight questions.

The teacher responded the second question, “*Do you teach English grammar to your students? Why?*” as follows;

All the teachers claimed that they teach English grammar because it is an inseparable part of English lessons as well as English coursebooks. Also, they stated that the students need to have a solid background of grammar because most of them enter different national and international exams.

The teachers responded the third question, “*Do you think teaching English grammar is important? Why?*” as follows;

All the teachers argued that teaching English grammar is important. They said that without grammar students cannot form correct sentences and cannot convey their ideas and messages in the right way. Even though one of them stated that the tendency nowadays is to forget grammar and teach only the language people speak.

In relation to the fourth question, “*Which of the English teaching methods do you use mostly in your classes?*” they gave responses as follows;

Four out of five teachers stated that they use direct teaching method in their classes. Only one of them said that she uses communicative approach in her English classes.

Regarding the fifth question, “*Do you apply Deductive Approach or Inductive Approach? Which of them do you find more effective for students and Why?*” they gave responses as follows;

Four out of five teachers claimed that they apply the deductive approach in their English classes. According to Nunan in deductive instruction, grammar rules are provided by the teacher at the beginning of the lesson (Nunan, 1999). Only one teacher said that she applies inductive approach because she finds deductive approach teacher-centered and everything is taught only by the teacher. It is interesting the fact that four out of five teachers did not explain why they found more effective the deductive approach.

About the sixth question, “*Do you use students’ first language while explaining grammar rules?*” they gave responses as follows;

All the teachers said that they do not use students’ first language in English lessons or while explaining grammar rules. For the seventh question, “*Are you familiar with PPP-Model and TTT-Model of teaching? If yes, which of them do you use in your English classes?*” the teachers as follows;

All the teachers stated that are familiar with PPP-Model and TTT-Model of teaching. Three out of five teachers said that they use PPP-Model of teaching in their English classes, and two teachers said that they use both models in their classes.

Regarding the last question, “*Do your students know basic rules of Present Simple, Present Continuous, and Past Simple? How well do you consider their skills?*” they responded as follows;

All of them stated that their students know basic rules of the above-mentioned tenses and they consider their skill to be good enough.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the different types of methods, approaches, and models of teaching English grammar. In this study, different methods of teaching such as Grammar-Translation, Audio-lingual, Direct, Total Physical Response and others were examined. Moreover, a special attention was paid to the inductive and deductive grammar teaching. In addition, the two most popular models of teaching were briefly mentioned; PPP Model and TTT Model.

In order to determine which of the above methods, approaches or models are used by the teachers and which of them is preferred by the students, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. In order to collect qualitative data, interviews with five English teachers were conducted and, and in order to collect quantitative data, a questionnaire with 126 students from two high schools in Tirana was conducted.

The research questions of this study were answered using the results obtained from the questionnaire and teachers' answers from the interviews. The findings have shown that all participants had a good background of English language. The answers of the questionnaire revealed that students all agree about the importance of grammar and they want to practice it more at school. Another conclusion reached as a result of the data analysis was that students prefer more deductive grammar teaching than inductive grammar teaching.

From the interviews with teachers, we realized that all teachers used the direct method of teaching. All teachers stated that they give importance to grammar in their English classes. Regarding the question, which of the approaches they use in their classrooms, four out of five teachers said that they use deductive approach without giving a reason why they think it is more effective. Only one of the teachers said that she used the inductive approach and considered the deductive approach as

teacher-centered. It is worth pointing out that Field says that the direct method used to teach grammar inductively through conversations or materials with cultural content (Field, 2000). Furthermore, two of the teachers indicated that they used both teaching models while three of them said they used only the PPP model.

As the final remark, it is interesting the fact that the teachers did not explain why they find deductive approach more effective than inductive approach. This study has limitations because it is conducted only in two high schools and only 126 students participated. Consequently, a possible further study may be conducted in order to get more detailed findings.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the fact that teaching English grammar is a very wide and important subject, a significant attention should be given to it. However, relying on the data and findings of this research, the following recommendations can be made:

1. There should be a more interactive learning in English classes, with more time to help students practice and develop their grammar skills;
2. Teachers must be given proper professional training opportunities for opening the doors of self-development; and
3. Teachers need to be given professional development training courses to make them aware of different methods and approaches to teaching English grammar.

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