Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher gives the review of related literature which focuses on the broad areas of teaching of the various aspects of teaching English language in general and Basic English grammar in particular. Though various research works have been found in the field of English language teaching both at international and national levels, no sufficient works have been found at the state level and also not a single work on the systematic study of Basic English grammar at the Barak Valley level could be traced so far as the knowledge of the researcher goes. However, some published and unpublished works related to grammar are reviewed here.

A language is based on two things: (i) Vocabulary and (ii) Grammar. Grammar is related to vocabulary which forms a sentence. According to David Wilkins (1972:III), “Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. Words are like the bricks of a building. So grammar and words are closely related. ‘Vocabulary’ means words and words are parts of speech and hence grammar. Thus ‘vocabulary’ is related to grammar.

2.1 Definitions of Grammar

Dictionary definitions of grammar often refer to it as the study of language as a system of words that demonstrate some apparent regularity of structure (morphology) and arrangement into sentence (syntax). Sometimes the definition
includes the pronunciation of words (phonology), meaning of words (semantics) and history of words (etymology). Some definitions emphasise grammar as a system of rules in a language. According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English (ed. A.S. Hornby), grammar means, “the rules in a language for changing the form of words and joining them into sentences.

As per Cambridge School Dictionary (ed. Melissa Good, Cambridge University Press), grammar means, “the way you combine words, and change their form and position in a sentence or the rules or study of this.”


Calidinn and Connelly (1986 as cited in Muhammed 2006) sustained that there are as many definitions as there are different beliefs and the mind. Some have defined grammar as a collection of rules where as some on the other hand think it is the way of understanding a language which is a big supplement to facilitate learning. According to a few, it is a way of communication and it helps the learners to communicate in the target language with others. A majority has defined grammar as structure, set of rules and regulation.

However, the main reason for learning grammar is because it helps one’s language abilities (Crystal 2004:7). There are four core linguistic domains in language learning: **Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing**. In all these, grammar serves a very important role (ibid:7). Grammar is the way to study the meaning of the language. (Ibid:9). Learning grammar can improve learners’ proficiency, correctness and contribute to developing fluency (Hinkel & Fotos 2002:10).
2.2 Historical background of grammar teaching

Importance of grammar teaching in second language teaching is well known. Long ago from the 15th century, there had been a long debate on the problems of teaching grammar effectively. For centuries, language has been synonymous with language teaching then the role of the grammar declined with the introduction of communicative language teaching (Thompson, 1996). At the beginning of 1970 the interest of real language teaching emerged and more interest was taken in social and cultural teaching of language. It proved to be a shift from audio-lingual and grammar translation methods to the exploration to communicative teaching of language. Hence integrative tasks were focused instead of discrete structures.

Teaching grammar has always been a matter of controversy especially in second language acquisition as Thornbury (1999 p.14 as cited in Neupane 2009) says, “in fact no other issue has pre-occupied theorists and practitioners as the grammar debate and the history of language teaching is essentially the history of claims and counter claims for and against the teaching of grammar”.

2.3 Beliefs about teaching grammar and its influence

The main difference in grammar teaching methods is due to teachers’ different views about the role of grammar. According to the historic overview of the role of grammar, Bygate et.al. (1994 as cited in Neupane 2009) says that in the light of the centuries old tradition of language teaching dominated by Latin and Greek, the study of language is mainly the study of its grammar. In old times, grammar has the central role in structural linguistics. According to wilkins (1972
as cited in Bygate et.al. 1994 as cited in Neupane, 2009) the aim of the language teacher is to enable the people to learn it. Some people have a view that grammar teaching is not essential because it does not facilitate second language acquisition. Krashen and Terrel (1983, P. 144 as cited in Neupane, 2009) are in favour of this idea when they say, “We prefer to avoid oral grammar instruction in class rooms simply because they take time away from acquisition activities. Whereas others own the view that it is essential to teach grammar”. Ur (1996 as cited in Gnawali et.al. 2001 as cited in Neupane 2009) has similar views.

Savvidou (2004) also believes that communication cannot take place without structure or grammar. Ellis (2003 as cited in Mahammad, 2006) among others argues that in order to achieve the objective of communicative competence, grammar and communication should have to be integrated.

Many like Weaver, Nally and Moermen (Voices from the Middle, Volume 8 Number 3, March, 2001) believe that grammar must be taught through writing and effective grammatical skills cannot be developed without it. Teacher must take risks in order to motivate students in writing activities in place of just giving them grammar exercises and grammar concepts can be taught by helping the students to edit their grammatical structures in their written work.

In most East Asian countries English language is taught through traditional teacher-centred, book-centred, grammar-translation method and a strong emphasis is given on note learning (Liu & little wood 1997 as cited in Rao Zhenhui, 2001) in his article ‘Matching teaching styles with learning styles in East Asian context). Due to this traditional approach, teachers adopt an introvert learning styles and
students think knowledge something to be taught explicitly and transmitted by their teachers rather than to be explored and interpreted by themselves. For Asian students, grammar is an essential tool in building confidence, language knowledge and fluency. (Krashen, 1982, cited in Vasilopoulos, 2008).

2.4 Grammar teaching in ESL/EFL classes

Grammar teaching in ESL/EFL classes has been a topic of heated debate, triggering issues like “should we teach grammar?” “which grammar should we teach?” and “should grammar be taught explicitly or implicitly?” (Ellis, 2006, p. 83-84). Although grammar teaching might be defined in a narrower aspect as reference to traditional grammar-translation type of “presenting and explaining grammar (Ur1996)”. Or “presenting or practising grammar (Hedge 2000), it could also be viewed in broader term (Ellis 2006 P. 84): “Grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners’ attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it”.

In this broader perspective, much recent research such as Norris and Ortega’s (2000) meta analysis of 49 studies and Ellis’ (2002) research (as cited in Ellis 2006, p. 85) have advocated grammar teaching for its effectiveness in second language teaching. According to Ellis (2006), “there is now convincing direct and indirect evidence to support the teaching of grammar (P86)”. It has also been widely agreed that meaning-focused, “descriptive grammar” (Celce-Murcia and Larsen- Freeman, 1999) or functional grammar for communicative uses of
language should be the centre of attention in ESL/EFL classes (Van Patten, Williams & Rott 2004: Ellis, 2006) in contrast to the traditional form-focused grammar.

However, deciding “which grammar to teach” and “how to teach” have remained more controversial. Some have claimed that only minimal concepts of grammar should be taught while others have argued for the necessity of teaching the entire grammar.

2.5 Review of Some Grammar Books

The present study is based on teaching Basic English in Barak Valley. Hence some grammar books which are available in Barak Valley need to be reviewed. With this end in view, the researcher visited some famous book stalls of Barak Valley and collected these grammar books which are normally sold by them and followed by the students and teachers of Barak Valley.

The books are as follows:


It is found that Bengali medium students and majority of their teachers in Barak Valley do not follow Grammar books written by foreign writers. They follow books written by Bengali writers.
The researcher has consulted all the above books for review and noted some problems in some of the above books which are discussed below.

In Hailakandi, Karimganj and Cachar, it has been found that majority of the students are from Bengalee community. Bengali is the major language in Barak Valley. Side by side Manipuri, Hindi speaking, a few Khasi, Naga and Reang students are reading in the Colleges of these three districts. But the common language is Bengali and that also is the Sylheti dialect of Bengali. So almost all the students know Bengali and some of them studied in Bengali Medium Schools. Hence Bengali medium students follow English Grammar written in Bengali Language or the books which are Anglo-Bengali. Of course, English Medium Students follow Grammar written in English only.

As per information collected, it has been found that a very few undergraduate students purchase the Grammar book prescribed by Assam University. They fully depended on the commercial note books available in the market which are below standard and full of mistakes. As a result, many students fail in the subject and majority of the students get very poor marks in General English. It is also collected from the students that they purchased Grammar books while they were at Schools but they did not read those Grammar books and they depended on the teachers in Schools and in private tuition. Same is the situation when they are at under graduate level. They engage private tutors for English and many of them are not expert in Grammar.

Moreover, there are some Grammar books in which some wrong expressions are found. There is a book named ‘Middle School Grammar’ which was followed
by many students at Middle School level and which is still considered a good Grammar book. It was written in 1931 in simple Bengali of those days and it was not revised. In this book, some expressions like ‘Fill up the blanks, I am seeing, We are seeing’ are found. In Practical English Exercise II (OUP) by A. J. Thomson and A.V. Martinet there is use of expression ‘Fill up the spaces’. In A Text Book of Higher English Grammar and Composition, the expression ‘Fill up the blanks’ is used many times in this book. In this book, there is some confusion in transformation of simple sentences into compound sentences. For example, the simple sentence ‘He is both tall and strong’ is transformed to ‘He is not only tall but also strong’ as compound sentence. The compound sentences must have two coordinate clauses i.e. they should be independent. But here in the compound sentence, only one finite verb is there and clauses are not independent. ‘He is not only tall’ does not give complete sense. And ‘but also strong’ is related to the first part of the sentence. Hence it cannot be a compound sentence. It remains a simple sentence. The compound sentence should be either ‘He is tall and he is strong’ or ‘He is tall as well as he is strong’. In the year 1995, in Assam University General English question paper, the sentence ‘Fill up the blanks’ was given in first question for correction. It means that the sentence is wrong and that was to be corrected. The correct answer is ‘Fill in the blanks’. ‘Fill up’ is used elsewhere i.e. in the vertical situation e.g. Fill up the bottle with water or fill up the post with suitable candidate. This is exclusively the opinion of the researcher because vertical and horizontal situations make the use of ‘fill in’ and ‘fill up’ justified and clear to the students and teachers.
Again some verbs which do not take continuous forms are also used as progressive verb. In some of the above books, some verbs are mentioned which do not take continuous forms but the reason is not explained. In some exceptional cases, a few verbs can be used in progressive form but it was not mentioned in majority of the above books. When the verb ‘hope’ is used in continuous form, it means the negative sense eg. ‘I am hoping’ or ‘I was hoping’ indicates ‘less hope’ i.e. negative sense. This is only explained in Practical English Usage by Michael Swan but not a single under graduate student knows the name of this book. High School English Grammar and Composition by Wren & Martin is a good book but this is followed by the teachers and a very few students. Scholar Junior and Senior English Grammar by T.R. Bannot and H. Martin are followed by English medium students and some other medium Students. In this book, there are nine parts of speech instead of eight parts of speech where ‘Determiners’ are also shown a part of speech. ‘Determiners’ are adjectives and hence it is not necessary to separate them as another part of speech.

‘The Most Common Mistakes in English Language’ is a book by Thomas Elliott Berry which deals with common mistakes in English but the researcher found that no students know the name of the book. Some under graduate students who studied in English Medium Schools have mentioned the names of two Grammar books namely, ‘Scholar Junior and Senior English Grammar’ by T.R. Bannot and H. Martin and ‘High School Grammar and Composition’ by Wren and Martin but they are also not fully aware of Basic English grammar.
First of all, there are two varieties of English namely, British and American. In India and other parts of the world, the British English is used as official language. Again in British English also there are dialects and ‘East Midland dialect’ is the standard variety which is the standard language of England and followed by India and other parts of the world. In Grammar books available in Barak Valley, there is no discussion about this. Hence students are not aware of this basic thing which they must know at least at the undergraduate level. The most important thing is that some of the Grammar books followed by students of Barak Valley are written not by the qualified teachers of English who are experts in this field. Some local publishers are doing business out of this kind of books. These publishers convince some of the teachers in English someway or other and sell these Grammar books very tactfully. These Grammar books are prescribed by these teachers for their personal benefit. As a result, students are not getting the original and genuine Grammar books which are available.

From the class room teaching experience for the last thirty years and considering the problems faced by students and the need of the students, the researcher wrote a Grammar book named ‘Basic English Grammar and Composition’ (Anglo-Bengali) which is being considered helpful by many of the teachers teaching English Grammar at various levels for which the book is being followed by a number of students. The book starts from Alphabet and covering all Basic grammars ends with some Basic English compositions. The book has only 192 pages. The main attraction of the book is that the author has tried his best to explain the chapters in a very simple way with some techniques wherever possible. In this book, the difference between American English and British English is
discussed in a very brief way. Moreover, there is discussion on the dialects in British English and the dialect that is used as Standard English.

2.6 Review of Dictionaries

Oxford Advance Learners’ Dictionary by A.S. Hornby is internationally famous and available in Barak Valley and many students & teachers follow this Dictionary. This Dictionary also serves the purpose of Grammar including vocabulary. In this renowned Dictionary also, there are some anomalies. The definition of ‘Crore’ was given – noun (Ind E) ten million, one hundred LAKHS. The word LAKH was also shown as a noun but ‘Hundred, thousand and Million’ are shown as number and in their plural, ‘s’ is not used. As per English Grammar, the words ‘Lakh’ and ‘Crore’ should not have ‘s’ in their plural as they are also numbers. Numbers are determiners and hence adjectives. So while ‘hundred’, ‘thousand’ and ‘million’ are shown as number, ‘Lakh’ and ‘Crore’ are shown as noun. According to English Grammar all these words are both noun and adjective. The words ‘Lakh and Crore’ are basically Indian words and they appeared in this dictionary first in its 7th Edition and then continued in its 8th edition also. The researcher contacted the Dictionary authority in October, 2011 and Diana Lea, the Principal Editor, ELT Dictionaries, Oxford University Press admitted the anomalies. She thanked the researcher and assured to correct it in its next print. It is a great pleasure and achievement of the researcher that a few months back, the New Eighth Edition of this dictionary came in the market and it is found that the anomalies are corrected. In the New 8th Edition the changes are as follows:
Crore – number (Pl. verb) (Plural Crore or Crores) (IndE) ten million, one hundred LAKH.

Lakh - number (plural verb) Plural Lakh or Lakhs (IndE) a hundred thousand.

But one explanation is not still there. In direct expression i.e. two lakh or two crore, ‘s’ is not used in plural. But ‘s’ is used in expressions like ‘lakhs of people’ or ‘crores of money’ as hundreds of people or thousands of rupees or ‘millions of people’. The letters to the Principal Editor, Diana Lea and her reply through email are attached in the appendices.

In ‘Chamber’s 20th Century Dictionary’ edited by E M Kirkpatrick, Lakh is also spelt as Lac and Crore is defined as Ten millions or One hundred lakhs. Here we find that ‘s’ is used in the plural of Lakh and Million which is wrong as per rules of grammar.

2.7 Review of Some Research Works

Anima Baishya’s unpublished PhD research work submitted to Assam University entitled “The Pedagogical Implications of English Vocabulary Items for Assamese Medium Learners with special reference to Kamrup District (2007)” is an attempt to study vocabulary along with some grammar items like vowels, consonants, pronunciation, verbs noun relation, prefix, suffix (for word formation), present, past and present participle form of the verbs, synonyms, homonyms, comparative form of the words etc. The study focuses on the implications of pedagogy in a systematic and organised manner in order to improve the pathetic condition of students regarding the knowledge of English language as teaching and learning English and its vocabulary are unsatisfactory in
Assamese medium schools. The study tries to contribute to the field of English vocabulary teaching in Assamese medium schools.

Although she touches various aspects of grammar as mentioned earlier but these are related to vocabulary studies only. Of course, she mentioned the grammatical factors of a word which relates to different parts of speech. Her entire thesis is based on vocabulary and other linguistic related matters. The researcher has not found any systematic grammatical discussions in her research work. However, her work is a major attempt to study vocabulary along with some grammatical relations.

N. Dasgupta’s unpublished PhD research work submitted to Gauhati University entitled “Vocabulary: A study (1975)” is also an attempt to study vocabulary. He has shown how important vocabulary is in teaching English along with the criteria of selection and gradation of teaching English vocabulary. He tried to locate the problem of the hypothetical gap that exists between the students of the age level 12(plus) reading in non-English medium schools in Meghalaya. He tired to prepare the glossaries of English words containing the weight of each word and the difficulty value of each word in respect of class VI. He discussed the theoretical background of words, its nature and growth. But his work is fully based on vocabulary itself and the Basic grammar on the basis of the words are not discussed in his work. But his work is also a major attempt to study vocabulary but not related to grammar studies in detail.

“Conceptions of Grammar Teaching : A case study of teacher’s belief and class room practices” by Thomas S.C. Farrel, LIM Poh Choo Patricia
published in TESL-Ej Sept. 2005, is a case study that investigated and compared the beliefs and actual classroom practices of two experienced English language teachers with regard to grammar teaching in primary school in Singapore. Areas where practices converged with or diverged from belief about grammar teaching are examined and discussed as well as factor that have influenced the teachers’ actual classroom practices. The findings suggest that teachers do indeed have a set of complex belief systems that are sometimes not reflected in their classroom practices for various complicated reasons, some directly related to context of teaching.

The case study of the beliefs of two experienced primary school teachers and their actual instructional practices in grammar teaching attempted to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the two teachers’ belief about the way grammar should be taught in primary schools? (2) What are their actual classroom practices of teaching grammar. Both the teachers agreed that grammar is important and has to be taught. Students need to know grammar rules and how to apply them in their writing. Drilling is a useful tool in grammar teaching. Grammar involved teaching language structures. The approaches to grammar teaching depend largely on the students’ proficiency level in the English language. One teacher agreed that grammar is concerned with using correct tenses. There is a place for deliberate teaching of grammar for the effective teaching of language items.

Both the Teachers agreed that the teaching of grammar is crucial in order to enable students to use grammar structures correctly in written work. Furthermore,
one teacher said that she would not hesitate to directly re-teach grammar structure if she discovered that her students had not fully understood the structure and were not able to use it correctly in speech and writing. Both the teachers strongly believe in providing grammar drills for their students. However, both the teachers adopted somewhat of a traditional approach to grammar teaching.

Here the researcher has found that the basis of research is primary school and its two teachers’ opinion regarding teaching of grammar. But the present research is based on teaching English at under graduate level. It is a question whether English grammar should be taught at degree level or not. According to the opinion of the researcher, drilling of grammar is important and hence Basic English grammar should be taught at degree level also. As a result, the students of this level will have the chance to update their knowledge of English grammar which is very essential for writing and speaking correct English.

The main reason for learning grammar is because it helps one’s language abilities (Crystal 2004:7). There are four core linguistic domains in language learning: **listening, speaking, reading and writing.** In all these, grammar serves a very important role (Ibid: 7). Grammar is the way to study the meaning of the language (Ibid:9). Learning grammar can improve learners’ proficiency, correctness and ease internalization of its syntactic system and contribute to developing fluency (Hinkel and Fotos 2002:10).

A recent study of Norris and Ortega (2000) undertook probably the most comprehensive analysis of published data on the value of grammar instruction. These authors stated that in many cases it is not easy to tell whether
communicative, explicit or meaning-focused instruction led to greater degrees of L2 learning acquisition because of the disparate sample sizes and statistical analyses employed in various research studies and publications. Thus to make sense of research findings published in past two decades, Norris and Ortega standardized the results of 49 studies on L2 learning acquisition and grammar instruction.

**English Teaching with grammar : A study on how English teachers at upper secondary school in Sweden use grammar in their teaching (2002 Rebeca Ronna):** It aims to investigate how English teachers at upper higher secondary schools in Sweden use grammar in their teaching and how their attitudes towards grammar affect how they use it in their teaching. To examine this, qualitative interviews were conducted with three English teachers. The result of these interviews showed that the teachers’ attitude towards grammar have great impact on their teaching. The two teachers who had positive views used deductive grammar teaching with the students and also worked with focus on form, while the teacher who did not like grammar had no formal grammar teaching and only let her students work with grammar using games and quizzes on the internet.

The consequence is that those without any grammar teaching might encounter difficulties if they continue studying English at a higher level. It is important for teachers to keep up recent research that has proved that students perform and learn better from formal teaching.

**How grammar matters in NNS Academic Writing. The relationship between Verb Tense and Aspect usage patterns and L2 writing proficiency in**
Academic Discourse”. By Kyung Eun Min - a thesis submitted to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 2013.

This study focuses on English verb tense and aspect system that would give direction to the study and ultimately suggest how grammar teaching should be treated in ESL writing courses.

This thesis addresses the significance of teaching grammar in ESL/EFL academic writing courses by restating the question of “Whether or not to teach grammar” to “how and when to teach which grammar”. The study aimed to investigate whether the usage of verb tense and aspect would have a positive relationship with the students’ language proficiency. Although it was possible to hypothesise that more proficient students would have better knowledge of verb tense and aspect and use more variety of verb structures, the results strongly suggested that grammatical knowledge represented by the NNS usage patterns of verb tense and aspect system was not an only factor; rather, the analysis of students writing samples highlighted the role of academic discourse as a significant variable to the frequency of each verb structure. Moreover, the error analysis of students’ writing samples implied that merely counting the frequency rate of ‘correct uses’ or ‘avoided uses/ non uses’ did not fully reflect their L2 writing proficiency; it seemed to have close relationship with their knowledge of more variety of functions each verb tense and aspect and their ability to make opportune uses of each function for the appropriate content. Put in another way, these findings suggested that patterns of using English verb tense and aspect was relevant to the students’ L2 writing proficiency because higher level students were able to
incorporate grammatical knowledge to the paper’s purpose, contents and its
discourse register. Thus this study concludes by proposing that grammar is neither
an opposing component of “contents” when teaching L2 academic writing nor a
competent factor against “structure of coherence” when assessing students’ writing
proficiency. It would be most ideal and reasonable to choose grammar content that
does not stand alone but have significance in meaning, function and purpose as
they merge into the entire writing process.

**Conclusion**

The researcher has tried his best to trace the research works related to this
present research work entitled “Teaching English at under graduate level in Barak
Valley districts of Assam with special emphasis on Basic English Grammar”. The
above are some of the research works related to English language teaching as well
as grammar teaching which have been reviewed. But not a single work has been
found on the systematic study of English grammar at the Barak Valley level. So
this is a unique research work on the part of the researcher which will help the
teachers, students, the future researchers and the others concerned with it.