

INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES OF TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR AT SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract: Learning English grammar is always a difficult process to most of the English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners at secondary school level. Innovative ideas, interesting teaching materials, practicing and drilling learners for learning the English grammar should be done through fun and joyful ways. The main aim of this library study was to identify and describe examples of practical grammar instruction methods in an EFL which employed innovative methodologies. The process of the library-based research involves identifying and locating relevant information, analyzing what has been found, and then developing and expressing the ideas. The results revealed that songs and poems, music, games, and tasks can be employed as tools in the classroom. Using innovative methodologies in teaching English grammar in the classroom at the secondary schools has paved a positive way to students to learn the language meaningfully.

Keywords: *innovative techniques, teaching English grammar, secondary schools*

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is “the way a language manipulates and combines words (or bits of words) in order to form larger units of meaning” (Ur, 1988, p. 141). Grammar is undeniably an essential component of effective communication (Vijayalakshmi, 2014). Ellis (2006) suggests that grammar has kept on holding a central place in EFL teaching.

However, both native and second-language speakers get difficulties in learning English grammar since there are a great number of intricate, obscure, and exceptional grammatical rules (Macfadyen, 2015). EFL students find this aspect of language the most difficult (Ahmad, 2018).

The grammar lessons at the secondary schools have the unfortunate reputation of being boring. They rely on traditional presentation methods, using the textbook and generalized fill-in-the-blanks exercises (Fischer, 20102). The study of grammar has only enhanced knowledge about the English language but does not facilitate learners of EFL on how to use the language. This theoretical knowledge of the rules of grammar, however, is not going to be of any help for the learners. Instead, the students should be taught to understand how to use the grammar rules in a communicative situation (Vijayalakshmi, 2014).

It is therefore suggested that EFL teachers should implement the *creative and attractive ways in teaching grammar* which make the *grammar* lesson interesting. They should link each grammar point’s function

in a concrete situation or scenario where the learners may possibly apply it, for instance, when buying a bus ticket/giving dating advice/asking for directions/etc. Once the learners can imagine how/when/where they themselves might use the grammar point. In this instance, it is more likely they will give it a try on their own.

Innovative Techniques of Teaching English Grammar

Teaching of grammar refers to methods, i.e. systematic ways of grammar teaching, that are used to help learners develop competence in an unfamiliar grammar. The methods are comprised of the description and analysis of particular forms and structures of a language. The teaching of grammar includes teacher talk (a type of language used by the teacher for instruction in the classroom), learning aids, and practices (Mesthrie et al., 2009: 348). Furthermore, the teaching helps learners to be aware of specific and 'correct' language properties (Ruin, 1996:99). Therefore, teaching of grammar can be defined as instructional techniques used to help learners pay attention to grammatical features.

The following presents some *innovative* ideas that will help EFL teachers reinvent their grammar *teaching methods* and make their classes interesting. Vijayalakshmi (2014) suggests including songs and poems, music, games, and tasks in the teaching of grammar.

Using songs and poems

Songs are one of the most enchanting and culturally rich resources that can easily be used in language classrooms (Puasa, 2008). Songs provide an alternative classroom activity. They are resourceful tools to enhance the learners' abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They constitute an authentic and meaningful material telling a story, or providing insights about life, or introduce cultural themes. They can also be used to teach a variety of language items, for instance, pronunciation, vocabulary, sentence patterns, and so forth. Learning English grammar through songs provides an enjoyable and relaxing classroom atmosphere for the learners. They may encourage extensive and intensive listening, and inspire creativity and use of imagination in the relaxed classroom atmosphere (Alinte, 2013).

Utilization of songs for grammatical points can be revealed through the following popular songs. They are as follows: (1) *Let It Be* by the Beatles (Present Tense), (2) *Yesterday* by the Beatles (Past Tense), (3) *Sailing* by Rod Stewart (Present Progressive), (4) *Nothing Compares to You* by Sinéad O'Connor (Present Perfect), (5) *Last Night I Had...* by Simon and Garfunkel (Past Perfect), (6) *Right Here Waiting* by Richard Marx (Future Progressive), (7) *I've Been Waiting for You* by Guys Next Door (Present Perfect Progressive), (8) *Blowing in the Wind* by Bob Dylan or *It Must Have Been Love* by Roxette (Modal Auxiliaries), and (9) *El Condor Pasa* by Simon and Garfunkel (Conditionals).

Similar to songs, poems have an enormous linguistic value as they provide authenticity and cultural views. Poems contextualize a grammar lesson effectively. They serve as an effective tool for practicing a specific grammatical structure, in particular, a poem that exemplifies a particular structure, such as jazz chants (Graham, 1978).

In presenting a poem to the learners, after the poem has been read at least twice, it is better to elicit the primary responses of the students about the poem. Next, after distributing the poem to students, students may be asked to read it either loudly or silently. In order to practice the determined grammar point, students may be asked to paraphrase the poem. Through transforming the verse into prose students get acquainted with the structure.

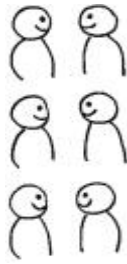
Furthermore, the students can work in groups and share ideas on certain projects, but include solo activities that encourage them to find their own unique meanings of a particular grammatical pattern in song lyrics, poems, stories, and other literature as well (Jandhyala, 2018).

Simpson (2018) suggests a successful song-based English grammar lesson. To plan for the use of songs in class, the teacher should: (1) *carefully examine what it is the teacher wants his or her class to learn in the lesson (e.g. to exemplify a particular verb tense)*, (2) *think about the language level of his or her class*, (3) *consider the learners' age*, (4) *consider specific cultural issues*, and (4) *think of kind of access he or she has to the song*. To present the song, the teacher should: (1) listen to the song to simply enjoy the music, (2) ask some questions about the title, (3) listen to the song again, this time with lyrics, (4) focus on a particular verb tense or aspect of grammar, (5) focus on vocabulary, idioms and expressions, and (6) round things off with some creativity.

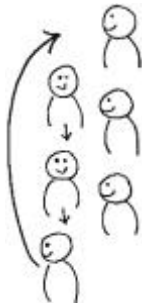
The students' creativity can be developed through: (1) writing another verse of lyrics maintaining the same mood and style as the original which can be done individually or in groups, (2) writing a response (this can be a paragraph, i.e., not necessarily in lyric form) from the point of view of the person the song is being sung about, or any other protagonist., (3) having the learners plan a music video for the song in groups, (4) writing a diary entry for a character in the song to examine the thoughts and feelings that inspired the story being played out in the lyrics (Simpson, 2018).

Heyer (2019) provides an example of teaching the future tense with "gonna". It uses two songs, "I'm Gonna Love You" (Meghan Trainor, 2015) or "When I'm Gone" (Anna Kendrick, 2012). The official videos for both songs are appropriate for most classrooms. However, they show romantic kisses, so previewing is advised. In addition, a reference to whiskey in the lyrics may make this song inappropriate for some classes; otherwise, both the song and video are classroom-friendly. Both songs provide examples the use of "gonna" in informal speech to substitute for *going to* in future-tense sentences only. The song "I'm Gonna Love You" repeats the phrase *I'm gonna* 21 times; the song "When I'm Gone" repeats the phrase *you're gonna* 20 times. To teach the grammatical item, the so-called Moving Line activity as presented below gives students multiple opportunities to practice this construction. First, ask several students, "What are you gonna do after class?" (or *this evening, this weekend, tomorrow*, etc.) to model the exercise and make sure students understand how *gonna* is used. Then follow the steps below. This low-prep activity facilitates a lot of interaction in a short amount of time and gets students up and out of their seats. It is highly recommended. The Moving line activity can take several steps. They are:

- (1) Divide the class into two groups of equal numbers. Students form two lines facing one another.



- (2) Students ask the student facing them, “What are you gonna do after class?” The student answers, “I’m gonna _____ . What are you gonna do after class? The student then answer, “I’m gonna _____ . The *one* line shifts position so that each student has a new partner. (The person at the end of the moving line moves to the beginning of the line.)



- (3) Students exchange the same information with their new partners. (Having students recite the same lines with each partner, like actors in a play, keeps the activity—literally—moving along. The activity is not boring because students hear new information from each partner.) Then they shift positions again.
- (4) The students in the moving line continue to interact with new partners and then move on. The activity concludes when the students in the moving line are back in their original positions <<https://sandraheyersongs.com/grammar-songs/>>.

Using games

Using games is a very interesting method of teaching for students, in particular young ones (Danarti, 2008). They generally tend to like and play games better than sitting down to study. Traditional methods dictated for study and games to be separate but the fact remains that the students tend to be more interested in playing games rather than sitting down to study. Learning with games will usually be engaging for the students (Anburaj, 2014).

The games can be utilized to learn grammar. To understand the meaning of a particular structural pattern and to use them in day to day life is a very difficult task and games can help the students overcome this difficulty. Games like scrabble, housie etc. have been designed for this specific purpose. These games are just based on words and help the students develop their vocabulary as well. In

addition to these very simple games can be played to help improve the word database of the students such as simple dictation competitions, synonym competitions, words puzzles, anagrams and hangman (Anburaj, 2014).

Fischer (2012) suggests several techniques and technological tools are used in his classes to help students learn to utilize and integrate grammar points and skills. First, the students are introduced to set expressions that allow them to initiate communication with one another. Then they are introduced to the verbs and adjectives that are typically used to reveal nationality, profession, personality traits, size). They have many opportunities to practice the grammar point orally and in writing. Once they have had some practice, the students are taken to the lab to complete the assignment using e-cards in a site and complete it during their lab hour. After they access the site they work on the assignment using the grammar point. In this case, they are required to describe themselves in an e-card to a new friend. Then they send the e-cards their teacher for grading as a writing exercise.

Using tasks

Task-Based Language Teaching (henceforth, TBLT) is one of these teaching methods and deals with grammar teaching through communicative use of the language. Essentially, it tries to let learners use the language effectively. Learning grammar can be used by assigning tasks. Introducing various tasks would provide students with exposures on the use of language in real-life situations by engaging them in doing many activities in the classroom (Anil, 2017). The advantage to task based instruction over traditional grammar instruction is that accomplishing a language task is more like real life language situations than performing grammar exercises.

The tasks used in the classroom are divided into two groups as pedagogical tasks and target tasks. Pedagogical tasks are precision made classroom tasks in which learners perform communicative tasks limited to the classroom environment. They require interaction among the students and the usage of language functions, however, the ultimate aim is to complete the task. Errors are tolerated (Nunan, 2004). The task asks help the students learn something on their own and most of the times they have to research on something then write something up on it, modify something that already exists and link to the base knowledge and data. This will lead to boost their creativity and also helps them overcome their difficulty creating completely new. Invention is very difficult especially when they are being forced to do it. In this way the students are not forced to complete the assignment and then they can do it whole heartedly and hence complete the learning experience that can be gained from the assignment (Anburaj, 2014).

Verner (2019) suggests several steps to take to teach a task-based grammar lesson. They are: (1) choose a goal for the grammar teaching, (2) identify the necessary grammar competencies, (3) introduce the lesson, (4) students perform the task- encourage students to use language fluently even if it comes at the cost of accuracy, and (5) Students Self-Evaluate- give students some time to reflect on how they accomplished that task. Let them discuss the activity in the groups they performed the task in. Have students write out how they accomplished the language goal, whether they used the grammatical structures you presented or not,

and what other strategies they used. Then have the groups share with the rest of the class how they accomplished their goals either orally or in writing.

Using story telling

Everyone loves a story. Stories form a very integral part of teaching a language (Anburaj et.al., 2014). They provide a realistic context for presenting grammar points (Rini, 2008). It can be used for both eliciting and illustrating grammar points. Storytelling is traditional and pervasive in almost all cultures. Storytelling is one of the versatile techniques to be employed as a convenient and natural grammar teaching tool. It is the technique that best makes the EFL learners stay focused as well as the one they enjoy most. Grammar points can be contextualized in stories which are engaging and entertaining. At this point the learners can help create stories and impersonate characters in them. They will also enjoy learning about grammar through the stories.

Fischer (2012) suggests the teachers to employ a program called Voki. This program allows a person to create an animated character (avatar) and to give it their own voice. It enables the students to create a graphic representation of themselves or an alter ego and then speak through it. This exercise requires the students to complete it in the language lab. Similar to the e-cards, it can be accessed through any computer anywhere once they have the username and password after having been showed how to access the site and then create their own avatar and speak a few lines in the target language. Once the students have created their avatar they have to record themselves say three sentences in the language using three subject pronouns and three – are verbs to demonstrate their understanding of the grammar point which w/verb agreements.

Furthermore, Fischer puts forward a teaching technique to instruct grammar points which uses is comics and comic strips and then to access a comic generating site. The teacher requires to select comic strips that show the grammar point in a familiar medium. The strips are an alternate teaching strategy whose main purpose is to help students think about material presented during class. The strips are also authentic because they are short they are easy to read and not overwhelming as dialogues sometimes can be. The main comics that are used are Mafalda (a strip featuring a little girl from Argentina), Condorito (a strip where the main character is an anthropomorphic Condor from Chile), and North American comics that have been translated into Spanish are also presented. Because comic strips are cultural constructs, the humor is not always easily understood; therefore, a brief explanation is given before they are presented. Initially, the students read the strips, and once they realize that they understand the use of the grammar in context, they begin to get excited and motivated for the next step. At this point the students can be assigned to create their own three panel comic strip featuring the grammar point. They are shown how to access the MakeBeliefsComix.com website, a comic generating site.

Using other media

Media helps to kindle the learning interest of learners. The computer tools like internet, audio or video clips help learners to interact or listen to the native speakers; this increases the morale of learners. Using video, audio clippings in the classroom is a stimulus for students to communicate about anything interesting

(Anil, 2017). Multimedia sources like songs, movies, TV series, magazines, newspapers play a very vital role in improving language. Such sources can be used it is very important that the students understand that fact so that they to help the students improve their language. But great precautions must be taken. They use colloquial English which is, in general, grammatically wrong and do not use that form of the language in their everyday usage. However, the students can very often engage with songs and movies. Through them, they can understand the meaning of expressions, usage of tools of the language like comparisons, personifications etc. These sources help them understand why such tools are necessary and also help them understand their usage. These innovative ideas the entire learning and the teaching process is enriched and guarantees a success in efficient learning. These are some of the innovative and creative ways of teaching the English Language (Anburaj, 2014).

All in all, EFL teachers should think of new and varied activities to empower students to face many real challenges in their future life. Such activities make students to think and react proactively, innovatively and confidently. This is supported by Richards (2001) who suggests that teachers should motivate students and provide situation to develop self-confidence among them. Other benefits as put forward by Scrivener (2007) are as follows: (1) Students' creativity can be developed, (2) narrative skill is enhanced, (3) English communicative skill can be developed, (4) story narration in an interesting way will grab the attention of the classmates, and (5) confidence and moral can be developed. In this way, the teacher supports students in a positive way.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, English grammar has been taught through chalk and board method. It has to be taught in innovative and creative way that it will help students not just to speak and write and listen but to communicate through various engaging activities that emphasize form-meaning, mappings for day-today communication. That is the purpose of the teaching of English grammar and that is what it must be used for. Innovative methods, therefore, help in bringing a change and most of the times for the better. It helps the students learn faster and in an efficient, interesting and an interactive manner and it is the teacher's responsibility to leave the traditional methods and make way for new and better methods for the students benefit. Using innovative methodologies in teaching English grammar in the classroom will pave a positive way to students to learn the language meaningfully. The suggestion for further study, the grammar emphasis with a limited scope may be more effective; input enhancement may be more effective with grammatical features that are less essential for communication (redundant, systematic, and less salient features such as past -ed); output enhancement may be more effective with grammatical features that have many salient lexical forms (e. g., past irregular); and learners in EFL contexts can benefit more from grammar instruction.

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