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Grammar and Grammar Teaching: Changing Perspectives Volume 2

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Grammar and Style in Media Language

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Abstract

Communication skills are imperative for a successful career. Communication skills are different from fluency skill in the language we learn to speak. A skilled communicator should have excellence in all the four major skills. Communication skills with proper grammar add to the image of an individual. He or she is seen to possess able personality.

English teachers are charged with the responsibility for improving the grammatical skills of students. They can help improve the grammatical skills of students by engaging them in Activity-based grammar teaching through media. Grammar is a problem for our students. Students get nervous if the teacher utters the word *grammar*, so language teachers have to find

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effective means to teach grammar and avoid involving them in gloomy drills and imposing on them rules regarding grammar.

Many grammar-oriented conferences and seminars focus on teaching through media. Media is a combo of print, sound, art, video, and blogs. Media is not only used as an entertaining tool but also as an educational tool which helps the students in their language learning. To make the teaching even more interesting to the students, a teacher can use the most popular, cheaper, a better medium, namely, newspapers. Reading habit, especially newspaper reading, is in decline. Newspapers can be used as an efficient tool to improve the skills of the students. Use of newspaper in teaching will motivate the students and help them to sharpen their LSRW skills.

This paper focuses on the grammar and style used in media language, and on teaching grammar in an easy way using newspapers. The findings of the paper throw light upon the activities which have not been tested upon the students so far in improving their skills.

Introduction – Activity-based Grammar Teaching-Learning

We do not learn grammar to supplement our use of the mother tongue while acquiring our mother tongue. We just adapt our mother tongue by what everyone speaks around us. However when it comes to learning another language formally, we need to study its grammar. To make the grammar teaching more memorable and interesting, the teaching method should include some activities to handle the grammar.

Activity-based grammar learning method fosters active learning among the students. This method is relatively very easy to implement in the classroom to help the students learn the targeted portion, faster and more efficiently. This activity-based grammar learning involves face-to-face interaction, group work, individual activities, and it even includes social skills which involve more activity-oriented training than mere lectures.

These classes which involve such activities may seem to be messy, chaotic and noisy because students will sit in a group and discuss in order to come out with some concrete results.

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Majority of the teachers with the fear of losing control over the class hesitate to take up such activity-based teaching. They end up with lecture mode in dealing with grammar.

It is not advised that the teachers give up the lecture method to teach grammar. But the paper's aim is to weigh the benefits of activity-based teaching vis-à-vis lecture mode to make the lecture method even more effective and interesting. This activity-based learning method is more succinctly presented in the words of Benjamin Franklin:

“Tell me and I forget
Teach me and I remember
Involve me and I learn” (Richards 81).

The teaching of grammar to the students by involving them in some activity-oriented exercises has a significant purpose beyond the perception of grammar and production of correct speech since the students learn also preferable communicative activities. As suggested by Franklin, “Involve me and I learn”, the targeted learners will be directly engaged where they themselves play the role to learn the exercises. This method stimulates the students' natural curiosity and it promotes them to learn the required skills.

The Role of Media

Media is now part and parcel of our day-to-day living. Media has made great impact on the English learners. The media supply information to both hearing and visual senses. Radio, T.V, print and web can be well used in classroom teaching.

When web-related technologies, through various types of media, are interlinked in teaching, fruitful results are obtained through such teaching-learning method. Media is not only used as an entertaining tool but also as an educational tool which helps the students in their language learning. It can be used as an effective teaching tool so long as we are not dominated and manipulated by it. The non-English speakers choose media as a tool to learn English through watching English movies, reading newspapers, etc. To supplement this activity-based teaching, media, especially print media, i.e., newspapers can be used as props to help the students in learning.

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Newspaper and Language Learning

Newspaper is a boon to all of us. It is considered to be the most significant resource which enriches our knowledge. The common reason for selecting English newspapers as a suitable teaching tool is due to the fact that these cover a wide range of information from a variety of sources. Leading newspaper are published from many cities, have established circulation, are sold primarily as print copies, their readers are very numerous, and they cover and present matters of current interest. Reading a newspaper on a regular basis is a good habit. It is very common that the students who read newspapers are good in their language skills. Use of newspaper in the ESL classroom helps the students in learning and improving their vocabulary, grammar and reading skills. Harmer reports, “It keeps the students informed about what is happening in the world, so they have an intrinsic educational value” (Harmer 190).

Literature Review

Newspapers can be used as an effective prop in ESL classrooms.

Fenholt (1985) offers numerous activities that are based upon the use of newspapers as a learning resource to develop the skill of the learners. According to “Newspapers in Adult education: A Source Book” (1998) many countries like Argentina, Cameroon, Mexico and South Africa encourage learning through newspapers in order to improve the language skills among the adults. The examples in the *Source Book* include 10 such cases on how the partnership between the educator and the newspapers can play an active role and make the adult education more attractive and helpful.

Carolyn Hunter and Janice McNearney (1988) have framed a series of 12 lessons based on the newspapers for their foundation course. Bill Graham’s “The Tutor’s Toolbox” (1996) contains twenty-five useful techniques for teaching literacy. One among those techniques uses the newspaper for minor reading practices.

In some cases, individual newspapers have their own programs and activities for English learners. According to Chandler (1988), newspapers like “The Tulsa World” introduced a program called ‘Read up’ that combined the use of daily newspaper with the telephone hotline to help the students to develop their reading skills. The Palm Beach Post newspaper provided workplace literacy program that conducted six classes under three different programmes, namely, Adult Basic Foundation, English as a Second Language, and High School Equivalency in preparation for the diploma programmes.

Aiex, Nola Kortner in his article “Newspapers as a Teaching Resource for Adult Learners”, discusses the various methods of using newspapers to make the students learn:

- Using words from the newspaper headlines, ads, sports news or comics as elements to supplement the teaching.
- Using new stories to teach them grammar.
- Asking the students to frame a report on events and happening in class or in school.

The Use of Newspapers Remains Stable

According to the research done by the leading provider of English sources, Kaplan International College, has reported that 75% of ESL classrooms support the students in improving their language skills using newspapers. Surprisingly, it is good to see that newspapers are still in use to supplement the lecture method in spite of having technically equipped classrooms with electronic gadgets such as laptops, i-pads, E-books, etc. The report adds that use of newspaper is still a success because it is cost-effective and portable. Kaplan has undertaken a survey from teachers belonging to 40 different countries and the result reveals that “The New York Times” was the leading newspaper (17%) followed by the British dailies such as The Times (16%), The Guardian (12%), The Metro (1%) and The Daily Mail (6%).

Newspapers as an Effective Teaching Tool

Grundy (1993), in his book “Newspapers” points out that most of our conversation or discussion are based on the knowledge we get through by reading newspapers. Hence, he

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suggests that “newspapers ought to be seen to some degree as the incidental stimulus to a wide range of communicative, integrated activities” (Grundy 8). The use of newspaper on daily basis will help the students to develop their habit of intensive and extensive reading.

In the Indian context newspapers like “The Hindu”, “The Indian Express” and “The Times of India” are very popular among the English learners as they have individual columns which help them to sharpen their skills. The students in both urban and semi-metro areas show interest in reading English newspapers. The urban students show more interest in reading English newspapers when compared to the students from rural areas. The circulation of English newspapers in the rural parts is not widespread. Even though English newspapers may arrive one day later after its date of publication in big cities, newspapers are still the best prop for learning English as these carry valuable information and content in standard style that can be used in ESL education.

The main advantages of using newspapers as prop in ESL classroom are:

- Newspapers offer students materials to read and discuss in English.
- Newspapers improve students’ interest to use English language.
- Newspapers appeal to all grade levels.
- Newspapers promote better understanding of words.
- Newspapers offer less expensive learning materials.
- Newspapers help the teachers to introduce innovative and interesting methods in teaching.

Dealing with Different Levels

The students of all levels can make use of English Newspapers. For beginners, the bold print headlines, advertisement captions, symbols and graphic pictures which are comprehensible can communicate information. At the intermediate level, newspapers expose the students to even more challenging exercises and more complex sentences and content. The students in advanced level can make use of newspapers by skimming some articles, reading the story part and special

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columns. Newspapers offer help for the targeted age group to improve their vocabulary skills. Different kinds of columns in the newspapers such as advertisements, classified sections, stories, editorial section, and reports serve as good examples for writing skill. These items help also to improve social accountability, critical thinking, etc.

Ingenious Activities with Newspapers

With the recent developments in technology, the information that newspapers cover has also become broader and richer. At the same time the language used in the newspaper has become more trendy and appealing. The teachers can frame exercises to enhance the reading comprehension, creativity skills, writing skills, grammar skills, vocabulary skills, etc. In addition to the above said methods that were followed so far in ESL education, I would like to add my suggestions to make teaching-learning through newspapers even more interesting.

Fun with Parts of Speech

When taking classes on parts of speech, teach the students the definitions of all parts of speech and give them newspapers and point out a particular article and ask them to underline the different parts of speech used in the passage using different colours.

Phonetic Teaching

Taking a part of news piece from the newspaper and reading it aloud in the classroom makes students familiar with the new words and their pronunciation.

Writing Skill/Flow of Language

Ask your students to turn to the sports section in the newspaper and ask them to write a brief summary on an sports activity of their interest. The details given below will help the students in their writing skill and improve their language fluency.

TITLE OF THE ARTICLE

NAME OF THE SPORT

FAVOURITE PLAYER NAME

TEAM NAMES AND THEIR SCORES.

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Matching the Headlines and the Story

Give the students a few headlines from the newspapers and a list of short lines taken from the articles and ask them to match the headlines with the short lines (sentences) given.

Fill in the Blanks

Give the students a photocopy of the article they have just read, leaving some blanks for selected words and ask them to fill in the words in the given text. This will improve vocabulary skills.

Role Play

Choose a comic section from the newspaper allotting the students a role related to that and ask them to perform. This will improve the speaking skill of the learners.

Report Writing

Give the students an article from the newspaper and ask them to write a report on that piece. This will definitely hone their writing skills.

Movie Promotion

Ask the students to imagine that they are movie advertisers who are in charge of promoting a new movie. Give the example of a movie from the entertainment column from the newspaper and ask them to design an advertisement that will be apt for promoting the movie.

Conclusion

Even with the availability of the Internet, making use of physical newspapers in ESL classroom is quite interesting to witness. Involvement makes the student to learn and this is proved when newspapers are used. The teachers should encourage the students to read newspapers daily in order to hone their language skills. We need to remember that newspapers have always been a valuable resource for language teachers and learners alike.

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