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Grammar and Grammar Teaching: Changing Perspectives

Editor
Dr. Vathana Fenn

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**Speaking by Reading:
Enriching Grammatically Correct Spoken English by Reading
Young Adult Novels - A New Approach**

A. Balaji, M.A., M.Phil.

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Abstract

Though listening and speaking and reading and writing are interdependent skills, this paper suggests reading skills to enhance the speaking skills. Both reading and listening are input skills. However, young learners find reading is much easier than listening for various reasons. Exploiting the comfort zone of the learners, reading books is encouraged before they practice speaking, in this approach. As Young Adult novels such as *The Hunger Games Series*, *Twilight Series*, and *Percy Jackson Series* are the favourites of this generation, the same is provided for their reading. After four weeks of reading, series of tasks are given to the readers which make them speak, argue, defend and debate in peer groups.

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For the purpose of engaging slow bloomers as well as fast learners, the task is divided into three levels. In the first level, learners who are slow bloomers and who are new to reading English books other than text books are given short stories. After reading them, a questionnaire is given to answer. Learning new words and phrases are given importance and practices involving pronouncing new words and phrases are given in this stage. In the second level, *Harlequin* romantic novels which are not more than 90 pages are given to the students. They are expected to finish them in a week or two. Then, they are asked to pick up conversations which may be used in one's day-to-day life. Social greetings, questions and responses to them are picked up and practiced in mock discourse activities. In the third stage, the Young Adult novels such as *The Hunger Games* series are given to the students and they are expected to finish them in four weeks. Then, they are given tasks like Role-play, interviews and 'What IF' situations which demand them to understand, analyze and respond to the given questions. This will make them speak unconsciously and may increase their fluency and accuracy.

Key Words: Speaking Skills, Reading Skills, Grammar Skills

Preparation and Choice of Words

One's literacy, competency and even credibility are assessed by the choice of words he employs. Hence, employing error free sentences, especially grammatically correct sentences, while speaking, is of much importance as it gives brevity and clarity to the listeners. The sole purpose of communication itself is not just expressing one's ideas and needs, but also receiving appropriate response from the other side. This is the reason why Mark Twain jokingly said that *it usually takes him more than three weeks to prepare an impromptu speech*. That's why, it becomes vital to (use innovative ways to) make students speak in good English. This task is definitely a daunting one.

Inter-dependent Skills

LSRW – Listening skills, Speaking Skills, Reading Skills and Writing Skills are interdependent skills; listening nurtures speaking skills and reading helps one to write better.

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However, this paper aims at hypothesizing that reading skills could be incorporated to nurture speaking skills, particularly to get this desired result - accuracy. It is wisely said that one should think before he speaks, but should read before he starts thinking. Mem Fox in her book Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever aptly points out that “*When I say to a parent, "read to a child", I don't want it to sound like medicine. I want it to sound like chocolate.*”

Interesting Materials for Reading

In a college or a school, making students read materials which aren't interesting to them is a fruitless exercise. Hence, it is recommended that the young adults should be encouraged to read novels such as Twilight Series, Percy Jackson Series and Harry Potter Series which have common young adult themes such as coming of age, hindrances in assimilation in community, teenage love and magic. These materials will interest the high school and college students alike, and thus, it will make reading a pleasurable act and edutainment. They will identify themselves in the characters and situations of the plot and immerse themselves in deep reading.

Experiment

The entire experiment should be involved in three different activities: Pre –Reading Activities, While-Reading Activities, and Post-Reading Activities. After their reading, a series of activities which involves either listening and responding or speaking are recommended. The teacher should ensure that every individual actively participates in the activities and completes his assigned works. Students should be discouraged to use notes for speaking after their maiden speeches. This activity should be split into two major phases: first phase is forming a pair of two individuals who are comfortable and delivering their speech to each other; in the second phase the individuals should deliver their speeches to a group.

I. Pre-Reading Activities

- a. **Identification:** The teachers should ask their students which author, themes or novels that are made into movies interest them enough to read. In case if a student is completely

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unaware of the young adult novels and novelists, then, their friends can select a novel for them and they must be tasked to help them in their reading as well.

- b. **Providing background information:** The teacher should give a PPT presentation or handouts of the background information of the novel to the students. One short paragraph of the plot, names of the characters, author's history and reception of the novel can be shared with the students to spike their interests.

II. While-Reading Activities

- a. **Silent Reading:** The student should read his intended book silently. If one has doubts regarding new words or phrases he or she should be allowed to refer to the dictionary or internet. One should not be pressurized by being given deadlines to finish a book. It is to be expected that some students may be slow readers. Instead of insisting on time, thorough understanding of the text should be emphasized.
- b. **Loud Reading:** After silent reading, either the teacher or a volunteer should initiate loud reading among the students who chose the same novel. During this exercise, students must understand the pronunciation, meaning and context of the words that are uttered.
- c. **Making Predictions:** In between the reading, a marked area should be given to the students and they are to be given a task of what may happen next. Initially, they may be given three choices to select, and at the end of their reading of their intended book they must be tasked to come up with their own, innovative predictions of what may happen next.

III. After Reading Activities

- a. **Building Vocabulary:** After reading, students should be asked to enlist the new words they have come across. Further, they should be tasked to explain the usage in the given context and other examples or instances.
- b. **Finding You in Them:** After the reading, students are asked to identify the feelings they shared with the characters in the novels and enlist them. They are

further tasked to find some scenarios where they found themselves in. Then they should explain them to their pair or team members.

- c. **Playing What-If:** After reading, students are given some of the scenes of the novels and are asked what will happen if the given incident is reversed or some new dimensions or aspects are added. They should come with creative altercations for the given story.
- d. **Compare and Contrast:** After reading two Young Adult novels with similar themes, students are tasked with finding similarities and dissimilarities between the given novels. For example, finding similarities and dissimilarities between Harry Potter and Artemis Fowl.
- e. **Role Play:** After reading, the student should assume a character of the intended novel. His or her partner or the teammates will ask the character a series of questions regarding the incidents of the novel revolving around the character. The student should defend, explain and clarify the doubts of the team.
- f. **Identify speech patterns and imitate:** After reading, students are asked to identify common speech patterns such as invitations, salutations, asking questions and answering politely from the given book. Then they are asked to indulge in an imaginary conversation using the gained knowledge.

“If we encounter a man of rare intellect, we should ask him what books he reads,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson. As reading makes a perfect man, it is sensible that one should read to speak his mind. Speaking grammatically correct sentences will induce confidence in the early public speaker and will persuade the listeners to give due attention he deserves. Reading may not result in speaking in the early stage of learning a new language; however, to put it in Walt Disney’s words “We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we’re curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.”

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