

English pedagogy made upside-down

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Abstract

If you ask those who have newly acquired the skill of driving, they will tell you, it is more difficult for them to use reverse gear than simply driving on the highway. Same is true with the majority of English teachers who for decades together have continued to use the tools and techniques prescribed by great Grammarians. The stark reality in the countries like India is that 80% people who claim to speak English use erroneous expression. The writers of this study have been using the reverse methodology to impart the knowledge of correct and accurate English language.

Whenever student commits an error, for from scolding him or her teachers must treat it an opportunity to initiate interaction with the student to guide him. This study lists a number of such situations where students committed errors and the teacher converted those situations into opportunities of fruitful and joyful learning experiences. These techniques if used appropriately are sure to transform the monotonous and dull learning exercises of grammar and language into stimulant and joyful interactions in classrooms.

Keywords: learning english, errors, joyful experience, reverse methodology

1. Introduction

The correct knowledge of grammar is considered prerequisite for spoken and written communication. Committing grammatical errors is part of language learning. Following discussion shows how errors were turned into learning opportunities. The author of this paper has selected some of the erroneous usages of grammar from the answer books of sessional examinations of undergraduate engineering students of Shri Ramdeobaba College of Engineering and Management, Nagpur. This paper has presented the teaching methodology of grammar in a compact way in following paragraphs.

2. Materials and methods

This being a research article and as stated above, the materials used are the answer books of students who appeared in the sessional examinations.

2.1 Time and Tenses

I have visited Gandhi Ashram in December

Application based grammar is the call of the recent time. The learners should know the application of all the types of tenses. This makes different tenses very user specific. Present perfect tense is used to talk about the past actions where action done is important and not its periphery details whereas simple past tense is used to denote any action done in the past with the choice of citing the details of the action as well. When the learner says the above sentence, we give the explanation that 'I have visited Gandhi Ashram' emphasizes the action of visiting 'Gandhi Ashram' and the details don't matter. If one wants to give the details then one can use simple past. Therefore, the correct answer is 'I visited Gandhi Ashram in December', where the action done in the past along with its details is also quoted.

A learner learns the best when he commits a mistake and rectifies it himself. Taking a cue from this, we can imprint certain applications of tenses by writing the wrong structure, striking it out and then correct it. Learners at times face the

dilemma of choosing between tenses of the same time, for e.g. choosing between present simple and present continuous. People commonly use the present continuous tense to convey their feelings, thinking or belief which is erroneous. Rather present simple is used to describe what we feel or think. To explain this we can demonstrate in the following way-
 I am not understanding this letter.
 I don't understand this letter.

2.2 Literal Translations

I must to talk him soon

The above sentence seems to be literal translation of 'I have to talk to him soon', where the learner has taken 'must' to be a synonym for 'has to' depicting compulsion. We shall encourage the learner for trying to reframe the sentence in the correctly but with a minor hitch. The learner has to be told here that modals are independent working units that do the job of the helping verb as well as have a meaning of their own. If 'have to = must' then in the sentence there shouldn't be any extra 'to'. The answer that they give is 'I must talk to him soon.'

2.3 Preposition v/s Conjunction

He's married with an engineer

The above sentence seems to be another case of literal translation of a sentence in vernacular. We need to explain learners that in English, the preposition 'with' means together. Therefore, the sentence will mean that 'he' and 'engineer' married together but not to each other. Therefore, the correct answer to the above sentence is 'He is married to an engineer.' The learners here need to be taught the usage of various prepositions like place, direction, etc. They should also be enlightened about the usages of 'in/in the', 'at/at the' etc.

2.4 Words with Similar Purpose

Although it was noisy, but the teacher engaged the class

It is very important for the learners to know that it is useless to use words with similar meaning in a sentence to convey one

meaning. In the above sentence ‘although’, a conjunction is used for introducing a statement that makes the main statement seem surprising. The word ‘but’ which acts as a preposition here is used for introducing a different idea where it makes the second statement surprising from the first one. Both the words are doing the same task i.e. introducing the second sentence as a surprising one. The best example for explaining this condition is ‘rewrite again’. They should be also oriented about over usage of words having similar meaning in a sentence. Thus, the correct answer to the above sentence is ‘Although it was noisy, the teacher engaged the class.’

2.5 Question Words Used as Demonstrative Pronouns

The man which comes here is from Ranchi

Learners face confusions when they use question words like ‘which’, ‘whom’ and ‘who’. A clear demarcation should be made demonstrating them that ‘who/whom’ is exclusively attributed to humans and for every other thing ‘which’. This confusion is a result of not possessing clarity about persons and numbers as well. They correct the error and give the answer as ‘The man who comes here is from Ranchi.’

2.6 Framing of Interrogatives

Where I can find a book?

The learners have always misunderstood the concept of Subject+Verb+Object. We forget to teach them that besides the ‘subject’ and before the ‘verb’ there’s the helping verb which is specific to every tense. We can teach them that there are only three helping verbs viz. ‘to do’, ‘to be’ and ‘to have’ and they are the lifeline of any sentence and are way powerful than the main verb. So, we can reframe the sentence pattern as Subject+Helpingverb+Mainverb+Object. When we want to frame a question we swap the subject with the helping verb. For e.g. ‘I find a book’ is the sentence and its interrogative is ‘Do I find a book?’ as the helping verb in the actual sentence is ‘to do’. In the above stated example, there’s a question word ‘where’ and a modal ‘can’ which acts as a sentence builder i.e. does the role of a helping verb as well has an independent meaning of its own. Here at first we ask the learners to frame an interrogative for ‘I can find a book’ which they correctly answer as ‘Can I find a book?’ Then we make them recall the swapping process of subject with helping verb and tell them that if we want to begin a question with a question word then we do the same swapping process and put the question word at the beginning. Thus, the correct answer is ‘Where can I find a book?’

2.7 Depiction of Time Span

I have been here since three months

This is a very tricky sentence for English learners as they assume the above sentence to be syntactically correct. Many assume ‘been’ as an agent used in the Present Perfect Continuous tense like ‘I have been painting this room since morning’. Therefore, while using been the learners assume that since has to be used along with it by default. They need to be told that ‘since’ is used to refer ‘a point in time’ like since last week, since morning, since night...and ‘for’ is used is to refer ‘a period of time’ like for three years, for an year, for one hour, etc. We need to explain in the above stated sentence, the word ‘been’ has not been used an agent but as a verb and ‘three months’ denote a period of time. Thus, the learners understand

that the correct sentence is ‘I have been here for three months.’

2.8 Sentence Editing

I have got a new work

While teaching grammar, the learners should be also oriented upon contextual meaning of semantics of a sentence. The learners must be encouraged to preserve the essence of the language than making literal translations and using connotative meanings. The word ‘work’ in English refers to the action of doing a task. Therefore, one can be allotted tasks or works. But when we refer to the allocation of a new work profile, then it is referred as ‘job’. Moreover, ‘got’ and ‘have’ mean almost the same meaning. Here, the learners also get to know the importance of editing and omission. So, they arrive at the right answer which is ‘I have a new job.’ If one needs to convey that the job was acquired by him/her, then it can be reframed as ‘I have got a new job.’

2.9 Polite Requests/ Permissions

Do you like a glass of lemonade?

When the learners are taught modals, they must be also categorically taught of the levels of politeness under the topic ‘requests/permissions’. The learners are explained that the following is the chronology or the degree of politeness: Can-->Could-->Would-->May

Where ‘may’ is the most polite and ‘can’ is used when we ask for permission as a first person like ‘Can I help you?’ or request anybody who is too close to you ‘Can you get me a glass of water?’ Then, ‘could’ is more polite than ‘can’ and is used for acquaintances and strangers. ‘Would’ is used as a past form of ‘will’ and meant for polite requests or offers. Therefore, the learners understand that the correct way of offering and come out with the correct answer ‘Would you like a glass of lemonade?’

2.10 Using More Than One Element of Negation

I didn’t see no one in the class

The learners should be oriented that they should avoid the usage of negation more than once in a sentence. The way in Mathematics two negatives makes a positive, similarly, we need to analogically explain that in English language, more than two negatives doesn’t emphasize the negative but leads to a faulty sentence construction. Moreover several learners also take ‘no one’ and ‘nobody’ to be just a unit rather than a negative word. Thus, the learners are explained that they can either say ‘I didn’t see anybody...’ or ‘I saw no one/nobody...’

2.11 Articles

Where is train?

Most Indian languages only have the definite article to depict a specific noun but don’t have an indefinite article. Therefore nouns are mostly referred without an article. This may confuse the second language learners when they make a transition from their mother tongues. The learners should be made aware of the correct and contextual usages of ‘a/an’ and ‘the’ used as definite and indefinite articles respectively while referring to something in general or specific noun. Thus, the correct answer give is ‘Where is the train?’ They should be also told that ‘a’ is used when something is mentioned for the first time and ‘the’ to talk about something we have already mentioned. E.g ‘Sam wore a hat today.’ ‘Sam wore a hat. The hat was made of lace.’ Or ‘Sam wore the hat that he had worn that day.’ We also use a/an before

a type of job: My uncle is a teacher. (NOT ...is teacher.) and the
for a specific job/job title: My uncle is the CEO.

The learners should be also oriented of the conditions in which
articles are not used like the names of most countries, except
the US and the UK; names of continents or languages; types of
music or any genre, meals, subjects for study, sports and games:
She's very good at arithmetic. (...the arithmetic), He plays
baseball well. (...the baseball) and did you have lunch? (...the
lunch).

3. Conclusions

The above examples clearly show that when learners commit
error in the usage of grammar, it provides an opportunity to the
teachers to explain the correct usage with examples. This
practice of teaching grammar can prove useful at the middle and
high school levels as well to orient listeners in correct usage of
grammatical structures. This strategy has been found more
effective than theoretical teaching of rules of grammar.