

LANGUAGE GAMES IN GRAMMAR TEACHING

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Abstract

The term grammar is often used by non-linguists with a very broad meaning. Grammar is often a generic way of referring to any aspect of English that people object to. However, linguists use it in a much more specific sense. Speakers of a language have in their heads a set of rules for using that language. This is a grammar, and the vast majority of the information in it is acquired—at least in the case of one's native language—not by conscious study or instruction, but by observing other speakers; much of this work is done during infancy. Learning a language later in life usually involves a greater degree of explicit instruction. This is due to the fact that people move from babbling during infancy to composing sentences. As a person builds grammatical competency they become focused on the meaning they are conveying through grammatical encoding. People begin to develop and use grammatical skills to plan these simple and complex sentence structures. To achieve this skill, we use games called language games as they are played to acquire a language flawlessly. This paper analyses how grammar can be taught through language games.

Introduction

The term *grammar* is often used by non-linguists with a very broad meaning. Grammar is often a generic way of referring to any aspect of English that people object to. However, linguists use it in a much more specific sense. Speakers of a language have in their heads a set of rules for using that language. This is a grammar. The term "grammar" can also be used to describe the rules that govern the linguistic behavior of a group of speakers. The term "English grammar", therefore, may have several meanings. It may refer to the whole of English grammar—that is, to the grammars of all the speakers of the language—in which case, the term encompasses a great deal of variation.

The need of grammar

We need grammar to speak and write flawlessly. If we communicate erratically, our communication leads to confusion. To reach our right destination, road is very important; likewise in our language journey, we essentially need the grammar road to reach the right destination of communication. The only difference between animal and man is language communication though animals communicate

using sign language. So perfection in communication is a must to be a complete man. Grammar brings perfection in our communication. To err is human and to excuse is divine: this is an old saying. But today it is different; To err is human and to rectify is grammar in language.

Deductive method

A deductive approach to instruction is a more teacher-centered approach. This means that the teacher gives the students a new concept, explains it, and then has the students practice using the concept. For example, when teaching a new grammar concept, the teacher will introduce the concept, explain the rules related to its use, and finally the students will practice using the concept in a variety of different ways. But,

The deductive method is often criticized because:

- a) it teaches grammar in an isolated way;
- b) little attention is paid to meaning;
- c) practice is often mechanical. This method can, however, be a viable option in certain situations; for example, when dealing with highly motivated students, teaching a particularly difficult concept, or for preparing students to write exams.

Inductive method

In contrast with the deductive method, inductive instruction makes use of student "noticing". Instead of explaining a given concept and following this explanation with examples, the teacher presents students with many examples showing how the concept is used. The intent is for students to "notice", by way of the examples, how the concept works.

Using the grammar situation from above, the teacher would present the students with a variety of examples for a given concept without giving any preamble about how the concept is used. As students see how the concept is used, it is hoped that they will notice how the concept is to be used and determine the grammar rule. As a conclusion to the activity, the teacher can ask the students to explain the grammar rule as a final check that they understand the concept.

These two are conventional methods. They cannot serve the modern day requirements. This is an age of hurry. Everyone is in hurry and they don't have time to spend much on learning. So grammar teaching must be innovative and must be added different flavors so that everyone can learn it with amusement. That amusing technology is commutainment i.e. communication through entertainment.

Communitainment

Communitainment, which refers to communication through entertainment, is essential in the English as a second language (ESL) class as it creates such environment. It has been found that communitainment activities such as role-plays, puzzles and problem-solving exercises promote meaningful communication, provide fun, develop team-work, foster creative thinking and create opportunities for learners to interact with one another.

In view of the underlying roles, such communitainment activities play in the ESL class, as an experiment a class of students of engineering was split into a number of groups and each group was asked to work on different role-play situations. The experiment had different stages from conceptualizing situations to enacting them. Besides role-play exercises, funny anecdotes and jokes were also experimented in the class with the objective of facilitating learning.

Role Play

A role playing game is an activity or a language game in which the participants or students of a language course assume the roles of some imaginary characters and as a team create a story based on a situation and enact the play in front of an audience.

The objective of role-plays is to help students practice certain language functions and learn speaking skills. Here is a sample situation:

You are a software engineer working in Mumbai. A pickpocket has stolen your purse and you have lost your train ticket, money and debit cards. The train to your hometown will arrive at the station in 30 minutes and if you miss the train you will have to wait at the station for about 18 hours. Your brother's wedding is at your hometown the following day and your presence is very much required at home. You talk to a stranger and try to convince the person and succeed in reaching your town.

This role-play situation requires two persons to perform it. One assumes the role of the software engineer and the other plays the role of the stranger in the situation. The duo together creates a story based on the situation and plan how they are going to carry out the role-play.

If the main objective of asking students to enact this role play is to enable students to confidently use the language functions such as describing, explaining and persuading, during the preparation stage, the teacher can pre-teach a set of common phrases used to perform such functions. Then they are given opportunity to practice it.

Why should role-plays be used in the English class? It is not enough merely to provide students with opportunities to speak in English, as teachers we need to encourage students to speak in a variety of different situations, and hence help them to learn to speak with confidence.

Games for Language Teaching

'Language learning is hard work ... Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work.'

'Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information.'

If it is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as central to a teacher's repertoire.

There is a common perception that all learning should be serious and solemn in nature and that if one is having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then it is not really learning. This is a misconception. It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the best ways of doing this is through games.

There are many advantages of using games in the classroom:

1. Games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
2. They are motivating and challenging.
3. Learning a language requires a great deal of effort. Games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
4. Games provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading.
5. They encourage students to interact and communicate.
6. They create a meaningful context for language use.

Some Language Games

1. One becomes 2

Write up a sentence i.e. It happened a week ago. Ask Ps (participants) to add two words to make a new sentence, but to keep the order of the original words / sentences. They can make two sentences rattler than one they want. I.e. it happened more than a week ago. Or, It happened more than a week ago in Chennai.

2. Disappearing sentences

Write up a paragraph on the board. Explain that you want Ps to remove words and reduce the paragraph to one word. They can remove 1, 2 or 3 consecutive words. Each time the paragraph should make sense and be grammatically correct, although the meaning can change.

3. DIY grammar (Do It Yourself)

Ask Ps to write a sentence of about 8 - 12 words. Then tear the sentence up so each word is on one piece of paper. Mix up the pieces of paper, pass to a partner and get

them to put the words in the correct order. Variation: To make it slightly harder you could ask the Ps to write an extra word that doesn't fit into their sentence.

Conclusion

The need for meaningfulness in language learning has been accepted for some years. A useful interpretation of 'meaningfulness' is that the learners respond to the content in a definite way. If they are amused, angered, intrigued or surprised the content is clearly meaningful to them. Thus the meaning of the language they listen to, read, speak and write will be more vividly experienced and, therefore, better remembered. This can be achieved when grammar is taught through language games. Language makes man perfect; Grammar makes language perfect.

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