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## Advanced techniques in English language classroom to teach grammar

### Abstract

*This paper focuses on the resources which can assist our teaching of grammar while providing a relaxed atmosphere and motivated students. Such activities involve students' participation and we let our students use their long-term memory and learn effectively during such activities. So there is an undeniable fact that if our concern is to provide a successful and beneficial teaching, we must not hesitate to use songs, poems, games, and problem solving activities, which bring the structural, pragmatic, prosodic and communicative aspects of language together, in our language classrooms.*

### Introduction

India is a vast country with many regional languages. Yet the people in India give much importance to learn, read and write English -a language which is accepted universally and forms the means of effective communication worldwide. Hence the Indian learners yearn to learn it effectively to gain command over language skills by acquiring perfection in terms of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, etc. of the language. Grammar teaching is focused much in this paper as it is a structure based formal activity that helps the learner to develop language skills further. Therefore a teacher must be trained to use well developed and advanced techniques in a language classroom to teach grammar. Grammar is the branch of linguistics that deals with the form and structure of words (morphology) and their interrelation in sentences, called syntax (meaning). The study of grammar is important as it reveals how language works and forms an important aspect in both English acquisition and learning.

Previously grammar was taught in such a way where the learners learnt the grammar rules but failed to apply them in the real life situations. This explicit grammar study and the grammar-focused lessons were often not communicatively based. This became boring, cumbersome and difficult for learners to assimilate. In the early 20th century grammarians like the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas and the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen began to describe languages and these studies led to the current approaches to linguistic theory such as Noam Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar. He viewed grammar as a theory of language structure rather than a description of actual sentences. According to him grammar is a device for producing the structure, not of a particular language, but of the ability to produce and understand sentences in any and all the languages. Henceforth a definitive study of language grammar is essential to language study that would result in effective communication.

It is essential to teach elements of language and develop communicative abilities in our students. For this a teacher should think of different ways of introducing the sounds, structure and vocabulary of

English, including colloquial forms of conversation and the four basic communication skills. Grammar teaching should be implicit, or explicit, as teaching / learning conditions may dictate. The various learning styles and intelligence strengths of the learners should also be considered while adopting methods and techniques in teaching grammar because there is no one best way to introduce and provide practice in them. All these innovative techniques which are based on communicative activities can be used effectively for all phases of a grammar lesson; thus the present day teaching of grammar will gain a new insight. Some of these techniques are clarified and the relevant examples will be focused in this paper.

### **Songs and Poems Make the Language Class more Effective and Communicative**

Through songs the learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills can be developed. As we all know today's generation is much interested to sing and dance for their favourite numbers. It has been observed that students were seen with their earphones listening to music or sometimes texting on their mobiles. They try to hum the most difficult numbers with an ease and they try to remember the same. It was also found that they like to learn while singing. Taking this as an advantage the teacher can use them as precious resources in teaching a variety of language elements like rhythm, intonation, pronunciation, vocabulary, adjectives, etc. The learner will understand and will also be exposed to that particular culture and the ongoing changes in it, if any. Moreover this technique will help the poor and shy learners of a regular class to participate and learn the language actively and remember the learnt for a longer period. This in fact, is a good technique in motivating the students to learn the language interestingly. The selection of songs should be done carefully from a traditional to a folk or a modern song. The selection of songs should also be in terms of short stories, good tunes, etc. which not only focus on grammar points but also reflect cultural aspects.

### **Application of Song-Technique in a Language Class**

Any method or technique that is to be applied in a class requires the creative skills of a teacher. The teacher is independent in adopting the method and can implement the same according to his or her own convenience. But s/he should remember the level and age of the learners while selecting the songs. Asking students to select a song will further motivate and encourage them to learn grammar more effectively. This method helps the student to relax and learn the grammar naturally. By now the teacher should show much interest in what to teach rather than how to teach. At this point the teacher should set the objectives for the classroom. Accordingly s/he should decide the grammar point to be studied and then the relevant song is selected. Now the teacher should prepare an effective lesson plan.

This could be divided into four phases. In the first phase the students are asked to read about the title, theme and history of the song to get exposed to the culture and time specified in a song. Secondly they are asked to recite the song so that the rhythmic aspect of the language i.e. accent, intonation, pronunciation is emphasized. The third phase helps the learner to focus on the grammar point to be studied.

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For example to study present tense read a verse from the song and ask the students when the action took place. Then ask them to write the correct form of the sentence if the action occurred long back or will happen later. This can be assessed by providing students the focus questions, true or false statements, gap filling, etc. Similarly to study synonyms and antonyms or voice or any other grammar point we can use the above techniques. In the last phase the teacher can select another song and assess the students on the same ground and ask the students to read about the grammar point focused in the song besides giving examples.

It should be taken care that the selected songs provide authentic and meaningful material. For present tense 'Let It Be' by the Beatles, for past tense 'Yesterday' by the Beatles, for present progressive 'Sailing' by Rod Stewart, for present perfect 'Nothing Compares to You' by Sinead O'Conor, for past perfect 'Last Night I Had...' by Simon and Garfunkel, for modals 'Blowing in the Wind' by Bob Dylan, and for conditionals 'El Condor Pasa' by Simon and Garfunkel can be used.

Apart from teaching grammar this technique can also be used to enhance the listening skills. As a first step in a listening activity even before they listen to the song the learners are informed about the grammar point they are going to learn from it. After listening they have to answer the questions given. Here pictures too can be provided to reflect the theme. These songs also improve the learners' writing skills. After reading the theme, title and the history of the target song the teacher can set opinion questions which demand effective answers from the learners. Finally the teacher can discuss the theme and based on which s/he can conduct group discussions, debates or even a role-play. This can be proved a good technique in enhancing the learners' LSRW skills along with other language elements like vocabulary, pronunciation, accent and intonation in a language class.

### **Games and Problem Solving Activities to Enhance Communication Skills**

The need of the hour is to enable the learners to communicate effectively and accurately. The learners also attempt to enhance their communicative competence. The teachers are trying to find all those possible means and ways which are task-based and those which lead the students to use language creatively. Language games and problem solving activities are task-based and they highlight not only the competence but also the performance of the learner. Games are enjoyable and learners tend to play the game only to win. In this process they get totally involved in the game and try to solve the problems in a game logically. Unconsciously they try to learn the language in the process of facing the challenges put forth in a game. For example select a game where the students have to use only the synonyms of a given word in the game to reach the target. Here they can be provided with gap filling questions to draw their attention. Thus they can learn vocabulary. Similarly games on tenses, accent, etc. can be selected to teach grammar.

But it is the responsibility of the teachers to select and apply the appropriate games and activities based on the learners' proficiency levels, age and experience. They also should design clear and easy directions for the selected activities and games. The students will be more attentive towards the entailed details and the meaning in problem solving activities. In the given activity the student should generate a specific grammar point as a solution part of the problem. For example if a teacher wants his or her students to learn future tense s/he can provide example sentences which may represent both present and future tense. If a sentence says 'I'm in the class but I shall see my friend in the canteen as soon as I get his

call'. The student can be asked to write that part of the sentence which talks about present tense on the left and other part on right and inform the tense in which it is used. Similarly we can provide some pictures, charts etc. in teaching grammar.

These activities are designed to be inquiry-based and they allow the students for self-exploration of problems and solutions. Some of them encourage work in a self-paced mode, and other promotes group competitions, thinking and discussions. Students are encouraged to find multiple, imaginative, intuitive and common sense solutions and as many solutions to a problem.

## Conclusion

In this whole process of teaching a teacher should be only a facilitator. Through these activities an innovative teacher can find a way to integrate all the four skills along with various language elements. It is also observed that such activities provide entertaining opportunities for the students to practice thinking clearly while focusing on the form unconsciously. They also provide favourable usages for extended communicative practice of grammar. They are both motivating and challenging. They encourage students to interact and communicate. Through such activities students match the discourse with the context of the game or the problem solving activity. So these activities create a meaningful context for language use. The use of such activities both increases the cooperation and competition in the classroom. Thus, potential classroom ideas come into being, and a successful, joyful and enthusiastic learning is provided.

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