Strategies in Teaching English Grammar

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Introduction

Grammar is a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language. It considers the meanings and functions the sentences have in the overall system of the language. As an important element of language and as the essential part of linguistic competence, grammar has a central role in making up learners' language skills and their communicative competence.

Challenges and Problems

One of the challenges before the teachers of grammar is the selection of suitable examples to teach grammatical rules and forms. In the old traditional grammar, examples used for illustrating rules are of alien context for the Indian students. Another challenge before the teacher is to decide the number of rules to be taught to the learners. A teacher should select those grammatical rules and patterns which have greater communicative potential.

The problems generally faced by most of the teachers of English is the poor standard of the students. Students are even ignorant of the basic rules and structural patterns which they are supposed to have learnt at the lower level. If a teacher directly starts his teaching at the graduate level without trying to know the level of the students, his efforts will not bear any fruits as he will not be able to raise a structure over a feeble foundation. A teacher should begin from the simple grammatical terms and proceed towards the complex ones. Thus, by carefully selecting the frequently recurring grammatical items and by grading them as per the background of the learners, a teacher should provide constant practice to the students in creating and using sentences based on the grammatical forms and structures in various day to day situations of their lives.

Identification of Rules and Structures

The teacher should identify the rules and structures of English grammar and provide practice in their use. The rules which have a greater frequency in use should be taught first and emphasized by a teacher and the rules of peripheral nature which represent the exceptions, irregularities, and anomalies should be taught at a later stage when a learner acquires competency in the use of core rules and structures. One of the dilemmas of a teacher is to decide whether the aim of teaching grammar is to teach rules or to help the learners in learning a language. The aim of teaching grammar is to provide the necessary exposure to the learners in the learning of a language. Teaching only rules without providing sufficient practice in their use will not contribute to the learning of a second language. Rules should be taught simultaneously with their uses. Both grammatical rules and their situational uses should be taught side by side, and then only communicative competence which is the aim of teaching can be achieved.

ICNTINMST-2021   **ISSN: 2008-8019**

Special Issue on Proceedings of International Conference on Newer Trends and Innovation in Nanotechnology, Materials Science, Science and Technology March 2021. International Journal of Aquatic Science, Vol 12, Issue

Grammar-based Teaching

The teachers, through grammar, can help students use the language correctly and appropriately. The teacher should help the students understand the different tenses and how to use them. In English, there are so many presents, past, future, past participle, present progressive, etc., and gerunds that can act as nouns. The teacher should constantly remind the students to use proper verb conjugation and make a list of all the exceptions. In English prepositions are a problem, too many prepositions should not be taught at the same time. The teacher should help the student to use the prepositions in context. Using prepositions can also be very difficult for ESL students, so it is best to have a practice regularly.

Teaching Grammar and Topics Integrated

Grammar-based teaching is the teaching of a language built around the linguistic components of the language (e.g. past tense, gerund, etc.,) English treated this way is put as a subject, rather than a skill. So, the problem associated with grammar-based teaching is that language item taught are given in isolation, not in context.

Learning through Writing

The method of learning through writing encourages the students to explore the language through creative writing and reading, picking up correct grammar usage along the way. An emphasis is placed upon language acquisition over language learning, as learning grammar by memorization only does not work well and that students are better able to recognize and understand grammatical rules when lessons are more interactive. Repeated practice is also important and easily achieved through creative or personal writing exercises.

Inductive Teaching

The inductive method of teaching grammar involves presenting several examples that illustrate a specific concept and expecting students to notice how the concept works from these examples. The expectation is that students learn to recognize the rules of grammar in a more natural way during their own reading and writing. Discovering grammar and visualizing how rules work in a sentence allows for easier retention of the concept than if the students were given an explanation that was disconnected from examples of the concept. The main goal of the inductive teaching method is the retention of grammar concepts, with teachers using techniques that are known to make an impression on students' contextual memory.

Deductive Teaching

The deductive method of teaching grammar is an approach that focuses on instruction before practice. A teacher gives students an in-depth explanation of a grammatical concept before they encounter the same grammatical concept in their own writing. After the lesson, students are expected to practice what they have just been shown in a mechanical way through worksheets and exercises. But the method has its shortcomings, as it is more of a teacher-centered approach.

Interactive Teaching

ICNTINMST-2021   **ISSN: 2008-8019**

Special Issue on Proceedings of International Conference on Newer Trends and Innovation in Nanotechnology, Materials Science, Science and Technology March 2021. International Journal of Aquatic Science, Vol 12, Issue

Another method of teaching grammar is to incorporate interactivity into lessons-using games to teach grammar not only engages students but also helps them to remember what they have learned. This method allows the teachers to prepare their lessons to the different learning styles of students. For instance, each student can be given a large flashcard with a word on it and the students must physically arrange themselves into a proper sentence. Other games include word puzzles, picture stories, expanding texts, etc.,

Structure-based Task

A structure-based task is a strategy in which the students are asked to compare two cities. A pair of students should tell each other about the features of familiar cities and record the information on task sheets. They are then instructed to write sentences comparing the cities according to the features they had described. Students are not explicitly taught comparative structures at any point during the task, but they must use comparative forms to complete it. Afterward, the teacher should teach a lesson on comparatives, and students should rewrite incorrect sentences, do more exercises.

Conclusion

The teacher should devise ways to enable the students to be able to do oral and written discourse equally in the classroom. There are so many complexities, obscure rules, and exceptions that different generations of teachers have used various approaches to teaching grammar. Over the years, many methods have been developed for teaching grammar and have been built upon, abandoned, or combined, but all with the same goal in mind-teaching students how to communicate effectively and understand how to use the English language. Sometimes teachers are attracted towards new approaches and without examining their merits and demerits, they are excited to use them due to their novelty and difference from the earlier ones. The challenge before a teacher is to choose the right approach or to integrate the concepts of different approaches in teaching grammar and the language.

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