

Grammar Guru I

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Grammar? Fun? You must be kidding! Even now I shudder to think of those horrific grammar classes in school. No more agonies for me, please! Leave me alone, I can hear you say. But wait. Do give us a chance. We do know that grammar is the pet aversion of many a student. They hate grammar wholeheartedly, but they have to learn it; or rather, they are desperately eager to master the monster, but just don't know how.

This is just a helpline. It will help you to master grammar, to avoid common errors, to feel confident when you speak and write. Not as in the bad old days, but painlessly, effortlessly, easily. We shall show you that grammar can be fun; it can be exciting; it can exhilarate you, enchant you, and entertain you.

Who is this meant for? For everyone from one to hundred: for anyone who wants to communicate effectively, and effortlessly in English; for the teacher as well as the student; for the creative writer as well as the diehard scientist; for those who hate grammar as well as those who love it; for those who know grammar as well as those who don't know it. In short, for one and all.

Here is a story I read some time ago. A pupil tells his teacher, "I ain't got no pencils." She corrects him immediately. "The correct way to say it is, I don't have any pencils." "We don't have any pencils. He doesn't have any pencils. You don't have any pencils. They don't have any pencils. Do you understand?" "No," the boy answered, astonished. "What

happened to all the pencils?" Well, all of us are only too familiar with the moral of the story.

Why does grammar terrorize us? First and foremost, it is because English grammar is different from the grammar of my mother tongue. I can say **suda suda kaappi** or **gharam gharam chai**, but cannot say, **hot, hot coffee**. I can say **idhu pusthakam**, in Tamil, but I have to say, 'This is a book', in English. According to Latin grammar, **It is I** is correct, but English speakers prefer to say, **It's me**.

Another reason for the problems is that there are exceptions to almost every rule in English. We often master the rules, but forget the exceptions. The past form of **talk** is **talked**, but the past form of **take** is **took**.

I may expect you to learn grammar, but I cannot make you to learn grammar. By the way, you cannot use **to** after **make!**

So, folks, cheer up! After all, English was invented by people, not computers. It reflects the creativity of the human race (which, of course, isn't a race at all). That is why, when the stars are out, they are visible, but when the lights are out, they are invisible!

[Editor's Note: This is the first of a series of articles by the author and published earlier in The Times of India, Education Times from May 2008 to May 2013. We are thankful to Dr Saraswathi, a legend in the field of ELT practice and research in India, to permit us to publish those articles in our journal.]