

Teaching English Grammar Differently

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of grammar is not a new venture. It has been taught for decades in schools and colleges. Many students learn grammar in order to get degrees and their teachers do not wish to go beyond examinations. Neither teachers nor students think that grammar is sine qua non to communicate fluently and confidently in everyday life. The present paper focuses on the teaching of grammar for real-life communication. It aims to show that grammar can be taught differently for day-to-day use.

Many of us look at grammar as a set of rules. Therefore, we encourage our learners to memorize the rules of grammar even if they do not understand them well. As a result of this, when our students go out and start interacting in real life, they produce incorrect utterances. It means this way of teaching grammar does not help them in real-life communication. We need to change our way of looking at grammar. Grammar is not just a set of rules. It is more than that. According to Diane Larsen-Freeman, grammar should be seen as the fifth skill of the language. She calls this skill “Grammaring.” She defines “grammaring” as “the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully and appropriately.” Teachers must understand this well.

There are several teachers who directly begin the class by saying: *Good morning, Class! Today we are going to learn the simple past tense.* After this, they spend a lot of time

explaining the rules of the simple past tense. This method of teaching may encourage learners to memorize the rules of grammar well but this will certainly not help them to use their knowledge of grammar in producing correct language utterances during conversations at the workplace or at home.

We must learn some better ways of presenting the target grammar structures in some effective ways. Pengelley James, in her blog “How to teach grammar creatively: Moving beyond the basics”, asks us to set the suitable context first. I agree with her. Setting the suitable context will definitely help us engage our learners meaningfully. Now the question is: how do we go about it? There are several ways. Some teachers show relevant pictures/videos; some teachers prefer to tell stories; some might begin in a different way. There are multiple ways of beginning and ending a lesson. Let us look

at the detailed lesson plan given below in order to understand what exactly the author means by teaching grammar differently.

Type of Class: Adult, college-going learners

Number of learners: 15

Duration: 1.5 hours

Level: Beginners

Topic: Talking about completed actions in the past (with finished time phrases)

Target Grammar Item: Simple Past Tense

Lesson Objective: By the end of the lesson, the learners will be able to talk about completed actions in the past

Stage	Time	Activity								
Warm-up	10 minutes	<p>Listen: I will tell my learners what I did yesterday from the time I woke up till I went to bed. I will deliberately stress the past time phrases more. Then i will ask them a question: Did I talk about today or yesterday/last night? They will say: about yesterday/ last night. Listen again and jot down the action verbs: Good. Now, I am going to tell you the same thing again. Listen to it and jot down the action verbs I use. This time, I will go a bit slower, deliberately stressing the action verbs. Examples of action verbs: <i>came/went/played</i>, etc.</p>								
Explanation and Application	20 minutes	<p>Then I will elicit all the action verbs they have noted down and write them on the board in V2 column as shown below.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">V1</td> <td style="width: 50%;">V2</td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>come</i></td> <td><i>came</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>teach</i></td> <td><i>taught</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>have</i></td> <td><i>had</i></td> </tr> </table> <p>After this, I will elicit the V1 forms from them and write these verbs in the V1 column. They will be able to tell me the base forms as they have already learnt them. Then, I will ask them a question: <i>Did I use V1 or V2 when I shared about my yesterday?</i> Most of the learners will say: V2. After this, I will tell them that when we talk about completed actions in the past, we use: S + V2 + _+ (finished time phrase). (Finished</p>	V1	V2	<i>come</i>	<i>came</i>	<i>teach</i>	<i>taught</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>had</i>
V1	V2									
<i>come</i>	<i>came</i>									
<i>teach</i>	<i>taught</i>									
<i>have</i>	<i>had</i>									

Stage	Time	Activity
		time phrases are: <i>yesterday/the day before yesterday/last night/ last Sunday/in 2017/in my childhood, etc.</i>). Examples: <i>I came to college at 8 am. I had my breakfast at 8.30 am.</i> After this, I will ask my learners to write two actions they did before coming to college. Each student will read out their sentences. I will request the class to listen to the sentences and correct them, if needed. If they miss out any, then I will correct a few.
Restricted Practice Activity	30 minutes	I will ask them to talk to their partner about what they did yesterday. During this activity, I will walk around and help them with the second form of the verb whenever they get stuck or use the incorrect form. I will also try to listen to them and write a few incorrect sentences spoken by them on the board and will discuss these sentences with the class in general. After some time, I will explain the rule: <i>Do not use an action verb and a non-action verb when you talk about completed actions in the past.</i> Examples: <i>I was come to you yesterday.</i> (incorrect) <i>I came to you yesterday.</i> (correct)
Free Communicative Practice Activity	30 minutes	Each learner will share his/her memorable experience from their childhood. I will note down 15 mistakes from their speeches and request them to correct these sentences at home. Next day, I will discuss these sentences with the students at the beginning of the class.

Note:

The lesson plan was originally prepared by the author of this paper to be submitted as an assignment for the AE-E Teacher online course. The author has sought the permission of his Moderator to get it published in a journal or a book.

This is one way of teaching the simple past tense. It may not appeal to all learners across the globe. As teachers, we may have to modify

the material to suit our purpose. For more grammar practice activities, please refer to *Grammar Practice Activities* by Penny Ur.

References

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