

Teaching Grammar Through Literature

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Abstract: Teaching English as a second language is a challenge for the teachers. The learners think in native language and try to translate it in English. This practice finds them in wrong sentence construction. Grammar application becomes a challenge. The present study based on case studies discusses how teaching grammar through literature not only evokes interest in the learner but also helps the learner to learn language faster and better.

Keywords: grammar, literature, learning, teaching.

English learning has gained paramount importance due to its global significance. It should be noted that English cannot be learned through grammar alone. There is a wide change among 'learning about the language' and 'learning using the language'. In the present scenario where communicative English is emphasized, the skill to use the language effectively and impressively should be taught to the user of the language.

Teaching grammar has to meet three challenges:

- 1) To train to speak impeccable language
- 2) To train to express in an effective and impressive manner
- 3) To equip with the nuances of the language at the syntactical and phonological level.

I have experimented with teaching grammar to two groups of students--Group A and Group B. There were 10 students from Kannada medium in each group.

* Group A was taught grammar through text containing definitions and rules.

* Group B was taught grammar through literary texts, which included passages from plays, novels, short tales, and poetry.

Group 'A':

Students of Group 'A' were taught rules that govern the topics of grammar and a series of exercises were worked out by the students.

The most common errors found by the students of Group 'A' were:

1. She don't know.
for
She doesn't know.
2. Suma has only one sister.
for
Suma has one sister.

3. I gone to the market yesterday.
for

I went to the market yesterday.

Group 'A' students found learning the English language very difficult. They tend to by heart the rules taught. They lost their confidence while communicating in English as they found it very difficult to recall the rules and then frame the sentences. Repeatedly they committed the same grammatical mistakes while writing or in their speech.

Group 'B':

Group 'B' was taught grammar with the help of literary text. The students were made to enjoy the beauty of the language by making them recite the poem in different tunes, enact the play, rewrite the dialogues in reported speech, transform complex sentences into simple sentences, spot gerunds, prepositions, clauses, etc.,

For instance, Nissim Ezekiel's poetry 'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.' was used to teach tenses. Following the lesson, the students were challenged to identify the poem's errors in a parody of Indian English speech.

Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S. "by Nissim Ezekiel

Friends,

our dear sister

is departing for foreign

in two three days,

and

we are meeting today

to wish her bon voyage.

You are all knowing, friends,

What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.

I don't mean only external sweetness

but internal sweetness.

Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling

even for no reason but simply because

she is feeling.

Miss Pushpa is coming

from very highly family.

Her father was renowned advocate

in Bulsar or Surat,

I am not remembering now which place.

*Surat? Ah, yes,
once only I stayed in Surat
with family members
of my uncle's very old friend-
his wife was cooking nicely... that was long time" ago.*

*Coming back to Miss Pushpa
she is most popular lady
with men also and ladies also.
Whenever I asked her to do anything,
she was saying. Just now only
I will do it. That is showing
good spirit. I am always
appreciating the good spirit.*

*Pushpa Miss is never saying no.
Whatever I or anybody is asking
she is always saying yes,
and today she is going to improve her prospect
and we are wishing her bon voyage.
Now I ask other speakers to speak
and afterwards Miss Pushpa
will do summing up.*

The common errors committed by Indians while speaking English are listed below:

- The use of present continuous tense when future tense is required.

'In two or three days, our beloved sister will be leaving for a different country'

whereas it should be -

'Our dear sister will be departing'

Wrong usage – 'for foreign'

Correct usage – 'for a foreign country'

Wrong usage – 'in two-three days'

Correct usage – 'in two or three days'

- When only the present tense is needed, the present continuous tense is used.

a) You are all-knowing

Correct usage -

'You all know'

b) 'Miss Pushpa is coming from a very high family'

Correct usage -

'Miss Pushpa comes from an extremely affluent family'

c) 'I do not currently recall the location.'

Correct usage -

'I do not remember now which place'

- The use of past continuous tense when only simple past tense is used.

'His wife was preparing a meal skillfully'.

Correct usage -

'His spouse was an amazing cook.'

* Wrong usage -

'Family members'

Correct usage -

'members of the family'

- Superlative to be preceded by article 'the'

'She is most popular lady'

Correct usage -

'She is the most popular lady'

- Either 'ladies and gentlemen' or 'men and women'

'She is the most popular woman among both men & women.'

Correct usage -

'She is the most sought-after woman by men.'

'Also' need not be used twice

'She is the most popular woman among both men and women.'

Correct usage -

'She is the most prevalent lady with men and women'.

The students were also given another poem of Nissim Ezekiel's 'Very Indian' to spot the mistakes.

John Milton's sonnet 'On His Blindness' was studied for rhetorical questions and other grammatical aspects.

- Rational inquiry:

'Doth God specific day labor, illumination obstructed?'

- Verbal Noun or Gerunds was taught with the example of Robert Frost's 'Mending Wall'.

The adjective 'mending' takes the gerund, which means it is talking about the present time.

The poet uses gerunds to suggest that the task is continuous and always there.

- William Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 was studied to spot more use of gerunds-Eg: 'wandering bark', 'bending sickle' etc.,

- Shakespeare's sonnet 116 was also studied to learn alliteration, personification, assonance, consonance, metaphor, simile, etc.,

- Excerpts from Shakespeare's and Girish Karnad's plays were taken to teach reported speech, clauses, phrases, transformation of sentences, etc.,

Sentences from novels, short stories and essays were selected and dissected to make the students know the different parts or sections of grammar such as gender, a reflexive pronoun, infinite verbs, regular-irregular verbs, etc.,

With all these exercises, the students spoke good English trying to use effective and impressive phrases. Another notable aspect was that the student's vocabulary increased, pronunciation improved and was also equipped with moral values.

When a student was asked to speak a few lines on the topic 'Without effort nothing can be achieved', the student quoted lines from King Lear and said: 'Nothing comes out of nothing'.

This is a clear example of how the students enjoyed the literary texts, learned the technical aspects of grammar, and improved their communication skills.

CONCLUSION

This article concludes that literature significantly contributes to the development of language along with language skills. Literary texts should be introduced as Course books complimented by a Workbook with extensive exercises covering all the aspects of language work. Thus teaching Grammar through literature is more effective and interesting to a learner..

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