INNOVATIVE TASKS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

T. AKKIRAJU
Assistant Professor of English
RRDS Govt. Degree College
Bhimavaram – 534202
(Andhra Pradesh) India

Abstract

English teaching profession has become a more challenging task in the post-Liberalization-Privatization-Globalization scenario. Teachers no longer depend on the borrowed methods from the West. They devise new and indigenous techniques that most suit the needs of the Indian students. Grammar is an area where they can display their critical potential in conceiving innovative tasks and putting them into the right spectrum of improving learners' communication skills. India badly needs skilled graduates, particularly those who are equipped with good conversational and presentation skills in English. It is the proud job of the English teachers to meet the expectations of the nation.

English Language Teaching has been very vibrant for the last two decades. English teachers face unprecedented challenges today to make the students speak in English. Whether professional or non-professional colleges, their reputation relies mostly on English teachers. It's these teachers who are instrumental in molding the passive learners into active speakers. It's these English-speaking graduates who boldly face three rounds of selection process at the job-drives and come out successfully. It's these selections or placements which decide the intake of the ensuing academic year and consequently the future progress of the institutions.

At any stage of study in India, the input of English language is usually offered through a few prose pieces, a set of poems, a non-detailed text and a few grammar items. Gone are the days where appreciation of poetry is enjoyed in the class; nuances of prose language are no longer explored. Neither teacher nor students are interested in the non-detailed text since it is meant for non-detailed reading. Scholars often appeal to the teachers to dovetail the teaching of grammar with prose/poetry/non-detailed text. But how many teachers are doing it? Rather how many teachers are able to do this? In fact, they are constrained by several pressures which disable them to do this. Of the four parts, grammar is directly linked with learners' improvement of language proficiency, especially spoken language.

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Prose, poetry and non-detailed text are the undisputed reservoirs of language elements, one cannot gainsay this. However, while teaching these three, the focus of the teacher usually rests on the content and he aims at making the learners answer the content-based questions in the semester examinations. Hence, learners are exposed to framing sentences and using language elements like articles, prepositions and verbs only when they are taught grammar. While doing exercises at home or practicing in the class, they are set to use language, of course mostly written. Only when they are asked to respond orally in the class, they can have an opportunity to 'utter' sentences but not to communicate. This opportunity is rare and only for a few.

An innovative teacher of English can exploit this area of grammar for creating live contexts into which the learners may be motivated to give simple answers, ask simple questions and make simple requests in English language. Live contexts can be modeled on tasks which provide opportunities for the learners to unconsciously acquire the target language while doing the tasks. "Task-based language teaching is based on the principle that language learning will progress most successfully if teaching aims simply to create contexts in which the learner's natural language learning capacity can be nurtured rather than making a systematic attempt to teach the language bit by bit."(Ellis)

Having taught English for more than two decades, the writer presents a task for teaching 'Tenses' chapter in English grammar. Neither the process nor the title of the task is borrowed; it is framed with gross root level experience and can be followed across the standards from Plus1 to Graduation.

TASK

Title:	*Form-n-Frame*
Time:	*Pre-task activity – 10 minutes*
	While-task activity – 40 minutes
	Post-task activity – 10 minutes
Class Strength:	*40 (ideal)*
Standard:	Plus1 to Graduation
Material Required:	*A few white sheets*
Objectives:	*To enable the learners to frame sentences with ease.*
	To keep the learning environment live.
	To engage slow and fast learners equally.
Advantages:	*More exposure to peer group speaking.*
	No cramming of structures.
	Ample opportunities for listening.
	Exciting off-class learning environment.
Constraints:	*Lack of spacious classroom or open-roofed place which is more suitable for implementing this kind of tasks.*

Process
Pre-Task Activity:
The teacher takes four white sheets, on each of which a list of ten verbs (base form) have been written along with a question word (Interrogative word). For example:
1) Verbs: *eat, come, go, spend, help* etc.   Question word: *How*

2) Verbs: *stay, deposit, read, draw, buy* etc. Question word: *Where*
3) Verbs: *pay, see, fill, write, bring* etc. Question word: *When*
4) Verbs: *prefer, sell, ask, do, grow* etc. Question word: *What*

He makes the class into four groups and distributes them the four sheets. He proceeds to give instructions for completing the task.

- Each group makes a circle.
- Name all the students in a group 1 to 5.
- S1 asks S2 a question using the question word and a verb from the list allotted. For example: *How do you come to college?*
- S2 frames an appropriate answer like I *come to college on foot.*
- He then turns towards S3 and poses him a question. For example: *How do you spend Sundays?*
- Next S3 answers like *We spend Sundays in the church.*
- The process is to be continued till the S1 answers the question from the last student in the group.
- All four groups need to follow this process.
- Once the first round is finished, take a break for one or two minutes so as to bring uniformity. Then groups exchange the sheets.
- In four rounds, all the four sheets will be completed by the four groups.

While-Task Activity:
- Learners are engaged in the task.
- The teacher monitors the learners' participation and progress.
- He ensures that learners follow the various steps involved in the task.

Post-Task Activity:
- Learners debrief their experiences including difficulties.
- The teacher explains the concept and contexts of Simple Present Tense
- He shares his observations with the class.
- He makes necessary corrections in general.

Note:
- Depending upon the strength of the class, the number of students in each group may be increased and subsequently the no. of verbs can be added in each sheet.
- The same task can be employed for other tenses also.
- As it is comparatively easy and simple to frame questions using *'How, When, Where & What'*, they are preferred in the task.

There is no dearth for innovative teachers in the domain of ELT. But their creative potential needs repositioning. In spite of inadequate resources at the gross root level, "pedagogical innovations are viable and feasible in the Indian context." (Patil)Eclectic method of teaching English is the order of the day. English teachers are at a stage where they are conditioned to reshape and refresh their teaching practices, especially infusing their own techniques into the field. They need not limit themselves to one method or approach. They can exploit all the resources at hand to hone their skill of teaching. As Krishnaswamy puts it, only the teachers of English in India can evolve a model that will capture the synergic processes of language teaching, based on Indian ways of learning languages. This is the time for "the right

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kind of materials and pedagogy produced by our own native wisdom" to be employed at all levels where English is taught.

Works Cited

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