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COMPREHEND SIMPLE GRAMMATICAL ERRORS AND EFFECTIVE WAYS OF TEACHING GRAMMAR

***Abstract.** As teachers, when we ask our immediate reaction to the word grammar, we come up with words such as challenging, important. Our students, however, when asked the same question on an informal survey, responded with comments such as "suffering", "boring". What we can do for students whose ideas are interesting but whose ideas are short and monotonous, barren of color adjectives or adverbs, and unclear in meaning because they do not use prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses? We have to teach them to use correct grammar, that's what. When asked to reflect on how grammar was taught to them, most students replied that teachers used direct teaching, worksheets, or editing exercises to help students to improve their grammar proficiency. We believe that, teaching and learning grammar are important but have discovered that, although there is a place for direct teaching of rules, students are more responsive to alternate methods of learning English grammar skills.*

***Keywords:** Subject, Action, Predicate, Verb, Pronouns, Dangling, Modifier.*

The English language is highly complex in nature, and even the best of writers sometimes fall prey to a host of common grammar errors. Among these commonly made errors are subject- verb agreement errors, pronoun-antecedent errors, and dangling modifiers. These errors can cloud the meaning of the writer's words, causing the writer to lose credibility with his or her readers. It is therefore important that a student learn to recognize these common grammatical errors prior to composing an academic essay to receive the best grade possible.

Jeremy Harmer in his book "Teaching and learning grammar" stated that complete sentences consist of two main components: a subject and a predicate. A sentence's subject almost always consists of a noun that identifies either the agent or the recipient of an action. Meanwhile the sentence's predicate is the remainder of the sentence. The predicate always consists of a verb, which identifies either what action the subject does or what action happens to the subject. In the sentence "Naturalists believe that every aspect of the human experience can be explained in terms of the scientific processes", "Naturalists" is the subject, while the remainder of the sentence is the sentence predicate. "Believe" is the simple predicate since it is the verb that identifies what action the subject, naturalists, performs.

Subject-Verb's Errors.

In order for a sentence to be grammatically correct, it is the subject and corresponding verb must agree in number; that is they must be either both plural or both singular. In the case of a subject-verb agreement error, the noun in the subject and the verb in the predicate do not agree in number. The aforementioned sentence is correct because "naturalists" is a plural noun, while "believe" is a plural verb. The sentence would have contained a subject-verb agreement error if it had read, "Naturalists believe that every aspect of human experience can be explained in terms of the scientific processes". Since "naturalists" is a plural noun, while "believes" is a singular verb.

Pronoun-Antecedent Errors

Pronoun-antecedent errors can also be noticed in students' essays. Pronouns are general nouns such as he, she, it, him, her, they, their, everyone, anyone, and no one. These pronouns rename a previously identified specific noun, known as a pronoun antecedent since it appears before the pronoun. Like subjects and verbs, pronouns and pronoun-antecedents must agree in number. A writer should never refer to a singular noun such as "child" using a plural pronoun antecedent such as "they". Therefore, the sentence, "A child must know that they are loved" is

grammatically incorrect. To correct this sentence, a writer may either make the pronoun antecedent plural by rewriting the sentence as, "Children must know that they are loved", or use singular pronoun: "A child must know that he or she is loved".

Dangling Modifier Errors

Another one of the common grammatical errors that students often make is dangling modifier errors. Dangling modifier is a phrase that is attached to a sentence in which the thing that the phrase is supposed to modify does not appear. For instance, the sentence "*By studying hard, grades will be improved*", contains a dangling modifier since it does not identify who will be studying hard. To correct this sentence, the writer must identify the agent who studies. The revised sentence, "*When the students study hard, their grades will improve*", no longer contains a dangling modifier because it identifies students as the agents who will be doing the studying.

Lots of learners and teachers think correction is important. Is this because it helps them to learn and teach or helps them to feel like learners and teachers?

The problem with some learners is they do not make enough mistakes. Accurate but minimal contributions in speaking activities are unlikely to benefit learning as much as inaccurate but extended participation. Learners can be hampered by their own inhibitions and attitudes to accuracy and errors, the teacher's attitude and behavior (conscious or unconscious) to accuracy and errors or the restricted nature of the activities proposed by the teacher. Teachers spend too much time focusing on what students do wrong at the expense of helping them to get the things right.

Teaching grammar through games

As practicing as a teacher, I understand that the most effective, enjoyable, practical and educational way of teaching grammar is games. By presenting students with a game setting that incorporates strategy, skill, an element of chance and enjoyment, "suffering" through boring, lengthy grammar lessons need no longer be in the case.

Shameem and Tickoo (1999, ix) point out that: "Research shows that new language items can be learnt incidentally and effectively when students participate in communication activities." Further, Rinvoluceri (2002) outlines four benefits of using a game format to teach grammar:

1. Games encourage personal involvement in the learning process;
- They provide diagnostic data about individual student skill levels;
- They foster enthusiasm for a subject traditionally viewed as uninteresting;
- They typically are structured so that they involve everyone in the class.

A *Grammar Mountain* is one of the effective games appropriate for university level composition courses, intermediate to advanced English as a second language (ESL) classes, and high school English classes.

Draw 4 vertical climbing lines on the board. Leave space on the bottom to show one sentence at a time.

Divide each line into 10 segments to represent vertical feet.

Mark the segments 10, 20, 30,40, etc.

Prepare a series of sentences. Some should be correct and about three quarters should contain one grammatical error per sentence. Choose the sentence from the students' work, or develop sentences to correspond to the particular grammar point or points the class is currently working on.

Run off the sentences on a transparency and cut them apart. Place them in a paper or envelope ready to draw from during the game.

Divide students into 4 teams of 5 students each.

The game is based on analyzing the given sentences for each team. Each time a team finds a mistake in the sentence or proves that the sentence is correct gains a score and climbs up to 20 vertical feet of the grammar mountain.

The first objective of the game is focusing the students' attention on grammatical usage and sentence construction. It also provides a way to address these two areas in such a way that the target structures are being reviewed and reinforced in an interesting, engaging manner.

In the end, a teacher can only encourage a student to partake in a particular learning opportunity and perhaps instill some rationale for the necessity of it. It is ultimately up to the individual to connect with the learning and make it personally relevant. The word *grammar*, along with perhaps *homework* and *alarm clock*, has negative connotations in the minds of many. We hope to overcome some measure of this resistance to learning grammar; a skill most will agree is necessary and important. Through the use of an interactive, student-encountered game activity, students may internalize the structures of grammar so critical for effective written and spoken communication. I believe that the game we have developed provides students with one means of accessing grammatical information.

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