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# Teaching Grammar Creatively Initiating Communicative Activities in the Class Room

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Language learning has been regarded as a creative activity and not a mechanical process involving memorization through repetition. Since learners encounter different socio-cultural situations in their lives, they cannot always use the same memorized sentences in all the communicative situations. It has been established through various researches carried out during the last century that cramming and mechanical drills amount to limited learning and do not make students proficient in the use of language. In order to maintain intelligibility, comprehensibility and the correct use of language, grammar is taught to the students who learn English as a second and a foreign language. However, only learning of grammatical rules does not guarantee the proficiency in the use of language. There are many learners who are very well versed in grammar rules but when it comes to the actual use of language in real life situations, they fail miserably. Traditional Grammar was prescriptive in nature and completely ignored the creativity of language use. Structural Linguistics endeavoured to evolve mechanical discovery procedures to apply them on the language corpus in order to yield description of language. It, by using analytical tools of study and ignoring the semantic aspect of language, undermines the creativity of language. Transformational Grammar by using intuitive knowledge of the native speakers as a data aims at discovering universal properties in human languages and to evolve a theory about the same. However it confined itself to the linguistic competence of the native speakers and ignored the language use in socio-cultural situations. Sociolinguistics and Functional Grammars discovered this leak in Transformational Generative Grammar and extended the study of grammar to incorporate the use of language in different socio-cultural situations. However, various schools of grammar and pedagogy failed to relate teaching of grammar to creativity involved in language use and as a result failed miserably in extending grammatical competence to communicative competence of the speakers. Hence an effort has been made in the present paper to teach grammar creatively through substituting, embedding, extending, supplementing, parallelism, abridging and complementing activities in order to extend learning of rules to their creative uses in various communicative situations.

## Development of Creativity in a Grammar Class-Room:

A teacher can initiate discussions, debates, language activities and language tasks in a class room by stimulating student's imaginative, inventive and creative faculties to ensure his participation in the language learning process. All the learners are equipped with some schemata and background knowledge which can be creatively used by a teacher in a class room. Similarly so many events, incidents take place around the students which also provide enough material to a teacher to be used in a class room creatively. Similarly the physical setting and environment in the class room also sometimes provide ample material to be creatively used for grammar teaching. While making students aware of grammar rules, a teacher can simultaneously initiate language activities in a class room to integrate teaching of rules with their creative uses. The next part of the paper, therefore, demonstrates teaching of grammar creatively through

initiating various types of activities in the class room in order to ensure the participation of the students in the communication process.

**Parallelism:**

Grammar can be taught creatively by motivating students to replace the examples used by a teacher by similar type of examples using different messages and lexical sets. While teaching phrases, clauses and sentence patterns, a teacher should help students to create parallel examples. When students will come out with parallel sentence patterns by using different messages comprising of different lexical items, they with regular practice of this sort will in due course of time gain insight in creating new and different parallel sentences in different communicative situations.

For example, while teaching basic sentence pattern “Subject +Verb + Complement”, a teacher can involve students in the communication activity and elicit parallel sentences from them from the interaction that takes place in the class room.

Teacher: Do you know Dr. Manmohan Singh/ Prakash Singh Badal/ M.S. Dhoni?

Students: Dr. Manmohan Singh/ Prakash Singh Badal/ M.S. Dhoni is the P.M./ C.M./ Captain of India/ Punjab/Indian Cricket team.

Teacher: Who is the Principal of your college?

Students: Dr. Neelam Kamara is the principal of our college.

Then a teacher should proceed further to the next pattern “Subject +Verb + Object” and try to integrate the earlier pattern with the next higher one in the hierarchy.

Teacher: What does Dr. Kamara do?

Students: She looks after the administration of the college.

Teacher: Do you know Amitabh Bacchan?

Student: He is a famous film star.

Teacher: What is he doing these days?

Student: He is hosting KBC.

A teacher can also ask students about the activities /games/ hobbies/ jobs they do at their homes and elicit responses from the students to provide them further practice.

Teacher: What do you do in the Morning?

Student No. 1: Sir, I play footfall.

Student No.2: Sir, I read newspaper.

Student No. 3: Sir, I study English.

Teacher: What is your father?

Student No. 4: Sir, he is a teacher(Subject+Verb+Complement).

Teacher: What does he teach?

Student No. 4: Sir, he teaches English(Subject+Verb+Object).

### **Complementing Activities:**

Complementing activities refer to the completion of the meanings of nouns which function as subjects in a sentence. A teacher can write some Nouns used as subjects in a sentence and then ask students to provide some information about the nouns in order to complete their meanings in a sentence. For example, a teacher writes some names of persons, places and things already familiar to the students on the blackboard and ask them to complete their meanings by providing some information about them.

Amritsar is .....

D.A.V. Girls College is .....

Sardar Bhagat Singh was .....

Milkha Singhji is

A teacher may also call upon some names among the students of the class and ask other students to complete their meanings by furnishing some information they know about their occupations, character, personalities, interests, hobbies etc.

### **Substitution Activities Using Describing Words:**

Substitution activities refer to the replacement of one language item by another language item. Grammar can be taught creatively in a class room by asking students to substitute one language item by another language item. A sentence or an utterance consists of many qualifying, modifying and describing words. These describing words and phrases which are generally adjectives, adverbials or some adjuncts in a sentence provide us information about the agents, themes and actions performed in a sentence. A pedagogue can create effective meaningful interaction in a class room by using class room resources and asking information about the persons, places and things which function as agents or constitute the theme of sentence or the actions mentioned that constitute the predicate of sentence.

A teacher can write some describing words like dark, fair, lazy, tall, long, grand, small, short, intelligent, beautiful, lovely, broken, old, tired etc, on the blackboard and ask students to use the words from the list to describe some persons, places and things familiar to them. He can initiate discussion in a classroom by involving students in a communicative activity to describe some head words using their background knowledge and the clues provided to them. This activity can be further extended by inviting students to add more names to the list and describe their qualities and traits. Simultaneously a teacher can also write some adverbials describing actions and activities performed by the agents. These adverbs and adverbial phrases may refer to the manner, place, reason and time of actions.

Teacher: Do you have a library in your college?

Student No. 1: Yes Sir.

Teacher: What do you think about its building?

Student No. 1: Sir, it has a big building.

Student No.2: Sir, it has a grand building.

Student No. 3: Sir, it has a palatial building.

Teacher: What about the collection of the books?

Student No.1: Sir, it has a rich collection of books.

Student No. 2: It has many interesting books.

Teacher: Who looks after the library?

Student: Mr. Maninder Singh looks after our library.

Teacher: What type of a person is he? (Teacher can ask students to use words describing his looks/ behaviour/ working/ personality etc.)

Students: He is a young/handsome/funny/intelligent/romantic/old/serious/hardworking/ cooperative/punctual person.

Teacher: How often do you visit library?

Student No.1: Sir, I visit the library daily.

Student No. 2. Sir, I visit the library frequently.

Student No. 3. Sir, I often visit the library.

Student No. 4. Sir, I seldom visit the library.

Student No. 5. I regularly visit the library.

### **Embedding Activities:**

Embedding is a grammatical activity that involves putting one linguistic unit into another linguistic unit. Generally embedding is used to put one phrase into another phrase or one clause into another clause. In language some words need to be described in order to make the message more comprehensible and clear. The embedded clause is used to perform the function of describing the head „Noun“ of the main clause. Generally a noun phrase, or a noun clause in apposition to or an adjective clause is used to describe head Noun of a main clause. The teacher can ask students to supply some information about the head „Noun“ with which they are familiar. The head noun should be known to the students so that they will not face any problem in supplying information about it. Through initiating discussion in the class room and eliciting responses from the students about the head „Noun“, a teacher can involve students to participate creatively in grammar activities. A teacher should first exemplify embedding activity himself and then brings students to participate in the same activities creatively thorough discussion in the class room.

I met Professor Mohinder Sangita today. She is Head of the Department of English. She is a very good organizer. Professor Mohinder Sangita, Head of the Department of English is a very good organizer.

Similarly a teacher can ask students to supply some information about some very well personalities or some known places or things.

Teacher: Do you know Saina Nehwal?

Student: Sir, She is a badminton player.

Teacher: What is her recent achievement?

Student: Sir, she won the gold in the Common Wealth games.

Saina Nehwal who is a badminton player won the gold in the Common Wealth Games 2010.

Similarly students can also be provided practice in the embedding activities by asking them to form gerundial and participial clauses by shortening and combining two separate simple sentences into a complex sentence.

Someone climbs the mountain. It is a difficult task.

Climbing mountain is a difficult task.

Someone swim across a flooded river. It is a difficult task.

Swimming across a flooded river is a difficult task.

Someone comes to Amritsar. It is a tiresome journey.

Coming to Amritsar is a tiresome journey.

Someone visits Darbar Sahibji. It is a heavenly experience.

Visiting Darbar Sahibji is a heavenly experience.

Teacher: What do you do at night?

Student No.1: Sir, I read novels at night.

Teacher: Do you enjoy it?

Teacher: Do you enjoy reading novels at night?

Teacher: What do you do in the evening?

Student No. 2: Sir, I play football in the evening.

Teacher: Is it your hobby?

Student: Yes, Sir.

Teacher: Playing football in the evening is his hobby.

### **Reduction Activities:**

Reduction activities involve shortening of sentences into clauses, phrases and words. They are closely related to embedding activities. Students can be taught embedding and abridging simultaneously. They should be demonstrated with examples to reduce sentences into clauses or phrases and then to embed them into a main clause. Further the embedded adjectival clause can be reduced by deleting the subordinator and the finite verb from them. Students can be asked by a teacher to abridge the full adjectival clauses into reduced ones.

Students can be further involved in reduction activities by asking them to reduce long sentences to make headlines of newspapers, to prepare telegraphic messages and to write some advertisements. Writing advertisements can be a very interesting and creative activity given to the students in a class room. Students can be asked to write advertisements for some well known brands using particular sentence constructions.

Type 1. Drink Pepsy and become young.

Buy Maruti and enjoy heavenly ride.

Use fair and lovely and look fresh.

Type 2. Nokia connecting people.

Coke refreshing people.

T.C.S. creating new horizons.

Nescafe relaxing people.

Lux beautifying people.

Type 3. Canon delights you.

Soni entertains you.

AjtaK informs you.

Keo Karpin repairs loss.

Limka rejuvenates you.

### **Extending Activities:**

After providing practice to the students in learning short and simple sentences through parallelism and complementing and substituting activities, students grammar and language skills can be further extended to long and complex and compound sentences. Extending and enlarging a short text into a long one will be both an interesting and a creative activity. A teacher can elicit some information from the students about the various head words used in a sentence. He can, then use this information in exploding a text by putting this information in the place of pre-modifier, post-modifier and adjuncts.

Example: The man visited the Taj.

In order to engage student in expanding a short text, the teacher may ask students to provide some information about the head noun „Man“, „Taj“ and the verb „visited“. The teacher may ask students to provide some information about the looks, height and personality of the „man“. He can put this information in the place of pre-modifier „a tall and handsome young man“. He can further ask students to furnish some information about the whereabouts of the man.

Teacher: Where does the man come from?

Student: The man comes from Amritsar.

The teacher puts this information in the place of post-modifier as follows:

The tall and handsome young man who comes from Amritsar visited the Taj.

In order to further expand the sentence, the teacher may ask students to provide some information about the Taj.

Teacher: What do you know about Taj?



Student No. 1: The Taj is one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Student No. 2: The Taj is situated on the banks of the Yamuna.

Student No. 3: The Taj is included in the World's heritage list.

The teacher puts this information in the place of post-modifier after Taj and further expands the sentence:

The tall and handsome Youngman who comes from Amritsar visited the Taj, one of the seven wonders of the world and included in the world's heritage list.

### **Pair Work and Group Work Activities**

Being a single person, a teacher cannot interact with each and every student of the class. In order to ensure the participation of all the students of a class, a teacher can divide a class into small groups of four or six students. Dividing a class into small groups will help the students to leave their seats and shed away their traditional role that restricts them to interact with only their teacher. Once the students leave their seats and join a group they will be engaged in interactions with each other. This will instill confidence in students to interact with other people outside their class room. One important advantage of group work activity will be that a teacher will be able to inculcate the habit of conversing in English among his students which generally they avoid due to shyness and fear. Once students start participating in conversation exchanges in a group, they will overcome the inhibition and will continue to interact with each other in English. One of the benefits of group work is that it not only triggers the students to initiate communication in English but also if a student or a member of a group has any problem in expressing himself, the leader of the group may help him or he may ask the other member of the group to help the member in need. For extending teaching of rules to fluency development, a teacher should first acquaint the students with the basics of a particular grammatical item that he is going to take up in his class. After acquainting the learners with the rules of a grammar item, a teacher should provide practice to use the item through different examples. Now a teacher can divide a class into different groups and provide some activities and tasks to the groups to facilitate the group members to interact with each other through the frequent use of that grammar item. In this way students will not only be able to learn a particular grammar item, but through the frequent use of the grammar item through interaction between them, their fluency will not only be clicked but also improved and the learning of that grammar item will also be consolidated.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, by providing exposure to learners through replacement, complementation, reduction, embedding, parallelism and extending activities, their participation in the learning process can be ensured and maximized. The communicative activities based on the socio-cultural and experiential knowledge pertaining to the students' home life and general knowledge will integrate the content with their learning and simplify the learning of English by facilitating the participation of the students in the learning process and in due course of time will also remove their inhibition to converse in English. According to Professor N. Krishnaswamy, "Learners know what to say in the mother tongue in a given situation; they do it everyday. ... In order to do similar things in English, what they need is words in English, an

understanding of how the words in English are put together to form larger units, and meaningful practice in contexts in which English is required to be used in India( Krishnaswamy 1995: 33). Use of the illustrated activities will involve the participation of the learners to create content on their own and to integrate the content with the required grammatical structures to create messages as per the requirements of the communicative situations. These activities will also trigger the creative faculty of the students to work independently in English.

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