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TEACHING SITUATIONAL GRAMMAR IN AMERICAN STUDIES

The purpose of this paper is to identify the role, importance and effectiveness of teaching situational grammar for the American Studies students.

Key words: grammar, the role, importance, effectiveness.

Целью статьи является определение роли, значения и эффективности преподавания ситуационной грамматики для студентов по направлению «Американистика».

Ключевые слова: грамматика, роли, значения, эффективность.

What is Grammar?

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

Grammar is defined as “..... the rules in a language for changing the form of words and for combining them into sentences” according to the

Different dictionaries define 'grammar' in different ways, but they all effectively talk about the 'rules of the language'. Grammar does not

equal only 'tenses' or verb forms. Grammar is language and how we use it. What is more important than a definition of the word 'grammar' in this paper is knowing that is there really any need to teach grammar?

First of all it would be relevant to point out what is Situational grammar teaching, according to one of the Internet sources on situational grammar "Situational grammar teaching is a contemporary way of teaching grammar points of a foreign language by presenting and practicing them in a context or a situation, instead of mechanical paradigms. as before. For example, for teaching and practicing the future tense, the teacher sets up the situation in which this structure is most commonly used, which provides lots of space for communicative (and fun!) practice of the specified grammar point. The situation for practicing going-to future is planning a party with your friends and arranging who is going to be in charge of what."

Nowadays when the world is changing every day, in every sphere of our life we can see some innovations. Though, the method of teaching situational grammar is not the invention of today, I can confidently say that it is comparatively new in our country.

First I had a chance to get acquainted with the different methods of teaching grammar was the Universities' Workshop Series 2008, About Teaching Grammar by Carol Marsh, English Language Fellow. That was interactive workshop which examined the place of grammar in the English classroom. We compared Prescriptive grammars and Descriptive grammars. We discussed the theory and did many activities for Deductive and Inductive grammar teaching. Also we were presented some elements of teaching situational grammar. From that time I began to reconsider my way of teaching grammar. Having implemented these "new methods" in my classes soon I have noticed the students' improvement and interest.

The next encounter with the Teaching Situational Grammar was at the Teachers Training Workshop on Communicative Methodology held by English Language School "Lingua", 2010.

Due to that workshop many language teachers learnt about teaching situational grammar. We reviewed and experimented with some samples of presenting situational grammar. I really became very interested in it more than in any other methods of teaching grammar and this fact had an

influence on writing this paper. In this paper I would like to give more detailed information about teaching situational grammar and share with my lesson plan on The Past Perfect Tense.

Teaching grammar via Situational Presentation
I. What do students need to know?

When presenting new language, the teacher must show following things very clearly:

MPF:

There are several aspects of a new item: that you need to know and learners need to learn.

1. What it means.

They need to understand meaning within the given context.

2. What it sounds like.

They need to know the natural pronunciation and spelling of the language.

(This is often referred to as, MPF.) As well as knowing the MPF, students need to use the language - practice.

Language needs context because context provides meaning. One way to illustrate meaning is via a situation. This can be done in a number of ways, including pictures. This situational presentation tends to be quite controlled by the teacher, at least initially, but with the students involved at all times.

Situational presentation refines the context and thus the meaning by building a situation around the presented grammar.

Let's take the Past Perfect Tense as an example of presenting grammar via situation. This is for pre-intermediate / intermediate class. As it is referred to the American Studies students I decided to present the situation of an American wedding.

Stage 1

Spend a few minutes on a class discussing about a big event in everyone's life. Try to elicit from the students the name of this event. The teacher asks questions and maximizes student talking time.

Stage 2

After the students have guessed the name of an event, the teacher revises some vocabulary about wedding which were covered before. In order to refresh the students' minds about learnt words, an activity "Back to the board" can be done. For example, these words can be following:

Wedding rings, bridegroom, bride, honeymoon, stag party, etc.

Stage 3

After the vocabulary been revised and students

feel more confident to speak on presented topic, the teacher hangs on a blackboard the picture a young man and woman. The teacher elicits the ideas about these people from the students asking some questions like: What do you think who are they? Are they a couple? Do they have any children? etc. This increases the students' talking time which is important in language lesson.

Stage 4

When the students are over with their suppositions about the picture, it is time for the teacher to present the picture. The teacher tells that these young man and woman are married, that they got married a month ago and they had their wedding party. Even it is good to give their names to seem the situation more realistic. Then your students should be asked questions about the wedding of this couple like: What did they do at the wedding? What did the guests do? It will help students much if the teacher presents another picture of a wedding party because students looking at it can easily get ideas. All the students' answers must be written on the board, below the picture of wedding and all the verbs in the sentences must be in past simple because all these happened "a month ago" this must be indicated on the board as well.

Stage 5

In this step the teacher asks questions about the things the couple did before their wedding. For example, what did they do before the wedding? Did they invite their guests before? etc. The teacher should record the students' answers on the board. So the board now is divided into two by the things done "a month ago at the wedding" and by the things done "before the wedding".

Stage 6

The teacher draws a time-line, after she asks students to combine two actions in the past into one sentence, pointing out that the first action happened before the second one.

Past-----#-----#----- Now

1) They bought a wedding cake. 2) They ate a cake.

Surely if they are not aware with this grammar point, they cannot manage with this task. Maybe someone will know it or may say the sentence with mistakes. Or maybe no-one has any idea. This is not important; you are just seeing if anyone knows it. If no-one does, the teacher says the sentence to the class, making sure everyone is listening!!! The teacher names the grammar and writes a model sentence on the board. This is the

teacher's model sentence containing the language being targeted.

Model: They had bought a wedding cake and ate it at their wedding party.

The students must hear you say the model sentence several times naturally and then be given the chance to say it to themselves. At this stage of the lesson the main focus has been on the meaning. What the teacher has done is to illustrate meaning by means of a pictorial situation and introduced a model sentence containing the target language. The aim has been achieved, meaning has been illustrated. It is essential that the teacher checks that the students really have understood the meaning. By providing meaning in context teachers are providing their students with real language rather than abstract rules. But this is not enough. We have to make sure they have understood.

Teachers must employ effective and efficient methods for checking the students' understanding of the meaning which has been illustrated.

'Do you understand?' 'Yes'. Proves absolutely nothing.

The most effective method of checking understanding is concept checking questions.

We can now turn these statements into simple questions:

Are we talking about the past, the present or the future? (past)

Are they finished actions? (yes)

Did one action happen before another action in the past? (yes)

If the students give any answers different from the above, they have not understood everything and some further clarification will be required.

Concept questions are an effective and efficient way to genuinely check understanding. They should:

- focus on the essential meaning of the language in the context being provided
- be short and simple in nature
- avoid ambiguity
- require very short answers
- avoid the use of the grammatical form being tested

Tips to formulate concept questions

1. First analyze the language and its meaning within the given context.
2. Define the essential meaning in simple statements.
3. Turn these sentences into questions.

4. Keep the questions simple in terms of both language and length.

5. Avoid questions which are not relevant to the meaning of the language.

6. Avoid using the same grammatical forms in the questions that you are testing.

7. Ask questions which do not require a lot of language in the answer.

8. Make sure the answers are clear and unambiguous.

9. Plan them in advance – until you have more experience and confidence, they will not be easy to think of on the spot.

Form can be highlighted by using different color pens, if possible, and/or a substitution table.

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After all let's review the main tips for planning and conducting Situational Grammar Presentations.

- The meaning, form and pronunciation of new language needs to be covered, and communicative practice should be given, too.

- Situational presentations are controlled and effective ways to introduce language at certain levels.

- They can be done via visuals as long as these are clear and appropriate.

- Teachers need to be clear in their own minds of the meaning of the target language, how it is formed, and how it is spoken.

- This type of presentation is teacher-led, but with student involvement throughout. Let them do as much of the 'storytelling' as possible.

- Have a model sentence to work towards – elicit it if you can, give it if you can't.

- Check they really have understood the meaning.

In conclusion I would like to emphasize that situational context permits presentation of a wide range of language items. The situation serves as a means of contextualizing the language and this helps clarify its meaning. At the same time the generated examples provide the learners with data for induction of the rules of form. Students can be involved in the development of the presentation as well as in solving the grammar 'problem': this makes it less dry than a traditional grammar explanation. Moreover, the situation, if well chosen, is likely to be more memorable than a simple explanation. All these factors suggest that this approach rates high in terms of efficacy.

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