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**Teaching English Grammar in Indian Engineering Colleges Using  
Reverse Learning Methodology**

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**Pratishruti Singh**

Assistant Professor, School of Humanities and Sciences, Ramdeobaba University,  
Nagpur

[singhps1@rknec.edu](mailto:singhps1@rknec.edu)

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**Abstract:** If you ask those who have newly acquired the skill of driving, they will tell you that it is more difficult for them to use reverse gear than simply driving on the highway. The same is true with most English teachers who have continued to use the tools and techniques prescribed by great Grammarians for decades together. In countries like India, a staggering 80% of self-identified English speakers make frequent errors (1). The writer of this study has been using reverse methodology to impart knowledge of correct and accurate English. Rather than reprimanding students for mistakes, teachers should view these errors as opportunities for constructive dialogue and guidance. This research highlights instances where errors were transformed into engaging and enjoyable learning moments, suggesting that these strategies can invigorate otherwise tedious grammar lessons. This study lists several such situations where students committed errors, and the teacher converted those situations into opportunities for fruitful and joyful learning experiences. If used appropriately, this technique will transform the monotonous and dull learning exercises of grammar and language into stimulant and joyful classroom interactions.

**Keywords:** English learning, mistakes, engaging experiences, reverse learning methodology.

### **1.Introduction:**

Correct grammar is considered a prerequisite for spoken and written communication. Committing grammatical errors is part of language learning. The following discussion shows how errors were turned into learning opportunities. The author of this paper has selected some of the erroneous usages of grammar from the

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answer books of sessional examinations of undergraduate engineering students of Ramdeobaba University, earlier known as Shri Ramdeobaba College of Engineering and Management, Nagpur. This paper has presented the teaching methodology of grammar compactly in the following paragraphs.

**Material used:**

This is a research article. As stated above, the materials used are the answer books of students who appeared in the sessional examinations.

**2.1 Time and Tenses**

I have visited Gandhi Ashram in December.

Application-based grammar is the call of recent times. The learners should know the application of all the types of tenses. This makes different tenses very user-specific. The present perfect tense is used to talk about past actions where the action done is important and not its periphery details, whereas simple past tense is used to denote any action done in the past with the choice of citing the details of the action as well. When the learner says the above sentence, we explain that 'I have visited Gandhi Ashram' emphasizes the action of visiting 'Gandhi Ashram,' and the details do not matter. If one wants to give the details, then one can use a simple past. Therefore, the correct answer is 'I visited Gandhi Ashram in December,' where the action done in the past, along with its details, is also quoted.

A learner learns the best when he commits a mistake and rectifies it himself. Taking a cue from this, we can imprint specific applications of tenses by writing the wrong structure, striking it out, and then correcting it. Learners sometimes face the dilemma of choosing between tenses of the same time, e.g., choosing between present simple and present continuous. People commonly use the present continuous tense to convey their feelings, thinking, or belief, which is erroneous. Rather, the present simple is used to describe what we feel or think. To explain this, we can demonstrate in the following way-

~~I do not understand this letter.~~

I don't understand this letter.

**2.2 Literal Translations**

1. I must talk to him soon.

The above sentence seems to be a literal translation of 'I have to talk to him soon,' where the learner has taken 'must' to be a synonym for 'has to' depicting

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compulsion. We shall encourage the learner to try to reframe the sentence correctly but with a minor hitch. The learner has to be told here that modals are independent working units that do the job of the helping verb as well as have a meaning of their own. If 'have to = must,' then in the sentence, there shouldn't be any extra 'to.' The answer that they give is, 'I must talk to him soon.'

### **2.3 Preposition v/s Conjunction**

He's married to an engineer.

The above sentence seems to be another case of the literal translation of a sentence in the vernacular. We need to explain to learners that in English, the preposition 'with' means together. Therefore, the sentence will mean that 'he' and 'engineer' married together but not to each other. Therefore, the correct answer to the above sentence is 'He is married to an engineer.' The learners here need to be taught the usage of various prepositions like place, direction, etc. They should also be enlightened about the usages of 'in/in the,' 'at/at the,' etc.

### **2.3 Words with Similar Purpose**

Although it was noisy, the teacher engaged the class.

It is very important for the learners to know that it is useless to use words with similar meanings in a sentence to convey one meaning. In the above sentence, the 'although' conjunction is used to introduce a statement that makes the main statement seem surprising. The word 'but', which acts as a preposition here, is used to introduce a different idea, which makes the second statement surprising from the first one. Both the words are doing the same task, i.e., introducing the second sentence as a surprising one. The best example for explaining this condition is 'rewrite again.' They should also be oriented about the usage of words having similar meanings in a sentence. Thus, the correct answer to the above sentence is 'Although it was noisy, the teacher engaged the class.'

### **2.5 Question Words Used as Demonstrative Pronouns**

The man who comes here is from Ranchi.

Learners face confusion when they use question words like 'which,' 'whom', and 'who.' A clear demarcation should be made demonstrating to them that 'who/whom' is exclusively attributed to humans and to every other thing 'which.' This confusion is a result of not possessing clarity about persons and numbers as well. They correct the error and give the answer, 'T, the man who comes here is from Ranchi.'

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## 2.6 Framing of Interrogatives

Where can I find a book?

The learners have always misunderstood the concept of **Subject+Verb+Object**. We forget to teach them that besides the 'subject' and before the 'verb', there's the helping verb, which is specific to every tense. We can teach them that there are only three helping verbs, viz. 'to do,' 'to be,' and 'to have,' and they are the lifeline of any sentence and are way more powerful than the main verb. So, we can reframe the sentence pattern as **Subject+Helpingverb+Mainverb+Object**. When we want to frame a question, we swap the subject with the helping verb. For e.g., 'I find a book' is the sentence, and its interrogative is 'Do I find a book?' as the helping verb in the actual sentence is 'to do.' In the above-stated example, there's a question word 'where' and a modal 'can' which acts as a sentence builder, i.e., does the role of a helping verb as well as an independent meaning of its own? Here, at first, we ask the learners to frame an interrogative for 'I can find a book,' which they correctly answer as 'Can I find a book?' Then we make them recall the swapping process of the subject with a helping verb and tell them that if we want to begin a question with a question word, then we do the same swapping process and put the question word at the beginning. Thus, the correct answer is 'Where can I find a book?'

## 2.7 Depiction of Time Span

I have been here for three months.

This is a very tricky sentence for English learners as they assume the above sentence to be syntactically correct. Many assume 'been' as an agent used in the Present Perfect Continuous tense, like 'I have **been** painting this room since morning.' Therefore, while using been the learners assume that since has to be used along with it by default. They need to be told that 'since' is used to refer to a point in time' like since last week, since morning, since night...and 'for' is used to refer to a period of time, like for three years, for a year, for one hour, etc. We need to explain in the above-stated sentence that the word 'been' has not been used as an agent but as a verb, and 'three months' denotes a period of time. Thus, the learners understand that the correct sentence is 'I have been here for three months.'

## 2.8 Sentence Editing

I have got a new work.

While teaching grammar, the learners should also be oriented upon the contextual meaning of the semantics of a sentence. The learners must be encouraged to preserve the essence of the language rather than make literal translations and use

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connotative meanings. The word 'work' in English refers to the action of doing a task. Therefore, one can be allotted tasks or work. But when we refer to the allocation of a new work profile, then it is referred to as a 'job.' Moreover, 'got' and 'have' have almost the same meaning. Here, the learners also get to know the importance of editing and omission. So, they arrive at the right answer, which is 'I have a new job.' If one needs to convey that the job was acquired by him/her, then it can be reframed as 'I have got a new job.'

## **2.9 Polite Requests/ Permissions**

Do you like a glass of lemonade?

When the learners are taught modals, they must also be categorically taught the levels of politeness under the topic 'requests/permissions.' The learners are explained that the following is the chronology or the degree of politeness: Can-->Could-->Would-->May.

Where 'May' is the most polite, and 'can' is used when we ask for permission in the first person, like 'Can I help you?' or when requesting anybody who is too close to you, 'Can you get me a glass of water?' Then, 'could' is more polite than 'can' and is used for acquaintances and strangers. 'Would' is used as a past form of 'will' and meant for polite requests or offers. Therefore, the learners understand the correct way of offering and come out with the correct answer, 'Would you like a glass of lemonade?'

## **2.10 Using More Than One Element of Negation**

I didn't see anyone in the class.

The learners should be oriented to avoid the usage of negation more than once in a sentence. The way In mathematics, two negatives make a positive. Similarly, we need to analogically explain that in the English language, more than two negatives don't emphasize the negative but lead to faulty sentence construction. Moreover, several learners also consider 'no one' and 'nobody' to be just units rather than negative words. Thus, the learners are explained that they can either say, 'I didn't see anybody...' or 'I saw no one/nobody...'

## **2.11 Articles**

Where is the train?

Most Indian languages only have definite articles to depict specific nouns, but they don't have indefinite articles. Therefore, nouns are mostly referred to without an article. This may confuse the second language learners when they make a transition from their mother tongues. The learners should be made aware of the correct and

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contextual usages of 'a/an' and 'the' used as definite and indefinite articles, respectively, while referring to something in general or a specific noun. Thus, the correct answer given is **'Where is the train?'** They should also be told that 'a' is used when something is mentioned for the first time and 'the' to talk about something we have already mentioned. E.g., 'Sam wore a hat today.' 'Sam wore a hat. The hat was made of lace.' Or 'Sam wore the hat that he had worn that day.' We also use **a/an** before a type of job: My uncle is **a** teacher. (NOT ~~...is a teacher.~~) **For a specific job/job title**, my uncle is **the** CEO.

The learners should also be oriented to the conditions in which articles are not used, like the names of most countries, except the US and the UK; names of continents or languages; types of music or any genre, meals, subjects for study, sports, and games: She's very good at arithmetic. (~~...the arithmetic~~), He plays baseball well. (~~...the baseball~~) And did you have lunch? (~~...the lunch~~)

### **Conclusions**

The above examples clearly show that when learners commit error in the usage of grammar, it provides an opportunity to the teachers to explain the correct usage with examples. This practice of teaching grammar can prove useful at the middle and high school levels as well to orient listeners in correct usage of grammatical structures. This strategy has been found more effective than theoretical teaching of rules of grammar.

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