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DECREASING EFL STUDENTS' FEAR OF GRAMMAR AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL: ADDRESSING GRAMMAR INDIRECTLY

Abstract:

Grammar is often a source of controversy among university teachers and learners. It has traditionally been taught for its own sake, emphasizing rules and drills, whereas in recent years more emphasis is given to communicative competence. Current research suggests that form-focused instruction is particularly effective when incorporated in a meaningful communicative context (Nassaji & Fotos, 2010). This raises the question of how to integrate grammar instruction with communicative language teaching, referred to as "the central dilemma" by Richards & Renandya (2002).

Generally, EFL students have a negative opinion about grammar and think they will never be able to speak or write English grammatically. In fact, there is a great discrepancy between students' comprehension of the English language and their ability to produce grammatical sentences even at high proficiency levels. By the time students get to the university, they have developed a clear-cut opinion about grammar and it is not one that is easily changeable. University teachers face the challenge of remolding the students' attitude to help them master the English grammar despite their previous negative experiences. The task may be daunting at times.

Advanced English students at Tel Aviv University typically have a good receptive knowledge of English but a lower productive competence, particularly in writing. Thus, in accordance with recent research mentioned above, grammar needs to be taught to enhance academic reading and writing skills. The purpose of this presentation is to illustrate ways to teach grammar through writing. It is argued that writing tasks related to the students' academic fields will encourage them to express themselves freely in topics that are close to their hearts, without being too concerned about grammatical forms. In these tasks students focus on the content of what they write and their opinions on the topic at hand. They are told in advance that they will be given credit for merely doing the task and that their grammar mistakes will not affect their grades. These original essays are later used by the teacher to identify grammatical points the students need to learn. The author will present practical classroom tips to teach grammar in a fun way that dissipates anxiety and promotes learning. The anonymity of the mistakes analyzed, as well as the joint efforts of the students to identify and correct the mistakes reduce tension and foster feelings of self-efficacy. The positive learning atmosphere thus achieved facilitates a favorable approach to grammar acquisition.

Keywords:

remolding students' attitude, EFL, teaching grammar through writing, communicative instruction

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