

Keepin' it Real: Engaging Strategies for Teaching Grammar

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The Challenge: Some abstract principles relevant to teaching grammar

- Language teachers have a wide range of options to choose from in grammar teaching:
 - traditional explicit drill-style teaching of grammar rules
 - focus-on-form approaches that balance explicit grammar with communicative practice activities (balancing explicit treatment of form, function, and meaning)
 - other ways of mixing explicit and implicit treatment of grammar rules
 - limited focus-on-form approaches that emphasize indirect grammar, supplemented with occasional exercises and activities that explicitly address targeted grammar
 - whole-language-style instruction, with grammar learned inductively.
- Research in applied linguistics has found that:
 - no one option above is ideal in all instructional contexts, at least partly because institutional and learner goals vary greatly, meaning that any one might be ideal
 - regardless of deductive or inductive approach, grammatical accuracy and fluency seem to develop best through lessons that involve structured practice of new forms within a rich communicative context, in which learners find their voices.
- With our limited time and resources, language teachers must find a balance between:
 - the tendency to fall into instructional ruts, following textbooks unquestioningly, doing what we've always done because we've always done it, and providing a predictably structured learning experience for our students, on the one hand
 - the professional obligation to adjust our lessons to the specific needs of each learner or group of learners and to challenge ourselves to try new things based on reflective practices and engagement with the profession, on the other hand
- In sum, we must navigate the many options available for grammar instruction by drawing on the strengths of our experiences and textbooks, but also by building those strengths to address the idiosyncratic learning styles and goals of each learner and group.

Some Strategies: Challenge yourself to use any of the strategies that you don't use regularly

Drill-style practice of grammar rules _____

Situated practice of explicit grammar rules _____

Explicit focus on form following communicative practice _____

Group/pair work focused on use and analysis of grammar rules _____

Grammar games (for group or whole class) _____

Explicit contrastive analysis of L1 and TL rules _____

Explicit contrast of informal vs. formal English _____

Other strategies? _____

Focus: Contrasting Dialect Forms and Structures

President-Elect Barack Obama's Election Victory Speech (11/4/2008)

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America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. So tonight, let us ask ourselves -- if our children should live to see the next century; if my daughters should be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see? What progress will we have made?

This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment.

This is our time, to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids;

to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace;

to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth, that, out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope.

And where we are met with cynicism and doubts and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can.

Thank you. God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s I Have a Dream Speech (1964)

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned.

Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.

So we have come to cash this check — a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now.

This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children...

President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (11/19/1863)

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

The United States Declaration of Independence (1776)

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare,

that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be free and independent states;

that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved;

and that as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do.

And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor...