

ICTs and Multimodalities for Enhancing Grammar Teaching

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Abstract

Based on the potential contribution of ICTs and multimodalities in grammar teaching, this paper aims at proposing a teaching model for grammar lessons. This model would help in raising learner's motivation, pleasure and self-engagement in the learning process because of the various attractive resources and long-term exposure to language in content. The article starts with a literature review that highlights some issues concerning teaching grammar, ICTs and multimodalities. Then, for more practicality and to show the feasibility of the proposed teaching model, this paper explains some procedures that can be followed by teachers to empower learning mechanisms through ICTs and multimodalities while teaching grammar. The suggested lesson is the simple past tense as an example.

Keywords : Grammar, ICTs, Multimodalities, Teaching process.

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I. Introduction :

Grammatical competence is one of the most important components of linguistic competence and none can deny the role of the latter in learning any language, even those who support communicative competence over linguistic competence, because simply communicative competence would never be acquired without linguistic competence. Grammar and communicative competence cannot be in opposition. Wang (2010:80) claims; 'At any time at any stage and in any circumstances, grammar teaching cannot be diluted.' Teaching grammar is imperative when teaching language. 'Mastering grammar is the foundation in the proficiency of a language. Grammar teaching is also an essential part of language teaching.' Wang (2010:78) The present study shows the importance of teaching grammar through stating its roots in history and how it synchronized the flourishing of education and culture in general. Then it gives an idea ICTs and multimodalities. After that, a model of teaching grammar based on the exploitation of both multimodalities and ICTs is suggested with a practical model for teaching the simple past tense.

II. A Historical Review

II.1. Panini's work :

Hanganu (2015) recounts the history of the English grammar starting from the Sanskrit language and the Vedic dialects that were described and examined in Panini's seminal work ; ' Panini seems to be the first scholar who had organized word into parts of speech and had defined grammar rules, in his work, Astaka, which is a detailed account of his grammar.' (05) According to Hudson (2012), grammar beginnings dated back to nearly 4,000 years ago; '(...) when the Akkadian-speaking scribes of Babylon learned to translate to Sumerian.' (10) They learned through 'tables of equivalent verb-forms in the two languages, so someone must have analyzed these verb forms and produced a systematic framework.' (ibid) The most noticeable according to Hudson (2012) is that they used to order first, second and third person forms in such order. What made him claim that certain part of 'our' heritage may return back to four thousand years. Then, he states that 'The Greeks developed the tradition of grammatical analysis that dated back to the Babylonians into a more highly structure and theoretical system.' (11)

II.2. Plato's contribution :

Then, Hanganu (2015) moves to Plato's and the Sophists' contributions in developing the schools of rhetoric and the establishment of grammar as a discipline. Plato, who is considered as the first who has used the term 'grammar', '(...) with the Sophists, Aristotle and the Stoics defined

the basic notions of the discipline'. (06) Those Greek scholars helped in the establishment of a well organized education that covered a number of topics including language (grammar) and literature which were the most important topics.

II.3. The Roman era :

With the rise of the Roman civilization over the Greek one, Romans recognized the superiority of the Greek culture and have adopted a lot from it. Education was one of the integrated characteristics of the Greek culture. 'As Rome grew in power and size, it assimilated numerous Greek customs and practices, including the educational system. Therefore, grammar also held a central place in Roman schools.' (Williams. 2005: 05 cited in Hanganu. 2015). Hanganu. (2015) states the contributions of the Roman grammarians Donatus in the 4th century AD and Priscian in the 6th century AD whose texts have been references for studying grammar in the Middle Ages.

II.4. The German dominance :

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the German dominance came with a sort of stagnation and education started to be led by the church, until Charlemagne became the emperor of the western area of the fallen Roman Empire when education in Europe continued progress. 'The fourteenth century witnessed a new phase in the progression of humanism, a reaction to the scholasticism of the mediaeval schools (...) Grammar research was becoming more and more theoretical'. Hanganu (2015:12) She explains; 'Under the humanist influence of Valla (...), scholasticism was abandoned, and grammar studies returned to the classical approach. (ibid) Meanwhile, the grammar of vernacular languages started to be established. Mulroy (2003:52) demonstrates; 'In due course, new humanist Latin Grammars modeled on Donatus and Priscian appeared throughout Europe. (...) they went beyond these models and the later scholastic textbooks by providing glosses and translations of grammatical terms and paradigms into vernacular languages.'

II.5. The Renaissance era :

Erasmus, the Dutch theologian and the leader of the German humanism, was the first scholar to introduce humanism in England. He sought to make changes in language teaching and in grammar teaching in particular. He insisted on eliminating the confusing ideas of the modistae as he saw they have complicated grammar by subdividing parts of speech into various 'modes of signifying' and transformed grammar to impractical speculative discipline. Therefore, he joined John Colet who established St. Paul's School, one of the first Renaissance schools in London, and Thomas Moore, the writer, in order to support the efforts to improve the schools. 'The effect of an education that included ancient classics and a standard grammar was the generation of the seventeenth century classic English

literature whose authors were eminent men like Spenser, Bacon, Malowe, Ford, Johnson and Shakespeare.’ Mulroy (2003: 55) All those authors, according to Mulroy, ‘appear to have learned grammar, have read the classical Latin writers, and have acquired some awareness of the Greek language or knowledge of the elements of this language.’ (ibid)

II.6. The Rebirth of grammar teaching :

‘In 1856, William Bullokar wrote a Bref Grammar of the English Language, which was considered «the first grammar of vernacular English.» Hanganu. (2015:16) Bullokar and some of the early vernacular grammarians demonstrated that the analytical counterparts of English such as subject, object, passive and active verbs are the same as in the Latin morphological system. Mulroy. (2003) The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a disappearance of English grammar from the curriculum in most of the schools of UK and English speaking countries. One of the reasons behind that was the lack of research and studies on English grammar. Later, there was a ‘rebirth of grammar teaching’ after the flourishing of research and studies in university. Hudson and Walmsley. (2005) But grammar teaching still needs more improvement; ‘(...) educators for the past two centuries have taught with traditional pedagogies of repetition and recitation based on the directions of the textbooks they taught with and, often, how they themselves were taught to interact with grammar.’ Patriquin. (2017:05) She adds: ‘Perhaps the Golden Age of grammar is not today, as it hasn’t yet been, but we can strive for grammar integration that makes sense.’ (32)

III. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Teaching in the 21st century demands more skills than those needed in the traditional teaching of the previous generations. In an era of unlimited ways of communication and information sharing, a teacher needs to know how to smartly make use of new technologies to foster the teaching and learning processes. ICTs offer unlimited opportunities for teachers to improve the teaching process.

III.1. Definition of ICTs

“Information and Communication Technology (ICT) generally relates to those technologies that are used for accessing, gathering, manipulating and presenting or communicating information. The technologies could include hardware; software applications; and connectivity.” (Alemu, 2015:02) This means that ICTs are all the technologies with all the software and hardware applications in addition to any means of communication.

III.2. Importance of ICTs in Teaching

Many studies have been conducted to explore the different ways of making use of ICTs for empowering teaching learning processes. However,

this domain is vast and the benefits of such new technologies on teaching and learning are unlimited. Teachers can exploit ICTs to create a better atmosphere of learning and hence better outcomes of teaching. Teaching languages and teaching grammar in particular can be enhanced through the use of ICTs for developing teaching techniques and overcoming many of the obstacles that both a learner and a teacher can face. "Mobile technologies have already begun to change the landscape of language learning in developed countries." (Shrestha. 2012:35-36)

All teachers and learners should benefit from ICTs to enhance and enrich the teaching-learning process as these technologies have a potential value to add to education. (Alemu, 2015) Traditional methods of teaching do not lead learners to be productive, so the advocates of ICT insist on the necessity of the existence of ICTs inside the classroom to prepare learners to be contributors in the information society. Mathipa and Mukhari. 2014

III.4. Problems faced in using ICTs for teaching

Using ICTs inside the classroom in spite of the unlimited offers and opportunities to boost the teaching/learning process, is not that easy task. Teachers face various obstacles that hinder the infinite potential uses of such new technologies.

In many countries, the exploitation of ICTs is limited to teaching the basics of using computer in an isolated subject matter. Many experts and educationalists do not encourage for such a narrow view of exploiting new technologies. Thakral 2015 indicates that integrating ICTs in teaching different subject matters is better than teaching computer as an isolated subject matter. According to him, besides the empowerment of the subject matter level, ICT use in everyday teaching and learning activities seems to be more important than specific computer courses.

Researchers, educationalists, administrative and governments should encourage teachers to exploit ICTs for boosting the teaching learning processes as much as possible. In addition to that, teachers need to be provided with all the necessary tools to achieve such goal. "New tools and approaches need to recognize the needs of teachers and to provide the supports that teachers need to use technologies seamlessly as tools of their trade." Oliver 2005:07

Despite of all the difficulties that a teacher may face to exploit ICTs for enhancing the teaching process, she has to try to overcome any kind of obstacles as much as possible. Teaching is not that easy mission and facing difficulties is

one of its routines. Thus a teacher has to focus more on the benefits of using ICTs for enriching the teaching learning processes rather than stopping at the difficulties.

IV. Multimodality in Teaching

Multimodality imposes itself on education as it has imposed itself on many other aspects of life. 'We live in a multimodal society in which visual

texts are parts of our daily lives. This makes it necessary that these kinds of texts become part of the teaching learning process which involves changes in communication and in the definition of literacy.' Lirola. (2013: 01)

IV.1. Multimodality and Creativity

Multimodality can enhance creativity in teaching and learning. Marchetti and Cullen (2016: 39) support the idea claiming that 'a multimodal approach in the classroom can be a source of creativity for both teachers and students'. They see that multimodality does not necessarily mean using technology. They state; 'It draws upon available visual, audio, and kinesthetic modes and does not necessarily rely on technology.' (ibid) According to them, using video to teach makes the lesson multimodal what leads to more flexible interaction between teachers and learners and enriches the learning environment. This rich learning environment reinforces creativity for both teachers and learners.

In their paper, Marchetti and Cullen (2016) focus on Kress and Jewitt's work concerning their research on multimodal studies. They apply Kress and Jewitt's concepts to higher education focusing on second language learning. They are interested in the combination of text, image and audio as individual modes and how they produce meaning by being creatively combined and enhance teacher-student interaction. Based on the results they got from the research conducted with Italian undergraduate students, Marchetti and Cullen (2016) argue that focusing on multimodality enhances the teaching process through boosting teacher learner interaction, teaching materials and interaction inside the classroom in general.

IV.2. Multimodality and Multimedia

Many people are confused and cannot make a clear cut between the two terms 'multimodality' and 'multimedia' and many of them use the two terms interchangeably, as if there is no difference between the two. To know the difference between them, one has to know the nature of each concept. In this concern, Farias, et.al, (2007:191) explain; 'Although sometimes used interchangeably, Mayer and Sims (1994) apply the concept of multimedia to the teacher's presentation of information through more than one medium and the concept of 'multimodality' to the learner's use of more than one sense.'

IV.3. What is Meant by Modes

According to Marchetti and Cullen (2016: 40) 'Underlying a multimodal approach are modes, which are visual, audio, text or speech, and movement channels used in a classical situation.' They see that 'There is nothing revolutionary about multimodality.' (ibid) They see that different modes have been always in communication, but what is new, according to them, is the resources provided by multimodality in interaction and connectivity, based on new technologies challenging the old traditional forms of communication. Marchetti and Cullen (2016) explain how teaching

materials shift from page to screen and how digital materials such as laptop computers, interactive whiteboards and overhead projectors change the nature of the classroom. In the same context, and focusing on the combination between different modes and language teacher-learner interaction, Farias, et.al, (2007) claim that interaction between language learners and teachers can be accompanied with modes like animation, based on movements and visuals, and narration, on the part of the teacher in addition to animation. This accompaniment between teacher-learner interaction and different modes helps in providing various contexts which can lead to the development of all communicative competence components. Appropriateness is a good example of these components which their rules and formulas can be clearly understood by language learners through the different modes that exist in daily life. When teachers refer to the suitable tools to enrich the teaching process learners in general and language learners in particular learn better and develop their communicative competencies.

IV.4. Multimodality and Language Teaching

Because of the immense influence of multimodality and new technologies on all fields of life and on education in particular, there has been a critical change in perspectives concerning language learning and communication. Farias, et.al, (2007:191) explain the situation; 'The multimodality era goes beyond both the generative-psycholinguistic the interactionist-sociocultural interpretations of language learning to consider several extra-linguistic representational modes (verbal, visual, musical, gestural, to name few) and several media (books, CD-ROM, teacher's body, sound)'. Multimodalities and new technologies broke the limits of linguistics and lead the linguists and researchers to go further in their perceptions concerning language learning.

In explaining their new mode of College Language Teaching, Chen and He (2015 :717) claim that : 'College Language Teaching is regarded as a communicative, dynamic, multimodal and social activity which involves a variety of modalities such as text, sound, image, and even gesture'. They see that in order to improve teaching and create a good multimodal teaching environment, teachers need to be aware when selecting the different modes and modalities. Royce (2002) calls for more focus on multimodal communication on the part of professionals who care about learners and their language learning.

IV.5. Multimodality and Teaching Grammar

Grammar teaching is a very important issue for many teachers, applied linguists and language teaching concerning organs. Various approaches, methods and strategies have been proposed in order to enhance grammar teaching and learning. Hegelheimer (2006) highlights the importance of multimodal online resources on developing non-native speakers' grammatical competence after an increase in their grammatical awareness and a decrease in their error frequency. Chen and He (2015)

explain how “Michael O’ Toole (1994) makes the running in the study of the grammar within simple semiotic resources. His work *The Language of Displayed Art* gives definition to the functions of visual images as representational, modality and compositional.” (715) They see that it is an addition to grammar teaching as it highlights the use of multimodalities and their importance for the teaching process.

V. A proposed teaching model: simple past tense

Using ICTs and multimodalities does not necessarily require special sessions or extra time. It may happen while the ordinary teaching process takes place. To teach for example the simple past tense, a set of materials that are based on such new technologies and multimodalities may be very efficient. The following are some procedures that a teacher can follow as a teaching model of the past simple tense:

- 1- The teacher can prepare a collection of videos of short stories. Such videos serve the learning process of the intended topic since they are based on the simple past tense. At the end of the session the teacher tries to let the learners watch the videos. This step would be repeated for different times, as much as the teaching process requires.
- 2- The teacher can also download some songs in which the dominant tense is the simple past. The learners can listen to the songs while writing down or during doing their tasks. Learners can be involved in choosing the song to be heard each time.
- 3- Another procedure can be followed by the teacher is by printing the biographies of some celebrities with their photos (preferably colored) and make learners stick them on the walls of their classroom. Hence, learners can read these biographies in different occasions out of the ordinary sessions.
- 4- Printing the list of the irregular verbs and sticking them on the walls of the classroom is also beneficial. It is better to put an image that explains the meaning of each verb beside it.
- 5- In addition to that, the teacher can ask learners to write a number of sentences in the simple past tense and to draw a picture that expresses the action next to each of the sentences.
- 6- The teacher can show the learners parts from TV news program which recount past events.
- 7- Powerpoints presentation may help teachers in presenting the lesson in new attractive ways. In our case, the teacher can use powerpoints to present past events; accidents; stories; news; history, and so on.
- 8- The teacher can ask the learners to bring some newspapers in English and try to make a kind of library in the classroom. It may be just a kind of a box wherein to put newspapers. Whenever the learners have free time, they can read the news from those newspapers.

It is up to the creativity of the teacher herself to generate new ideas for profiting from multimodalities in enhancing the learning of grammar.

These procedures can be followed to expose learners to learning techniques through ICTs and multimodal tools which are accessible and time saving for the teacher. The teacher can save time through limiting the process of writing on the board, through attracting the learners' attention and reducing the anarchy, and through replacing the repetitive time consuming explanations by images, videos or any suitable modes. Thus none can say that they hinder the continuity of the teaching process, such as those who prefer to stick to the traditional ways of teaching and do not recognize any of innovation.

VI. Conclusion

EFL teaching and grammar teaching in particular is in need of innovation. Traditional teaching is no longer up to the expectations of learners or teachers. It should be enhanced with new methods, techniques, and materials. ICTs and Multimodalities can be exploited to promote grammar teaching. This paper proposes a grammar teaching model which is based on the combination of multimodal tools and ICTs for enriching learning techniques. This model helps in raising learners' motivation and involvement in the teaching-learning process. For more practicality and to show the feasibility of such mode of teaching, the paper includes suggestions to teach the simple past tense as an example. This model of teaching cannot be restricted to grammar teaching only. It can be used to teach all language competencies, as it can be beneficial for teaching other subjects apart from language.

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