

## Imparting Grammar Intelligently and Interestingly

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### Abstract

Indeed, for several years, I had been haunted by a doubt i.e., why students are constantly confused about the basic grammar that they have been taught since their childhood. Finally I realized that it was the mistake of the teacher in particular and the system in general. Because there has never been an attempt by the teacher at any level – school, Jr / Degree College or even at the professional college to teach the student functional grammar and vocabulary rather than a repetition of the monotonous rules and definitions of grammar by most pedants.

Both teacher and student are tricked into believing that the revision of definitions itself is the knowledge of grammar. Majority students are content with giving the Tense labels to the sentences rather than realizing the difference in usage. If you ask the students in the class to explain the meaning between –

- a) I was watching football match.
- b) I had been watching football match.

Majority students reply that the former is past continuous and the latter is past perfect continuous and they will not be able to explain the difference in usage.

I intensely feel that the students should be explained why they should know the difference between a Common noun and a Proper noun, rather than knowing mere definitions. By giving an example like-

“I have **a** Shakespeare in my bag”, we can explain why the Proper noun is preceded by an article though the rule says they should not be an article preceding a Proper noun. Here it is used as a common noun since Shakespeare refers to a writer; hence the sentence means – ‘I have **a** book by Shakespeare in my bag’.

We should make the student realize the application part of the grammar ; how can a student understand the sentence – ‘the Krishna committee **are** divided over the issue’, if he is not taught that the word ‘committee’ takes a plural verb also when the members of the ‘committee’ have a division of opinion over an issue. The problem is that the students know the word ‘committee’ as an example of Collective noun only but they never realize the very use or purpose of knowing a Collective noun. We should explain what is beyond a definition.

Here what I would like to focus is – We can take certain live examples for instilling in the students a live interest in grammar and vocabulary.

In one of the newspapers a leave letter of an employee of a reputed software company has appeared –

“Sir, I may kindly be granted three days leave as I am leaving for my native place to sell my house along with my wife”.

The importance of the Conjunction, Syntax, and the structure of the sentence can be best explained through the above sentence.

There is always a sort of confusion in the use of the verb structure ‘to do something’ and ‘to get something done’. The following examples can clear that confusion.

A leave letter from an employee of Oracle, Bangalore, who was performing the ‘mundane’ ceremony of his child – “sir as I want to shave my son’s head, pl. grant me leave for two days.”

Another leave letter from a gem from CDAC.  
“As I am marrying my daughter, pl. grant a week’s leave.”

(We can explain the difference in the usage- ‘get my son’s head shaved’ and he himself getting ready to shave his son’s head. So also the gentleman ‘getting ready to marry his daughter himself’ and ‘get his daughter married to some one’.)

The irreparable damage done to the honour of an individual due to the mistaken use of the pronoun –‘both’ can be explained to the students through the following sentence-

A candidate’s job application –  
“This has a reference to your advertisement calling for a ‘Typist & Accountant-male or female’ ...As I am both for the past several years and I can handle both with efficiently, pl. consider me for the post”.

Another employee applied for half day leave through Internet as follows-  
“Since I have to go to the cremation ground at 8am, I fear I may not return, pl. grant me half a day leave.” (The problem of incomplete sentence- ‘I may not return in time’).

Newspapers give us a very good opportunity to unravel certain subtle differences in the grammar. We can use print media as a powerful tool.

On 11<sup>th</sup> Sep 2009, in D C, the following line appeared in the local addition –

“**Most men and women** are forever craving for height, slender frame, better nose and thicker hair.”

I asked my students to correct this sentence if there was any error– majority students made it – “**most of the men and women** .....

get an opportunity to explain the role of the preposition 'of' and the usage '**most of**' – when we use most of, the noun that follows should have a further description i.e. "most of the men and women in the city", "most of the men and women in the age group of 20 – 40"; it should be "most of the students of the professional colleges are not eco-friendly"; otherwise 'it is most professional students are not eco friendly'. We can also highlight the usage of adjectives – 'slender', 'better' and 'thicker'.

In one of the English dailies I have come across this sentence-  
"However, Bhagwat (RSS) has expressed the opinion that **it is time** that the BJP **retired** its leaders & **infused** younger blood in the party."

This sentence certainly does create a doubt that the verb (past tense) in the second half of the sentence is wrong. We can explain the students that when we use the phrase-'**it's time or it's high time**' the verb that follows the phrase should be in past tense, not in the present, though the reference is to the present.

"It's time we had dinner" means, 'let's have dinner' -

The use of the phrase "**it is learnt**" can be explained with the help of the following news items reported in the news paper.

"The PM & the rest of the cabinet ministers **are learnt to have expressed** concern over the harassment to passengers for the past three days on account of the Pilots' strike."- (11<sup>th</sup> Sept 09- DC)

"The Civil aviation minister Mr.Praful Patel **is also learnt to have briefed** the cabinet on the developments related to the strike."

The following sentence containing a **phrasal verb** gives us a chance for the explanation what a phrasal verb is.

"City parents admit that they are seeing the signs of their kids **mooning over** a cute classmate or a neighbour".

(Mooning over somebody (informal) is to spend time thinking about somebody you love, esp., when other people think that this is silly or annoying.)

Of course the same newspapers give us also the chance of teaching our students through their mistaken sentences-

On 24<sup>th</sup> Aug 09, an ambiguous sentence was seen in DC.

"Recently, officials of the United Securities & Exchange Commission came to India to discuss the progress in the investigation of Satyam fraud case with the C B I."

I was asking myself, after reading this - has Satyam cheated even the C B I?  
'With the CBI' should have been placed after "discuss" .

In the same newspaper, relating to the same issue, the following sentence was seen.

"In **the two** last months, the company has recalled around one thousand associates across the wide spectrum of specialties". Once again I fell in confusion - is it '**the last** two months' or 'two last months'?

Present tense and the sequence of tense can best be explained in the following sentence, given in a newspaper titled "Blood spilt over land" – "whether it is a small piece of land or a tiny house, shared by family members, quarrels erupt, and fists fly and knives appear."

We can add the modal auxiliary '**will**' before the last verb (appear) and ask the students to find out the error in the sentence and we can further explain the students how 'will' is wrong since the sequence of 'tense' will be disturbed.

The use of adjectives can be best explained in the sentence such as- "the debate on the issue was regrettably **polemical, sanctimonious** and at times **bitter**." (DC editorial- 28-08-09 )

(Polemical – strongly worded, controversial argument; sanctimonious- an exaggerated show of morality)

I always would like to explain a Pronoun through an example rather than a definition.

She loves him more than **me**.

She loves more than **I**.

The former means – she loves him more than she loves me.  
The latter means- she loves him more than what I love him.  
(Hence it is better she marries him.)

#### References

- Deccan Chronicle: 11<sup>th</sup> Sep '09, Hyd.  
Deccan Chronicle: 24<sup>th</sup> Aug 09, Hyd.  
Deccan Chronicle: Editorial- 28<sup>th</sup> Aug, '09, Hyd.