COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING GRAMMAR

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Mastering foreign language communicative competence of students is the main purpose of teaching foreign languages in school. According to this, it is impractical to study grammatical forms without understanding of their potential practical use in a real communicative situation. Exercises with multiple repetitions of the same grammatical structures usually make pupil tired and bored, lowering their interest in learning. To solve this problem, teachers should use communicative approach, even in teaching grammar.

The idea of this approach is to teach how to communicate through real communication. Therefore, exercises that focus on the target of verbal expression should prevail on the lessons (“learning by doing”), rather than separate grammatical structures out of the context. Otherwise students will not be aware of possible practical application of grammatical structures, consequently, will not acquire language skills during their study. This phenomenon contradicts the essence of communicative competence, which includes the aspect of knowing how to use a language for a range of different functions and purposes [4, p.3].

Today many teachers suppose that teaching grammar using communicative approach is more beneficial for students [1, p. 68]. Despite this, many of them still use language exercises, e.g. transformational exercises such as “open the brackets, using the appropriate time of the verb”, which are absolutely devoid of communicative orientation: it is a formal, linguistic, rather than a verbal task. But when we are speaking, we never have a task to put the verb in the future tense; in this situation, the task is to express a certain idea about future plans or to talk about upcoming events. Thus, the correct formulation of any task gets the main importance on the lesson. Explaining a task, a teacher should arouse students’ interest and motivation for speaking, and speech situation should be close to the conditions of real communication.
Speaking about communication on English language lessons we should keep in mind the problem of pseudo-communication. V.S.Korostelev said that not every verbal activity of students in a classroom gives it a communicative nature [2]. Indeed, teachers often try to organize a speech activity of students, creating different reasons and situations to speak such as “Imagine that you are buying food in the shop”, etc. But a value of buying food in real life transforms into a pseudo-value on the lesson. Thereby, on the basis of pseudo-values and pseudo-motives only pseudo-communication may occur. To awaken natural motivation for communication, teachers should offer students communicative tasks, which do not require making up the content of speech and representing oneself in someone else's role.

Basing on the above, we offer some examples of communicative exercises aimed at the study of grammar.

To practice Question Words, teacher can bring a personal photo to the lesson and offer students to guess “the story” of the photo through questions such as “When was it taken?”, “What are these people doing on the photo?”.

To consolidate Modal Verbs (should, must, can, have to) teacher can offer students to share their personal problems and then students give advice to each other, using modal verbs:

Student A – I`m always late for the lessons.
Student B – You shouldn`t go to bed late.
Student C – You must set an alarm in your clock for 5 minutes earlier.

The following communicative game can be used for mastering The Past Continuous Tense: one student says where he was last Sunday, and the classmates try to guess what he was doing that day.

Student A – I was in the village last Sunday.
Student B – Were you visiting your grandparents there?
Student A – Yes, I were.

The similar technique can be used for practicing The Future Continuous Tense. One student says that he will be busy tomorrow at some time, and the others try to guess what he will be doing.
Student A - I will be busy tomorrow at 5 p.m.
Student B - Will you be doing your homework at this time?
Student A - No, I won’t.

Studying the degrees of comparison of adjectives (Comparatives and Superlatives) a teacher reveals a problematic situation, which is directly connected with students, then students give possible solutions to this problem:

Teacher - I think, this home task is too boring for you.
Student - Yes, we want a more interesting home task.
Teacher - Girls sitting at the first desk are too noisy.
Student - Yes, they should be more quiet.

If teaching The Present Perfect Tense occurs to the period before some school event or holiday, teacher can ask students what they have already done for the upcoming event. For example, if New Year holidays are coming:

Student A - I have prepared presents for my friends.
Student B - We have put up a Christmas tree.

Future Perfect Tense can be practiced by asking students to give a promise that they will have conducted specific activities to improve the level of their English by the end of the school year.

Student A - I will have learnt 5 English songs by the end of this year.
Student B - I will have read 3 English books by the end of this year.

Speaking about communicative approach in teaching grammar we face the problem of “error tolerance”, which refers to the unacceptability of interrupting students when they are speaking. The most optimal solution for a teacher is to direct to the “zone”, at which student should look to find the correct version. To specify the error zone, teacher can clarify the content of the statement: “I lived here for five years”. “Do you still live here or not?”

Sometimes a signal like phrase “Sorry?” or circumstantiation (“I go to the cinema yesterday”, “Did you go the cinema yesterday, didn’t you?”) can be used to indicate the mistake.
The exercises given above address to the life experience of each student and ensure their personal involvement into the process of communication and, therefore, have a genuine communicative nature, prepare students for real communication in accordance with the essence of communicative method of teaching.

Therefore, students will be able to acquire communication skills and master communicative competence of a foreign language just by practicing grammatical structures in a process of real communication, caused by natural need.

References


