

## Enhancing grammar competency by implementing creativity

Minasyan E.

### Повышение компетентности грамматики путем внедрения творчества

Минасян Е. Т.

*Минасян Ева Тиграновна / Minasyan Eva Tigranovna - кандидат филологических наук, доцент,  
кафедра иностранных языков № 1,  
Российский экономический университет им. Г. В. Плеханова, г. Москва*

**Abstract:** *the review article considers the rising need to implement creativity in language teaching, to reveal untapped routes for teaching traditional materials, namely grammar rules and structures. It proves that creative activities enrich the quality of the lesson delivery and learning as they generate excitement, interest and willingness to perform effectively. Such instructional interventions meet as well as the current requirements of the EFL teaching which focus mostly on student-led communicative competence and cooperation. The article places great emphasis on learner-centered activities based on the task-driven approach to encourage foreign language learners in increasingly self-regulated both oral and written interaction.*

**Аннотация:** *в статье рассматривается растущая необходимость внедрения креативности в преподавание иностранного языка, чтобы выявить новейшие методы для преподавания традиционных материалов, а именно правил и структуры грамматики. Статья доказывает, что креативные задания обогащают качество уроков и обучения, поскольку они порождают заинтересованность и готовность эффективно выполнять их. Такие учебные методы соответствуют также текущим требованиям преподавания иностранного языка, которые сосредоточены в основном на студенте, на коммуникативной компетентности и сотрудничестве на уроках. В статье уделяется большое внимание деятельности учащихся, поощряя изучающих иностранный язык в большей степени на индивидуальное устное и письменное общение.*

**Keywords:** *repetition, formulae, creativity, memorization, implementation, student-centered, language acquisition.*

**Ключевые слова:** *повторение, формула, творчество, запоминание, внедрение, личностно-ориентированный, изучение языка.*

**Introduction.** Grammar is regarded as one of the challenging aspects of language acquisition since it is mainly connected with continuous repetition of the rules, tables and formulae, with completion of numerous similar activities which are rather boring and far less creative. In one of my articles I have proved that grammar is the cornerstone of any language learning process, the fifth key competence of language acquisition [1, p. 107]. Therefore, it should be released from frustrating frames giving the learners a pleasure to understand and study it with enjoyment. Only creative activities supported by grammar patterns can be motivational and can lead to positive effects.

**How and why do grammar and creativity merge?** The main reasons are that grammar practice mostly consists of routine and repetitious activities, whereas creativity is stimulating and motivating. Grammar is strongly linked to theoretical, prescribed rules and stated forms, whilst creativity is associated with imagination and freedom [2, p. 52]. Language acquisition itself and usage are natural and creative processes; consequently creative techniques should be implemented in teaching language materials to improve students' learning commitment, the level of interest and self-esteem. They should become encouraged to take risks and use the grammar patterns in a more original and entertaining way.

**Sample creative tasks:** The following creative activities are the fruit of my tuition practice covering nearly two decades. Based on my experience of teaching in EGP or ESP classrooms, I have noticed a great level of reluctance to study, memorize, revise and use grammar patterns and rules. Generally, I introduce grammar learning process to my students as a pyramid of knowledge acquisition.

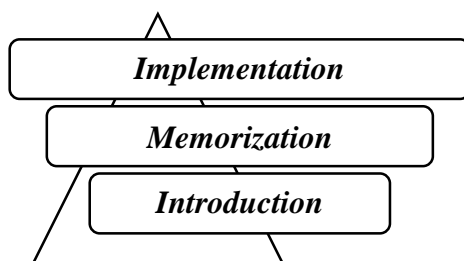


Fig. 1. The pyramid of knowledge acquisition

*At the introduction level*, which is the primary step to grammar learning, the foremost attention is paid to book materials, tables, rules and structures. Here the educators are apt to explain the rules, their usage and check the understanding and basic use of the definite grammar aspect. It seems there is no room for creativity at this prime stage, considered mostly as teacher-centered. Yet I have proved it is possible to escape from some standard ways of checking students' comprehension by exploiting some creative activities.

### **1. Role exchange**

After introducing a definite grammar part (e.g. tenses, modals) I ask the learners to take the role of a teacher and by using the board and board pens to explain it to me and their peers. They are provided with some creative ideas of using the board, or handouts, or digital tools. Surely, they need to have their own impact on it. As a result, they present the covered grammar material in a variety of ways starting just with drawing tables, time lines on the board, using colorful pens, creating slides by emphasizing key points, presenting jumbled parts to be matched by their mates in groups and so forth. This role exchange activity helps to free the classroom atmosphere from monotonous mood, stimulates students' collaboration and improves grammar material acquisition, which also proves to be a quite student-centered approach.

*At the stage of memorization*, which is regarded as the most repetitive and exasperating phase and the whole process is followed by revising rules, remembering some exceptions and completing tasks. Definitely, it turns to be rather discouraging and educators face greater than ever absence of interest and frequent grammar mistakes both in written and oral discourse. The creative technique that I have implemented is the following:

### **2. Two in One**

The process of revision and memorization of some rules and patterns can be encouraged if students in groups of 3-4 are given an assignment to create some tasks referring to a specific grammar aspect (e.g. articles, pronouns, prepositions). The activities can vary from *Multiple choices* to *Gap filling*. On task preparation phase they spend 20 minutes, then the groups exchange the tasks and complete them in 10 minutes. After finishing, the tasks are checked by the group which created them. At the end, the common mistakes are written on the board and discussed.

The activity seems both challenging and exciting because it helps students to interact, to experience self-sufficiency and start thinking critically. Here two roles are combined, since students act as educators and learners. By creating tasks they use their knowledge, they recall examples from book resources and by completing the tasks they check their understanding.

*At the implementation level*, which is the highest point of the pyramid, learners need to be quite confident to use the grammar rules and patterns accurately and appropriately. In this phase of language acquisition we can use a range of creative activities, like *Picture description*, *Anecdotes*, *Paraphrasing*, *1-minute pitches*, etc. I would present one of the activities used by me rather effectively.

### **3. Mini-logues**

Students, either in pairs or groups, are given a task to compose a mini dialogue focusing on a grammar issue, like Question types, Relative clauses, Conditionals. This activity is focused mainly on the use of entire grammar with irregular forms and exceptions. Mini-logues should be situational and consist of at least 150 words. Situations are provided by the educator in a form of authentic pictures/scenes cut from current newspapers, or some short background information (e.g. *A woman calls Kids Café and wants to get information about the menu, party services and pricing. Dialogue is between the woman and the receptionist, later the party organizer*).

Such activities give a huge platform for the learners to present their grammar skills in question formation and answering, usage of several tenses, collocations, modals, etc. In creating conversation models they are enabled to take possession of the foreign language, make it their own, enhance imagination and implement it in a real-life context. As a result, students first compose talks, then play in roles, thus becoming one another's audience, and take the tutor's role to note down the errors.

**Conclusion.** The article has demonstrated some techniques used for generating creativity in order to practice grammar rules and patterns going beyond traditional boundaries, to boost the language acquisition process and apply the structures skillfully. Similar activities are rather motivational and exciting for learners; they practice the language more deeply, get engaged in learning process personally, cooperate with peers and educators effectively [3, p. 55].

I firmly believe that *Do it yourself* approach in language teaching is the most effective, as it provides learners with great independence, triggers their inspiration, helps them to reveal their strengths and weaknesses in performing the foreign language and improve them. It is proven that every act of creation involves four phases: searching, making, adjusting and presenting. So during creative lessons learners experience variety and movement from routine procedures, they face unpredictable task solutions and enjoy fresh learning models balanced between challenge and security, relaxation and tension [4, p. 154].

**Gratefulness.** The review article is completed thanks to Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Management Department students, who expressed great readiness to participate in these creative activities.

## *References*

1. *Minasyan E. T., Midova V. O.* Grammar as One of Key Competences of Language Acquisition // Russian Linguistic Bulletin, 2016. 3 (7). Pp. 107-108. DOI: 10.18454/RULB.7.05
2. *Jill & Charlie Hadfield.* Teaching Grammar Creatively // British Council, 2015. Pp. 51-64.
3. *Hernán A. Avila.* Creativity in the English Class: Activities to Promote EFL Learning // HOW Vol. 22. №. 2. Bogotá. Colombia, 2015-2016. Pp. 91-103.
4. *Tessa Woodward.* A framework for learning creativity // British Council, 2015. Pp. 150-157.