

Writing for beginners

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Having said that most of us, EFL teachers, have put so much effort and time into acquiring overflowing amount of theoretical information about language teaching, approach on language acquisition, and teaching material design, there still is uncertainty that how these actually could be applied to various teaching situations and whether a particular method would work anyway. I myself was one of those who started teaching, feeling uncertain which method would be the one for my students. At first, I was endeavoring to apply all the methods and materials that I have learned to my class. I actually believed then doing so, my class could be something very innovative for Korean students who must have been so tired of ineffective, old, and much criticized grammar-translation method. I started my writing class with two different levels which are now level 2 and 3. Students were encouraged to generate their own ideas to write about and focus more on the content, not details like spellings and grammar. Also, not much correction was given by me on students' work; otherwise, students will stick to simple constructions and focus more on forms. Instead, correction was often done through group or pair work.

However, I soon learned that this worked well for only limited number of students and I overlooked the majority and the habits in language acquisition. Although the grammar-translation method is considered old and even unworkable, students who have been taught in this method for at least six years in the secondary schools still find it interesting and they benefit from it. They are interested in language structure and details and they feel that they truly learn a language only when they understand the underlying systems of a language: grammar, and this tendency is particularly strong among absolute beginners. I found that I could not break their habits, especially when I get to have them for only 35 hours.

Another issue is that the speed of language acquisition among students varies. Most students who take level 1 class are absolute beginners who haven't studied English for years or who have found level 1 conversation class too fast and overwhelming. Some students are amazingly quick at leaning language, but others take a bit longer. Those who take my class after level 1 conversation class often say that they think they know all the grammar points but when given a chance to speak, they cannot be as fluent as they want to be. There is a rush in an

interpersonal interaction and words just come out ungrammatically. This means that there are student who need much more time to think things through and to produce language and for those, activities which allow more time are needed and they are translation.

However, thinking of their future, writing should be taught as a mean to communicate with people. Therefore, the old method was combined with the new one and that was the beginning of level 1 class. In fact, this class cannot even be called as writing class as most of activities are translation. However, an element of more communicative approach is employed in every lesson and this is the method that works and benefits my level 1 students most. Here is a sample lesson plan. Each lesson is usually conducted in 4 stages and if necessary, extra exercise or modification can be brought in.

Stage 1. Demonstration of language construction

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| <p>a) a loving mother: Present participle modifies agent (agents do the actions described by the participle)</p> <p>b) a loved mother: Past participle modifies receiver (receivers are affected by the action described by the participle)</p> <p>Ex) The audience was confused</p> <p>The lecture was confusing</p> |
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An English sentence is consisted of five phrases: noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, adverb phrases, and prepositional phrases, so learning to compose phrases can be much easier task for those who cannot produce grammatical sentences. Let's say it is a session to teach a noun phrase with a participle as a premodifier. First of all, show students examples. Some of the terms above can be challenging for some, but it can be quite useful to have agreed terms between students and teachers in pinpointing problems in writing later on.

Stage 2. Phrase composition exercise

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. 만족스러운 결과2. 무서운 괴물 |
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Immediately after explanation of the grammar item, a phrase composition exercise is done to help students see whether they truly understand the language item and whether they are able to use it. In this process, give students enough time to translate each item and to learn what kind of difficulty they have by themselves. Also, it is important for a teacher to go around checking each student's work to make sure they actually do try it and to give feedback if necessary. Students seem to like this teacher's personal attention. Once students complete the

activity, the sample answer is given using an OHP. Afterwards, we need to make sure that we give them enough time to ask questions. Often students are afraid to speak up, worrying that he or she got something very easy wrong so many just miss the chance to ask questions and repeat the mistake again and again. Also, this is a good place to explain common errors. In case of participles, many are not aware that whether to use a present participle or a past participle depends on which verb is used. For example, ‘무서운 괴물’ can be written in two ways: ‘feared monster’ or ‘frightening monster.’ The two verbs seem to be similar in meaning but in fact, quite different as they are ‘무서워하다’ and ‘무섭게 하다’ respectively.

Stage 3. Sentence composition exercise

1. 늘어나는 자동차수는 대도시의 심각한 대기오염과 관계가 있다.
2. 아이들이 시청하는 몇몇 프로그램들은 재미있고 유익하다.

Once students learn the item using phrase composition task, now it's time for further language development. A few Korean sentences are given and the task is done in the same manner as the previous task. Do not forget to remind students this is literal translation task. Students often find this exercise challenging because they have to use the learned item and compose a sentence using unfamiliar vocabularies at the same time.

One of the shortcomings of this grammar-translation method is that it encourages students to focus too much on accuracy rather than fluency so that they often believe that there is only one correct answer in expressing a particular idea. Yes, they tend to feel dissatisfied until they get the correct answer. However, this can be easily solved by continuously reminding student of the fact that 100% accurate piece of writing is something impossible to achieve and that there is more than one grammatical structure to deliver an idea. For example, when composing a sentence as follows, it is important to make students see different ways to deliver the same idea and understand that they need to be able to use all of them.

e.g. 모자를 쓴 그 남자는 고장 난 차를 수리공에게로 가져갔다.

The man who was wearing a hat

The man wearing a hat

The man in a hat

Stage 4. Free writing exercise

5-minutes free writing activity is finally carried out at the end of every class and this will provide students an opportunity to use the language that they have just learned more freely (an aspect of process writing method). This activity is collected on every Friday, but this is not corrected as heavily as translation

activities in class. This can motivate students to feel free to write so that they get more concerned about the content but less about specific sentence structure or grammar points. This will be a good fluency practice.

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