

TEACHERS CORNER – DECEMBER 2015
MAKING GRAMMAR FUN

The understanding of grammar and its use is the fundamental component to language learning. However, for students it can often be challenging to learn and grammar acquisition can seem more a task of memorization than a skill developed in practice. In a typical English classroom grammar is seen as linear progression and student mastery of the simple grammatical rules must occur before more challenging forms can be learned.

However, student mastery of grammar rules may not be a direct progression. Kellerman (1983) found student mastery of older grammar rules can rise and fall depending on what new grammar they are currently learning. Nunan (1998) likens the learning of grammar to growing a garden. Grammatical ability may thrive and then growth stops only to resume later in time. He further argues that students do not learn one grammatical rule at a time but many simultaneously. As a result, their understanding may be imperfect for a time before suddenly becoming clear and understood. One possible approach to nurturing this understanding more quickly is to teach grammar in context.

There has been considerable debate around textbook grammar exercises. These exercises can often lack context that students can use to generate *schema*. Schema is the knowledge a learner has that can be applied to new learning. Kirkland and Saunders (1991) assert “students must have appropriate context schemata available in order to be able to comprehend material, a prerequisite to manipulating it” (p. 108). Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) support this idea and argue for an end to the intensive teaching of grammar rules. They argue that grammar relies too much on context to be taught through the isolated sentences typically found in grammar textbooks.

As teachers we may want to teach grammar in context but are unsure where to start or how to create that context. This month we’ll take a look at some ways to generate fun, engaging contexts in which to teach grammar. Specifically we’ll examine ways to make learning grammar fun through the context of science. From exploring the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, to being stranded on the Moon, this month’s Teacher’s Corner will present engaging science contexts to teach a variety of grammatical forms in a fun way.

- Week 1 – Prepositions of Location - The National Museum of Natural History
- Week 2 – Adjective Clauses – Grace Hopper and the First Computer Language
- Week 3 – Conditionals and Infinity of Purpose - Astronauts Wanted
- Week 4 – Modal Verbs and Adverb Clauses of Reason - Stranded on the Moon!

This month’s focus on science as a context for grammar showcases some of the broad range of science-based materials written in English, and each week links to a wide range

of science materials will be provided. If students are interested in science, an understanding of English is a strong requirement. A study by Larsen and Von Ins (2010) found that over 80% of science journals are written in English. Students interested in science careers will need English to succeed. Science is about the joy of discovery, so let's help our students discover the larger world through science and discover how much fun grammar can be!

References

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- Kirkland, M., & Saunders, A., (1991). Maximizing student performance in summary writing: Managing cognitive load. *TESOL Quarterly*. 25(1). 105-121.
- Larsen, P., & Von Ins, M. (2010). The rate of growth in scientific publication and the decline in coverage provided by Science Citation Index. *Scientometrics*, 84(3), 575-603.
- Nunan, D. (1998). Teaching grammar in context. *ELT journal*, 52(2), 101-109.