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INTEGRATING AUTHENTIC TEXTS INTO GRAMMAR TEACHING: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

This paper analyzes benefits and challenges of integrating authentic texts into grammar teaching. Teaching grammar is an integral part of the whole and comprehensive English teaching process. Taking into account social, semantic and discourse factors that are crucial in teaching grammar, the authors suggested an alternative method of teaching grammar via authentic texts. The study emphasizes that authentic materials can be integrated into the teaching process with the purpose to motivate students, prepare them for social life and reduce the language gap between the in-class learning and real-life communication. The paper introduces a methodological model for teaching auxiliary modal verbs, developed on the basis of the authentic text "Hitchhiking". The designed grammatical activities are classified into groups of recognition, comprehension and analysis, and production. Each activity is followed by the methodological explanation of the expected learning outcomes. Under the results of the students' questionnaire, the authors specified advantages and drawbacks of every activity presented in the article. Based on the analysis of the students' questionnaire and feedback collected, it was found that benefits of working with authentic texts clearly outweighed the drawbacks, although certain factors such as students' proficiency level, their interests and individual characteristics should be taken into account. This practical approach made it possible to analyze the effectiveness of using and applying authentic texts to grammar teaching, more specifically on the example of auxiliary modal verbs via particular activities designed and classified by the authors. The paper highlights the main benefits and drawbacks of using authentic materials in teaching grammar for the full-time second-year bachelor's students of the Faculty of Humanities, based on their feedback collected via a questionnaire.

Key words: authentic texts, authentic materials, teaching grammar, methodology, modal verbs.

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ІНТЕГРАЦІЯ АВТЕНТИЧНИХ ТЕКСТІВ У НАВЧАННІ ГРАМАТИКИ: ПЕРЕВАГИ І НЕДОЛІКИ

У статті проаналізовані переваги і недоліки інтеграції автентичних текстів у навчання граматики. Навчання граматики є невід'ємною частиною всеохоплюючого процесу викладання англійської мови. Враховуючи соціальні, семантичні та дискурсивні фактори, які є важливими у навчання граматики, автори запропонували альтернативний метод навчання граматики через використання автентичних текстів. В статті зазначається, що автентичні матеріали можна використовувати у навчальному процесі з метою мотивації студентів, підготовки їх до соціального життя, зменшення мовленнєвого розриву між аудиторним навчанням та реальним спілкуванням. В статті надається методологічна модель для навчання теми модальних дієслів,

розроблена на основі автентичного тексту «Автостоп» (Hitchhiking). Розроблені та складені граматичні вправи було класифіковано по групах: розпізнання, розуміння та аналіз, відтворення. Кожна розроблена вправа супроводжується методологічним поясненням в межах програмних результатів навчання. На основі проведеного опитування студентів, автори зазначили переваги та недоліки кожної запропонованої граматичної вправи окремо. Відповідно до аналізу опитування студентів та зібраного зворотнього зв'язку від них, було встановлено, що переваги роботи з автентичними текстами переважають над недоліками, хоча деякі фактори, такі як рівень підготовки студентів, їх вподобання та індивідуальні характеристики повинні також братися до уваги. Такий практичний підхід допоміг проаналізувати ефективність застосування автентичних текстів у навчанні граматики, а саме на прикладі допоміжних модальних дієслів через окремі вправи, які автори розробили та класифікували у цій роботі. Стаття підкреслює основні переваги та недоліки застосування автентичного матеріалу у навчанні граматики для студентів-бакалаврів денної форми другого року навчання гуманітарного факультету відповідно до оброблених результатів проведеного опитування.

Ключові слова: автентичні тексти, автентичні матеріали, навчання граматики, методологія, модальні дієслова.

Problem statement. Teaching grammar is a fundamental part of the whole and comprehensive teaching process. Grammar is considered as the body of rules that governs the structure of words, and the structure of words to form clauses and sentences. Though the process of teaching grammar on a par with combination of various methods and approaches gives a full range of techniques and activities, students often face boring grammatical practice and the teachers need to make this teaching process more interesting as motivated learners eager to discover more. According to Morska studies, there are two basic methods of teaching grammar. A deductive method that was developed in order to teach Latin and Greek. According to this approach, students are first presented with a grammatical example or an underlined pattern that was further explained. The explanation is usually presented in the mother tongue with the usage of the metalanguage of grammar. Finally, students practice applying the rule both orally or in writing. But “little attention is paid to the value of the message” (Morska, 2003). Another method of teaching grammar is called inductive. It makes the students understand grammatical structures with no prior explanation. Loads of examples given by teachers must become evident to explain certain rules. The teaching process starts from demonstrating grammatical points in a form of meanings. Explanations are sometimes given and they may be elicited from the students themselves.

Here arises a question, what method is the most effective? Learning a foreign language grammar, students often face the dilemma. They need to know the rules and structures and apply them correctly. On the other hand, there is a need for communication and it is obvious that teaching grammar must be connected to communicative tasks of the students. Consequently, the teachers realized the necessity of combining these methods and involving different techniques and approaches to make teaching grammar process as close to communicative objectives of the students as possible.

As a solution, there was introduced an integrative grammar teaching method that combined a form-based with a meaning-based focus. But still even combining these approaches, grammar is often taught in isolated and unconnected sentences that give an unrealistic and sometimes extracted picture of English that makes it complicated for English learners to apply what they have learnt in specific situations. Taking into account social, semantic and discourse factors that are important and integral in teaching English methodology, the authors suggested an alternative method of teaching grammar i.e. via authentic materials.

Using authentic materials in teaching grammar is popular nowadays due to a bigger access to all kinds of information, especially to articles on different topics.

The objective of this paper is to analyze and demonstrate benefits and challenges of integrating authentic texts into grammar teaching from the teacher's perspective, to analyze and explain the drawbacks of the work with authentic texts, to demonstrate advantages of integrating authentic materials into the grammar teaching process both to the teacher and students. The paper is aimed at developing, suggesting and classifying grammatical activities on the basis of the authentic text. The suggested classification is aimed at creating a methodological framework that is considered the most effective to teach different grammatical structures on the example of auxiliary modal verbs.

For the purpose of this research, the following questions are to be answered in the paper:

- 1) What are the benefits of integrating authentic texts into grammar teaching?
- 2) What are the challenges of integrating authentic texts into grammar teaching?
- 3) What are the most effective activities that can be created based on the authentic materials?

Research analysis. Since the specific topic of integrating authentic texts into grammar teaching is actual nowadays due to the technology development and an increased access to the materials of all types,

the authors consider it necessary to analyze the most valid and potent research in this domain.

The idea of using and applying authentic materials to teaching English grammar has appeared since the introduction of communicative approach in 1970's. While teaching grammar students can recognize the samples of English used by native speakers in all kinds of language use (Mestari, 2016).

Authentic or supplementary materials can be integrated into the teaching process with the purpose to motivate students, prepare them for social life and reduce the language gap between the in-class learning and real-life communication. To support this idea, Speller maintains that the language used in textbooks are only valid in a classroom environment while the requirements of real-life English is different and this difference has not been closed by the use of text books, as grammar learners have to deal with the language of brochures, office work and other cultural product (Speller, 2002). And this is the teacher's responsibility to filter materials through selection of the learning objectives. According to Daskalos and Ling, authentic materials include books and articles where language and grammatical structures are not modified or simplified in any way. For teaching purposes this refers to English books, novels and articles. They must be written by an English native speaker to a native audience (Daskalos, Ling, 2005). According to Popova, Derik, Korolyova, Morhun, Dashkova, authentic materials have originated in real-life language practice by native speakers. These include texts and language samples from newspapers, journalistic articles, posters, correspondence, television programs and works of fiction (Popova, Derik, Korolyova, Morhun, Dashkova, 2025).

Many researchers state that authentic materials encourage learners, as they are more interesting or stimulating than artificial or non-authentic materials. This view is supported by Freeman and Holden (1986), Little and Singleton (1991) who call this approach the 'classic instrument'. Among them is Matthew Peacock. In his studies of the effect of authentic materials on the motivation of EFL learners, he claimed that "it is certainly possible that using authentic materials has a positive effect on learner's motivation in the classroom". In his research the author noticed that results of the experiment performed with the usage of authentic materials there were proved indicators that "overall class motivation significantly increased when the learners in this study used authentic materials" (Peacock, 1997).

On the other hand, there are researchers who claim that using authentic materials reduce learners' motivation and interest as they may appear too difficult.

Among them are Freeman and Holden (1986) and Morrison (1989).

We consider that it is certainly possible that using and applying authentic texts to teaching grammar has a positive effect on the learning outcome though there are some disadvantages related to the methodology of teaching grammar via authentic texts that have not been sufficiently tested. Our research is aimed at analyzing and investigating benefits and pitfalls of using authentic texts in teaching grammar, namely via presenting auxiliary modal verbs grammatical topic by means of designed activities based on the authentic text "Hitchhiking" (Hitchhiking).

Main material presentation. Teaching grammar requires a well-structured approach that enables students not only to understand grammatical structures, but also to use them in speech. The authors of the research developed a set of exercises based on the authentic text "Hitchhiking" and asked students to complete them in order to analyze potential benefits and drawbacks of the proposed activities, as well as to evaluate their overall impact on the understanding of grammatical phenomena, modal verbs in particular.

According to the framework of contemporary language pedagogy, teaching grammar should be organized in three stages – presentation, focused practice, and communication – which indicate a sequential move from awareness to active use. This approach is widely supported by researchers and practitioners (Ur, 1996; Harmer, 2015), who emphasize that grammar learning is the most effective when students are first "introduced to the form, meaning and use of a new piece of language" (Harmer, 2015), then "practice certain grammatical items" (Harmer, 2015), and "continue to use skill on their own, becoming more proficient and creative" (Ur, 1996). Following this principle, the exercises in the present research were grouped into three categories: recognition, comprehension, and production.

The aim of recognition tasks was to teach students to identify the modal verbs, recognize them and define the basic meanings of them. The following instructions were given – "Find modal verbs in the text, read and translate corresponding sentences, explain functions of the modals in the context", "Find sentences containing modal verbs expressing certain function, e.g. advice, obligation etc.", "Spot the difference and explain how it changes the meaning".

Comprehension tasks were intended to develop students' understanding of the suggested modal verbs, analyse them, define them and to explain the nuances of their use based on the example sentences from the text. Exercises included paraphrasing, answering the comprehension questions, True/False statements and rewriting sentences in the past tense.

The most important stage in mastering grammar is its practical application in speaking. Thus, the third type of activities – production – was aimed to encourage students' deeper comprehension of the modal verbs via translation tasks and to generate their own speech. Acting out dialogues, brainstorming, dilemmas, story making, discussion questions helped students to apply theoretical knowledge in practice.

After completing all types of activities, following a structured progression from awareness to application, students provided their feedback through a survey that yielded both qualitative and quantitative results (Survey results).

The research revealed that vast majority of the students (88.4%) found working with authentic text interesting (Chart 1).

1. Did you find it interesting to work with an authentic text (not from the textbook)?

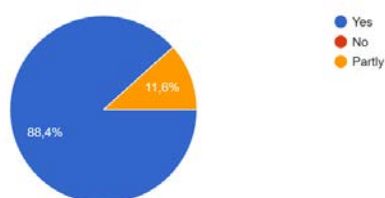


Chart 1

Almost all students (95.3%) stated that completing the tasks based on the authentic text helped them better understand the functions of modal verbs and use them more effectively in communication (Chart 2).

4. Did the tasks on finding modal verbs in the text help you better understand their functions?



Chart 2

In addition, an overwhelming majority (97.7%) of the responders reported that such activities developed other skills such as reading, speaking and critical thinking. Students admitted that they had gained a clear understanding of the shades of meaning in using modals of obligation, necessity, possibility, ability and modal expressions like *be supposed to*, *be bound to*, *be to*.

The most useful activities for practicing grammar were translation and comparison (48.8%), followed by storytelling (23.3%). In contrast, comprehension questions (14%) and roleplay (11.6%) received lower

ratings from students (Chart 3). The findings suggest that students prefer form-focused and reflective activities, such as translation and comparison.

5. Which activities were the most useful for practice?

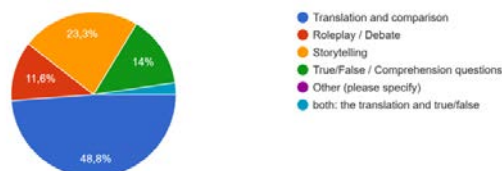


Chart 3

Having reviewed and analysed all the responses together with lecturers' observation, the authors identified a number of advantages that this approach can offer. The most significant benefit of learning grammar through authentic text lies in the opportunity to observe how grammar functions naturally, not artificially in isolated exercises from the textbooks which are often outdated. As one student noted in the feedback survey "It (an authentic text) shows how grammar is used in real life, because nobody in real life actually speaks textbook English" (Survey results).

A large number of students reported that working with real texts was more stimulating, meaningful, and enjoyable than textbook sentences. "Real texts are not something that is repeated (as exercises, for example). Texts can upgrade understanding of grammar because of uniqueness, different interesting topics, and plot understanding" (Survey results).

Students mentioned that real texts show how grammar is used by native speakers in real communication, helping them prepare for real-life use. "Nobody in real life actually speaks textbook English" (Survey results).

Learners appreciate that authentic texts are not artificially simplified, which not only challenges them but also broadens their awareness of grammar use. "It's obviously more complex and is written neither to be difficult nor to be overly comprehensible." "Working with real texts makes you put more effort into studying grammar and this is really helpful" (Survey results).

Several students mentioned that authentic texts help them learn new words while analyzing grammar. "It also helps in learning new words." Some learners noted that long, meaningful texts let them immerse in the content, leading to a deeper understanding of grammar. "While reading a long real text you have an opportunity to deeply immerse in the meaning of the sentences." A few students mentioned that authentic texts and textbooks should complement

each other rather than replace one another. “Both options are important because practice is practice” (Survey results).

Although the vast majority of students gave very positive reviews on learning grammar via authentic texts, some concerns were given. One of them is some difficulties connected with complex grammatical structures and the overall level of the material. Another frequently mentioned issue was to give more variety of topics to make students engaged into discussion. Desire for more explanation of grammar rules and bigger number of creative activities suggest that students want the combination of inductive and deductive approaches. At the same time the lecturers mentioned that it’s really challenging and time-consuming to find the text which contains a variety of different grammatical structures within a single topic and may be engaging for all students. Another concern is the level of students who are working with authentic texts: since such materials are not adapted, students of lower levels may feel embarrassed and even demotivated.

Conclusions. Taking everything into consideration, the authors have concluded that the benefits of using authentic texts in teaching grammar are as follows: better understanding grammar in context,

increased motivation and interest, developing of practical language awareness, exposure to natural variety and complexity, support for vocabulary growth and integrated learning, deeper processing and comprehension. However, there are some challenges mentioned both by students and language instructors. Students suggested more diverse topics, additional grammar explanation, addressing comprehension difficulties, a bigger variety of example grammar structures. Teachers, on the other hand, struggled to find the text which may engage the students, match their level and contain the targeted grammar.

The authors found that benefits of working with authentic texts clearly overweight the drawbacks, although certain factors such as students’ proficiency level, their interests and individual characteristics should be considered.

The authors also recommend designing tasks which should be divided into three groups – recognition, comprehension and production – with the latter playing the crucial role in mastering grammar via authentic texts.

These findings highlight the importance of integrating authentic materials into grammar instruction to bridge the gap between language form and real-life communication.

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