Teaching Grammar Creatively

Using poems and stories to practise grammar

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Creativity

• What?
• Why?
• How?
What do we mean by creativity?

- Webster: the ability to produce through imaginative skill, to bring into existence something new.
- Van Oech: imagining familiar things in a new light, finding previously undetected patterns and finding connections among unrelated phenomena
- Boden: novel valuable and surprising
- Amabile: novel and useful
Creativity and creativity

• Boden (1994) makes the distinction between Big C – a creation that is original in world terms (e.g. Michelangelo) and little c - a creation that is original and creative for the creator (e.g. our students)
Creativity involves

Using imagination to

• see familiar things in a new way
• find patterns
• break rules
• connect unrelated things

in order to produce something ‘original’
So why use creativity?

• Motivating: leading to positive affect and self-esteem
• In creative activities students perform better and use language more interestingly
• Deeper processing associated with creativity enhances memorisation
• Creativity is instrumental in L2 identity-building
Why encourage creativity in grammar teaching?

At first sight it would appear incompatible:
Grammar involves

• Rules
• Repetition
• Recognised patterns
• Established connections
Contradictions

- Rules vs Creativity
- Established Patterns vs New Connections
- Repetition vs Novelty
- Control vs Freedom
Constraints and Creativity

• Creativity within boundaries
• New connections within established patterns
• Novelty within repetition
• Freedom within limits
Creativity in grammar teaching

The tension between
• Constraint and freedom
• Rules and breaking rules
• Pattern and new connection

is inbuilt in the creative process

Can we use it in grammar teaching?
Three ways we can help

- Providing constraints
- Providing an Imaginative trigger
- Providing an Audience
Providing Constraints

• Grammar practice and creativity can be combined by providing tightly controlled frameworks and a format which involves repetition:
  • Pattern poems
  • Substitution tables
  • Word lists
  • Sentence frames
Imaginative trigger

- Concrete stimulus
- Brainstorming
- Idea Collision
Providing an Audience

- Create and Guess
- Create and Share
- Create and Combine
Connecting the Unconnected

Tom usually wakes up early. Yesterday he….
Tom usually walks to work. Yesterday he.....
Tom is usually early for work. Yesterday he.....
Tom usually has a sandwich for lunch. Yesterday he….
Tom usually watches TV in the evening Yesterday he…
Tom usually sleeps well. Last night he…

Abridged from Murphy English Grammar In Use CUP1989
Poems
prepositions

Preposition painting
Using a substitution table

On the table
next to a tree
beside a lake
beneath the mountains
under a deep blue sky
lies a....
Past regrets
Using rhyme and pattern

I’ve never been to India
I’ve never been to France
I’ve never eaten frogs’ legs
And I’ve never learned to dance

I’ve always lived in Thames
I’ve never been abroad
I’ve always lived at home
I’m getting rather bored…
• Snails/ jail/whales/tale/
• Spain/rain/train/plane
• Cruise/ news/ shoes/booze/zoos
• Mountain/fountain
• Greece/ fleece/niece/police/
• Prize surprise/ lies/pies/
• Hair/dare/
• Bank/prank/tank/
Scenarios

Using rhyme and brevity

- Buying eating drinking sleeping writing
- Flying meeting thinking peeping fighting
- Trying greeting weeping
- Sighing walking reading kissing
- Crying talking speeding missing
- Lying feeding
- Taking crawling playing waiting hoping
- Shaking bawling staying hating moping
Behind the Teacher’s Back

Children fighting
No one writing
The supermodels meet for lunch

Airkiss greeting
Not much eating
A Boy’s Head
Framework poem plus game element

Based on Miroslav Holub’s poem
‘A Boy’s Head’
A boy’s pocket.
A girl’s handbag
A businessman’s briefcase
A teenager’s diary

In it there is a
a.....
a...

There are some....

And there is ....
Lexis problems?

• In authentic material the ‘fit’ between the grammatical structure and lexis may not be good: the vocabulary may be of a higher level than the level at which that particular structure is introduced.
Soap Opera
Limiting Vocabulary, Making use of genre

waved (at) smiled (at) winked (at) saw told spoke(to) wrote (to) phoned met liked fell in love with dreamed about disagreed (with) agreed (with) yelled (at) shouted (at) left cried came back (to) ignored asked refused quarrelled (with)

she, her, he, him, it, I, me, we, us, you, they, them.
I fell in love with him. He fell in love with her. I saw them. I cried. I shouted. I yelled. He left me. He quarrelled with her. He came back to me. I refused.
The House That Jack Built…

Pattern and chaining

This is the house that Jack built.

This is the malt that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the rat, that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the farmer sowing his corn, that kept the cock that crowed in the morn, that waked the priest all shaven and shorn, that married the man all tattered and torn, that kissed the maiden all forlorn, that milked the cow with the crumpled horn, that tossed the dog, that worried the cat, that killed the rat, that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the photo that Jack took

man   fish girl boat wind
wave whale rod camera rock
beach shark cook friend
chips   cat
This is the photo that Jack took

• This is the man that caught the fish that was in the photo that Jack took
• This is the girl that kissed the man that caught the fish that was in the photo that Jack took
• This is the boat that carried the girl that kissed the man that caught the fish that was in the photo that Jack took
• This is the whale that capsized the boat that carried the girl that kissed the man that caught the fish that was in the photo that Jack took
A long time ago I started life as a tall tree growing in the middle of a deep forest. One day men came with axes and saws. I was cut down and sent floating down a wide river to a factory. There I was chopped up, carved and painted and then taken, with hundreds of others to a shop in a big city. I lay on a shelf for several months next to cards and piles of writing paper. Then one day a child came in with his father. He bought me and took me home. When we got to room he held me tightly in his hand and together we made something beautiful. Now the child is a man and I am too old to work—but I still travel everywhere with him. He says he keeps me with him for good luck. That child is now a famous artist—and he and I remember that day long ago when we drew his first picture.
Past passive history

• Choose an object:

Photo frame    paperclip    knife    coin

stamp    ring    bookmark    notebook

Or one of your choice….
Maternal Advice
Genre with a twist

Using ‘When in doubt, wash’ from Jennie by Paul Gallico:
Listen and guess the animal.
Then choose an animal and write maternal advice.
How it’s done
Genre with a twist

• Choose an activity and write instructions. Read out your instructions. Others guess the activity:
  • Eating spaghetti   Falling in love
  • Getting promoted   Bathing a dog
  • Having a relaxing evening
  • Going to a wedding   Taking an exam
  • Looking after a two-year old