

THE USE OF PROVERBS IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPONENTS

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ABSTRACT: The article discusses the use of proverbs in teaching some essential components of English language such as pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. In recent years, in the conditions of the unprecedented development of science and technology, more and more people are talking about the development and application of modern methods of teaching foreign languages. It is known that teaching methods are diverse, but often some of them become more effective when combined with additional methods.

Key words: English teaching, grammar, pronunciation, proverbs, vocabulary

SỬ DỤNG TỤC NGỮ TRONG VIỆC DẠY CÁC THÀNH PHẦN NGÔN NGỮ TIẾNG ANH

TÓM TẮT: Bài viết bàn về việc sử dụng tục ngữ trong việc dạy một số thành phần thiết yếu của tiếng Anh như phát âm, từ vựng và ngữ pháp. Những năm gần đây, trong điều kiện khoa học công nghệ phát triển chưa từng có, ngày càng có nhiều người nói đến việc phát triển và ứng dụng các phương pháp dạy ngoại ngữ hiện đại. Chúng ta đều biết rằng các phương pháp giảng dạy rất đa dạng, nhưng thường một số phương pháp sẽ trở nên hiệu quả hơn khi kết hợp với các phương pháp bổ sung khác.

Từ khóa: dạy tiếng Anh, ngữ pháp, phát âm, tục ngữ, từ vựng

8. INTRODUCTION

Among foreign languages, the demand for the English language has increased the most in connection with the development of economic, diplomatic,

political relations, intercultural relations, science and technology. Therefore, English language teachers should approach the problem more responsibly, choosing the most correct, effective and accessible teaching methods for students. In this

regard, some specialists consider the use of proverbs in the educational process to be important. Here, it is appropriate to note that the application of proverbs is an additional way to make the learning process more interesting and to make it effective. Unfortunately, very little space is devoted to the study of proverbs in English language textbooks, and for some reasons, they are almost ignored when creating curricula. Meanwhile, few people know the effectiveness of their use.

Wolfgang Mieder (2004), one of the well-known pioneers in the study of proverbs, states that it is difficult to give a precise definition of a proverb. He defines the proverb as “a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation”. Proverbs, being precise from the point of view of meaning and often melodious, are easier to remember by learners - a circumstance that contributes not only to the enrichment of the vocabulary, but also makes the speech more accurate and understandable.

Like all the other languages in the world, the English language has its own huge collection of proverbs, which can be a very valuable resource for English language teachers. Proverbs are an important constituent of folklore, which includes the culture, history, wisdom and experience of the given people, accumulated throughout the history and development of their existence. According

to experts who practically use proverbs when teaching English, the lessons become more effective and interesting because through proverbs as authentic materials, the students get to know the culture, history and folk wisdom that have been unknown to them before. This circumstance can be an incentive for students to study a foreign language more deeply and continuously, and for our case, English.

2. THE USE OF PROVERBS IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPONENTS

Pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary are essential language components which contribute to the development of the language learners' communicative competence - the primary goal of any language courses. As Nuessel stated: “Proverbs are effective and practical tools to teach vocabulary, to exemplify and practice grammar points, to show creative use of language, and to teach and practice pronunciation because of their musical quality.” (Nuessel, 2003), the teacher can make good use of proverbs in teaching these language elements.

The use of proverbs in teaching vocabulary

As teaching aids, English proverbs are expected to be a valuable resource of authentic materials to improve learners' vocabulary learning. Since proverbs are the sentences which contain vocabulary with meaning, form and function, they are considered one of the most effective materials to teach vocabulary. As part of

formulaic language, proverbs can inspire fluent and natural language production and cause learners to be more motivated as they are learning authentic language, which they can use in both oral and written communication.

Rowland affirmed that proverbs help build up students' vocabulary. "Because of their very nature as handy units of thoughts with a universal application, proverbs incorporate only the familiar words of a language. Hence, a student who gradually takes into his consciousness a score of proverbs adds fifty or more valuable units to his active vocabulary with very little effort. Proverbs provide opportunities to acquire new and frequently used vocabulary and to learn other meanings of the known vocabulary". (Rowland, 1926)

Proverbs help to expand the students' vocabulary and because they are often short, rhymed and rhythmic, and the vocabulary is easily understood and memorized. This is most evident in beginners. If the teacher's goal is to reinforce the group of words that make up the given proverb among the learners, then this method is just right. For example:

*A friend **in need** is a friend **indeed**.*

East or **west**, home is best.

When the cat's **away**, the mice will **play**

*Man **proposes**, God **disposes**.*

*No **pain**, no **gain**.*

Obviously, students can promote their language competence by using and understanding English proverbs to enrich

their vocabulary and consequently, facilitate their language usage.

The use of proverbs in teaching pronunciation

Proverbs can be used when introducing a new phonetic phenomenon, when performing exercises to consolidate a new phonetic material and when repeating it, during phonetic exercises. The rhythm of many proverbs makes their pronunciation and certain sounds easy to learn. The proverbs which include the repetition of the same sound used in the several words are suitable materials for practicing that sound. The experience of teachers shows that one of the effective methods of ensuring students' interest in learning, their activity and performance is the use of proverbs in English lessons at different stages of language teaching. At the initial stage, teachers can turn to proverbs for processing the sound side of speech. They help put the pronunciation of individual difficult consonants, especially those that are not in the Vietnamese language. Instead of individual words and phrases containing one or another sound, the teacher can offer the class some specially selected proverbs.

Very often, some students have pronunciation difficulties. This is especially typical in the initial phase of learning. The teacher needs to select a proverb or proverbs depending on what kind of sound is being practised. The teacher can offer, for example, such proverbs for processing sound [**w**]:

*Where there is a **will** there is a **way**.*

*Watch **which way** the cat jumps.*

Suppose the problem concerns the pronunciation of the combination of sounds [t] and [r]. In this case, it is appropriate to use the following proverbs:

Don't trouble trouble till trouble troubles you.

Treat others, as you want to be treated yourself.

In another case, to practise the pronunciation of sounds [θ] and [ð], it is advisable to use the following proverbs:

Nothing seek, nothing find.

Wealth is nothing without health.

Something is better than nothing

It takes a thief to catch a thief.

Birds of a feather flock together.

The rhythm, rhyme and alliteration in such proverbs apparently help students a lot in practising difficult sounds that are absent in their mother tongue, therefore, improve their pronunciation.

The use of proverbs in teaching grammar

As for the role of proverbs in teaching grammar, proverbs can be incorporated in the classroom to exemplify grammar points (Nuessel, 2003). Rather than using simple and unappealing sentences to illustrate the grammar, proverbs can be used as interesting sample sentences and as attention-getters. Moreover, since they can remain alive and active in the mind once they are learned (Rowland, 1926), students can easily keep them in their mind as samples of the grammar points they have learned. In addition, using proverbs in particular

grammar exercises can reinforce learners' knowledge of grammar. English proverbs are an abundant source of materials for teachers to exploit in demonstrating certain grammatical patterns in their lessons. If the teacher chooses suitable proverbs, students can improve not only their pronunciation, but also their grammar knowledge. For example, to strengthen the possessive case in English, as an additional means, the following proverbs can be suggested:

A friend's frown is better than a foe's smile.

Everybody's business is nobody's business.

An Englishman's home is his castle.

In another case, when teaching the passive voice and the past participle form of verbs, the following proverbs can be used:

If one claw is caught, the bird is lost.

A tree is **known** by its fruit.

Good swimmers **are** often drowned.

Marriages are made in heaven.

Rome wasn't built in a day.

Words must be weighed, not counted.

What is done can't be undone.

Practice shows that the process of mastering the degrees of comparison of adjectives is not difficult if the material is offered as much as possible in the form of proverbs. In teaching these grammatical structures, it is advisable for the teacher to select the following proverbs as examples:

A miss is **as** good **as** a mile.

The grass is **greener** on the other side of the fence.

Blood is **thicker than** water.

Pen is **mightier than** sword.

Prevention is **better than** cure.

*The nearer **the bone**, the sweeter **the flesh**.*

(The) more haste, (the) less speed.

Honesty is the best policy.

Laughter is the best medicine.

The longest way around is **the shortest** way home.

*The highest **tree has** the greatest **fall**.*

Hope for **the best**, but prepare for **the worst**.

*The least **said**, the soonest **mended**.*

When teaching the -ing form of verbs, the teacher may make use of the following proverbs as illustrations:

Seeing is believing.

Winning is earning.

Losing is learning.

*It is no use **crying** over spilt milk.*

When it comes to teaching relative clauses, the teacher may also find the following proverbs helpful:

A friend **who shares** is a friend who cares.

People **who live in glass houses** shouldn't throw stones at others.

*He **who hesitates** is lost.*

*He **who laughs last** laughs best.*

*He **who likes borrowing** dislikes paying.*

Don't kill the goose that lays golden eggs.

All that glitters is not gold.

*It's the empty can **that makes the most noise**.*

The grammatical structure of proverbs gives teachers the opportunity to use them also when strengthening English conditional sentences. The following proverbs can be useful to exemplify different types of conditional sentences:

***If you buy cheaply**, you pay dearly.*

***If the sky falls**, we shall catch larks.*

***If you run after two hares**, you will catch none.*

***If you agree to carry the calf**, they will make you carry the cow.*

***If you lie down with dogs**, you will get up with fleas.*

***If you are patient in a moment of anger**, you will escape hundred days of sorrow.*

***If you play with fire**, you'll get burned.*

*Don't open a shop **unless** you know how to smile.*

***If wishes were horses**, beggars would ride.*

The above-mentioned examples testify to the wide scope and possibilities of using proverbs in teaching English as a foreign language. Their use not only contributes to the development of learners' oral speech and linguistic thinking, enriches their vocabulary, strengthens their memory, but also helps to improve their grammar knowledge. The application of proverbs also makes learners aware not only of their own, but also of other

people's cultures, folklore, historical past, everyday life, lifestyle, etc.

3. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

English proverbs are a great treasure of the English language and a very valuable authentic resource for language teachers. As we have already seen, the possibilities of their application in teaching the English language are quite large. If teachers of English use them appropriately, there will be great benefit not only to arouse students' interest in language learning, help them master the language components and therefore, improve their language competence, but at the same time encourage them to be aware of the culture, philosophy of life, broaden their knowledge and world outlook. Incorporating proverbs in the language classroom can contribute to the development of students' pragmatic, metaphorical, cultural and intercultural competences and organizational competence (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, four language skills) and to increasing their fluency and naturalness of language production and eventually, their communicative competence.

At Haiphong University, the application of English proverbs is not addressed properly in English courses for either English major students or non-English major students. Examining the English course books being used, we can find that not many English proverbs are incorporated in these materials. Besides, only a few teachers of English realise the value of using proverbs in teaching English

and utilize them effectively in their lessons. In such a language learning setting where there is limited exposure to English outside the classroom, English language teachers and coursebooks carry an utmost importance in teaching English proverbs. Therefore, the language teachers here, in the first place, should be aware of the role of proverbs in language teaching and feel the need to equip themselves with a sufficient stock of English proverbs. Then, during their teaching process, they should acquire the skills to design and adapt the teaching materials, incorporate appropriate proverbs in their lesson plans and exploit them effectively in class. In addition, the students should be encouraged to develop interest in the use of proverbs besides being given opportunities to learn and practise them. As a modern proverb goes, "*A proverb learned is a proverb earned*", students benefit a lot from gaining a collection of proverbs in improving their language competence.

4. REFERENCES

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