

TED AS TRENDS IN ENGLISH TO DEBATE

Maria Semenovskaya¹, Anna Gornostaeva²

¹Ms, Moscow State Linguistic University, RUSSIA, maria.semenovskaya@gmail.com

²Dr, Moscow State Linguistic University, RUSSIA, anngornostaeva@yandex.ru

Abstract

Nowadays, with lots of good course books with engaging contents and up-to-date digital resources, do teachers need to create materials of their own? The answer is certainly yes as teachers need to tailor the syllabus to the needs of the class. The best way is to use authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, videos, even leaflets. Video is undoubtedly the most powerful medium in teaching as it grabs students' attention and sparks curiosity. TED, which stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design, is a non-profit organization, which runs conferences of different types with the most interesting people as speakers sharing cutting-edge ideas. It is a great source for teachers of English as they can easily find a talk to lead in or round off the topic in the course book. However, English language teachers do not need only ideas to inspire the class, but first of all they look for new vocabulary and examples of grammar patterns studied to enhance their students' command of English. They choose the items, which seem beneficial. Here the problem arises as speakers at TED are from all over the world and may be non-native speakers as well as the majority of educators are non-natives and teach English in EFL and ESL classrooms. Either of them uses the vocabulary of their choice but the frequency of usage may be low. As for the grammar one can find examples which are different from classical grammar of English. Whether we should consider such cases as a new trend in English is debatable. On the other hand, this is the way how a language changes. The paper gives examples of difficult cases and may be interesting for a wide audience.

Keywords: TED, video, grammar patterns, vocabulary, teaching materials, authentic materials, ESL, EFL.

1 INTRODUCTION

The English language is not a dogma to follow but a living organism, which is changing over the time. Both teachers and learners should acquire modern grammar patterns and vocabulary. Recent course books aim to present the vocabulary, grammar and functions which students encounter most often in real life. The example of such a course book is innovative *Touchstone* book series by McCarthy, McCarten and Sandiford's (2005–2006), which is based on the Cambridge International Corpus. At the same time, ESL and EFL teachers need to adapt materials as "Think Globally, Teach Locally" approach can indeed help to make learning more effective. In order to fine-tune the syllabus and course books at your school or university teachers need to use teaching materials of their own alongside the main books. It is a must that the resource should be authentic. Videos are definitely authentic as the speakers present their ideas and one can master not only the English language but some extralinguistic things, such as the way and manner of presentations.

Incorporating a video into the syllabus a teacher focuses first of all on the topic relevant to the one in the course book but suitable for the needs of their students. The next stage is to choose the focus grammar patterns and target vocabulary.

2 METHODOLOGY

For this paper TED Talks were chosen as they present modern spoken English. The speakers at TED conferences are from all over the world and it is possible to find examples of contemporary grammar and lexis. In this paper the focus is primarily on frequency of some grammar patterns and vocabulary. The analysis is based on The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as it is a widely-used corpus of English and freely-available. It contains more than 560 million words. Teachers and learners can find the following data on each word: genre (informal to formal): spoken, fiction, magazines, newspaper, academic; the source of the information, including the date and the reference to the original text; the number of examples. Besides, the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (further - Macmillan Dictionary) was taken as the definitions in the dictionary are based on the information derived from 200 million words of English which make up the World English Corpora (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2007). Macmillan Dictionary is used to see the frequency of usage of words. To present explanations concerning grammar *English Grammar in Use* by R. Murphy M. for intermediate students and *Advanced Grammar in Use* by M. Hewings were used.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Purpose of Additional Teaching Materials

Teaching materials are the resources a teacher uses to convey the meaning of grammar patterns and provide additional practice. A course book usually offers a text to introduce grammar or vocabulary and one or two exercises to activate them and another one or two exercises in the accompanying workbook usually done as homework, which is not enough and makes teachers develop additional teaching materials of their own "to maximize the effectiveness of classroom and individual work of students" (Semenovskaya M., 2016). Teachers turn to authentic materials as according to Guariento & Morely (2001), "authentic materials help to motivate learners learn the language by making them feel they are learning the 'real' language".

3.2 Sources for Additional Teaching Materials

EFL/ESL teachers can easily find authentic materials as "there are unlimited sources for teaching materials" (Gebhard, J.G.,1996). According to Gebhard's classification educators use the following authentic materials:

1. Authentic Listening/Viewing Materials -- TV commercials, quiz shows, cartoons, news clips, comedy shows, movies, soap operas, professionally audio-taped short stories and novels, radio ads, songs, documentaries, and sales pitches.
2. Authentic Visual Materials -- slides, photographs, paintings, children's artwork, stick-figure drawings, wordless street signs, silhouettes, pictures from magazines, ink blots, postcard pictures, wordless picture books, stamps, and X-rays.
3. Authentic Printed Materials -- newspaper articles, movie advertisements, astrology columns, sports reports, obituary columns, advice columns, lyrics to songs, restaurant menus, street signs, cereal boxes, candy wrappers, tourist information brochures, university catalogues, telephone books, maps, TV guides, comic books, greeting cards, grocery coupons, pins with messages, and bus schedules.
4. Realia ("Real world" objects) Used in EFL/ ESL Classrooms -- coins and currency, folded paper, wall clocks, phones, Halloween masks, dolls, and puppets, to name a few. (Realia are often used to illustrate points very visually or for role-play situations.)

3.3 Why TED

The abbreviation TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) is known to almost everybody with inquisitive mind and passion for something new. Teachers find this platform as a great source of topics to create additional materials. To begin with, TED is absolutely authentic as speakers present their own research, history or share life experience, with graphs, slides or pictures demonstrating the input of the speech. "In order to get a clear picture of the ins and outs/distinguishing features of the manner of behaviour of native speakers one must see the circumstances the communication takes place in." (Revina, E., 2015) What is more, "TED welcomes people from every discipline and culture" (www.ted.com), so teachers can find a video according to the needs of their students? Finally, the language itself proves to be really modern due to the presenters all over the world and a wide audience viewing the talks and thus improving their competence

and making the English language develop. At the same time, educators must be aware that they may encounter new tendencies they may be unfamiliar with.

3.4 Examples and Analysis

3.4.1 Grammar

(a) The construction most commonly used in English is **there is/are**. It can be found in Matt Cutts's speech, a born American. In his absolutely inspiring talk at TED *Try something new for 30 days* in March, 2011 with 10,021,362 views she says:

- (1) **There's a few things** I learnt while doing these 30-day challenges.

Contrary to classical grammar the verb *to be* is used in the singular form *is* with the real subject in plural *a few things*. COCA gives only two examples of this construction in the full form *there is a few things* dated 2007 and 2017 and forty-two examples of the contracted form *there's a few things* with the frequency rising from 1 in 1990 to 7 in 2017, with the vast majority in spoken English.

Another example of the same usage can be found in TED speaker Nilofar Merchant's great talk *Got a meeting? Take a walk* performed in February, 2013, and watched by 3,020,448 viewers by now.

- (2) Of course **there's health consequences** to this, scary ones, besides the waist.

There are no matches to *there's health consequences*, but there are thirty-nine examples of *there's consequences* and eleven of the full form *there is consequences*. The sources are mostly written.

In order to be sure that there is a tendency to use *there's + a noun in plural* more search of other examples of this match should be conducted on COCA. One can find *there's things* regularly used since 2000, *there's four (of them/ chords/ policemen/ tickets* and so on) with first mentioning in 1995, *there's many (components/governments/ people/ things/ sources* and so on) from 2008 and other examples both in spoken and written English. Thus, *there's + a noun in plural* can be considered as a modern trend in English and can be recommended for usage.

(b) Tenses in English have never been easy to understand and learners tend to rely on live examples which help them to get the meaning of different tenses and put them into practice. At the same time, some speakers use tenses which may mislead inexperienced users of English. For example, in the talk *Don't Regret Regret* by American journalist Kathryn Schulz (1,989,232 views since November, 2011) we can find the following:

- (3) *Because we all know people who **have gotten** tattoos **when they were** 17 or 19 or 23 and **regretted** it **by the time** they were 30.*

English Grammar in Use by R. Murphy says: "Do not use the Present Perfect (**I have done**) when you talk about a *finished* time (for example, yesterday / ten minutes ago / in 2005 / **when I was a child**). If we consult COCA, we can find few examples of the Present Perfect with a when-clause in the Past Simple, such as

- (4) *I **have got this** **when I ran** psconfig command. 3 content database(s) encountered.*
(5) *Things **have got physical** **when** Obama **called** Kremlin leadership as "barbarous" in regard of Aleppo.*
(6) *And we **have done** that **when** the fire **was still going** on.*

In Martin Hewings' *Advanced Grammar in Use* the explanation of the Past Perfect usage is the following: "If we want to refer to an event out of order – that is, an event happened before the last event in the sequence we have written or spoken about – we can use the Past Perfect." COCA provides fewer than 40 sentences from different sources dated between 1990 and 2017 demonstrating The Past Simple tense instead of the Past Perfect, among which are

- (7) *But **by the time** we were gone on the plane, they **got up** and **dusted** themselves off*
(8) *By **the time** they were in eighth grade Jeremy **knew** it, too, once Laura **pointed** it **out** to him.*

Taking the above-mentioned explanations into consideration, (3) should be as "Because we all know people who **got** tattoos when they were 17 or 19 or 23 and **had regretted** it **by the time** they were 30", (4) *I **got** this when I ran psconfig command. 3 content database(s) encountered.*, (5) "Things **got physical** when Obama called Kremlin leadership as "barbarous" in regard of Aleppo.", (6) "And we **did** that when the fire was still going on.", (7) "But **by the time** we were gone on the plane, they **had got up** and **dusted** themselves off", (8) "By **the time** they were in eighth grade, Jeremy **had known** it, too, once Laura **had pointed** it **out** to him."

Due to the fact that such cases are not often used this aspect should be viewed only as a peculiarity of the author's style.

(c) Another aspect of grammar which is challenging for learners of the English language is articles. Articles are even more difficult for those whose mother tongues have no grammar category like this, for Russian students in particular. In analyst Richard St. John's amazing TED talk *8 Secrets of Success*, which is consistently in the top 20 most viewed talks out of hundreds other talks by great speakers since February, 2005, and watched by the audience of 12,313,763, we can find such examples:

(9) *And the first thing is passion. Freeman Thomas says, "I'm driven by my passion. "TEDsters do it for **love**; they don't do it for **money**.*

(10) *Carol Coletta says, "I would pay someone to do what I do" And the interesting thing is: If you do it **for love, the money** comes anyway.*

The speaker presents some advice how to become successful and mentions *love* and *money* in general, which implies zero article before these abstract nouns in both examples (9) and (10) as according to *English Grammar in Use* by R. Murphy "We don't use **the** before a noun when we mean something in general with plural and uncountable nouns". As for the article **the** the closest meaning in M. Hewings' *Advanced Grammar in Use* is "**The** is used when we assume that the listener or reader will understand who or what we are referring to, or when other words in the noun phrase make the reference specific." However, in (10) we cannot find any specific reference or situation known to both the speaker and listeners to justify the usage of the article **the** in the word combination *the money*. Listeners can only guess what the speaker meant.

Thus, this particular example does not show a new trend from our point of view.

3.4.2 Vocabulary

(a) Vocabulary can be easily acquired when emotionally presented in a colourful speech. The example to discuss comes from Jennifer Senior's talk "For parents, happiness is a high bar" viewed 2,101,916 times since March, 2014

(11) *When I was a kid, high school specifically, I was told that I would be **at sea** in the new global economy if I did not know Japanese.*

From the context of the sentence it is clear that **at sea** means **at a loss**. At the same time, Macmillan Dictionary provides the meaning of **at sea** as **in a boat or ship on the sea**. For **at a loss** the phrase is **all at sea**. A search on COCA provides very few examples of **at sea=at a loss**.

(12) *If you **'re at sea** about the direction of stock prices, open an account with one-third of the money you plan to invest, then invest another third each of the next two months.*

Thus, the omission of **all** in (11) can hardly be called a trend.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This paper gives a quick overview on some TED talks from the point of view on changes in English grammar and vocabulary and hopefully has raised questions for teachers and learners to pursue. Some examples have illustrated that the usage of grammar patterns or some phrases different from classical grammar or definitions given in dictionaries may be considered as a new trend in our constantly changing world and language correspondently, though even with millions of views some things are still a trend as they are not commonly used. Some may only be peculiarities of the speech of a certain person. Depending on the level of the class educators should either concentrate on the traditional approach to the language or analyse novelties by using original materials.

REFERENCE LIST

- Gebhard Jerry G. (1996) *Teaching English as a Foreign Language: A Teacher Self Development and Methodology Guide*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. – P. 51.
- Hewings, Martin. (2013). *Advanced Grammar in Use*. 3rd Edition. Cambridge University Press. p.94.
- Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, (2007), New Edition.

Murphy, Raymond. (1991). *English Grammar in Use*. Cambridge University Press. p.148.

Revina, Elena. (2015) *The Usage of Authentic Video Materials in Language Teaching. Ispolzovanie autentichnih materialov v protsesse obucheniya inostrannomu yaziku*. Vestnik of Samara State Technical University, N4, (28), UDC 378.147, p.99.

Semenovskaya, Maria. (2016). *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on ESP/EAP/EMI in the Context of Higher Education Internationalization, Moscow*. ISBN 9785906953285 p.120.

<https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>

<https://www.macmillandictionary.com/>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228740371_Text_and_task_authenticity_in_the_EFL_classroom

https://www.ted.com/talks/jennifer_senior_for_parents_happiness_is_a_very_high_bar

https://www.ted.com/talks/kathryn_schulz_don_t_regret_regret

https://www.ted.com/talks/matt_cutts_try_something_new_for_30_days

https://www.ted.com/talks/nilofer_merchant_got_a_meeting_take_a_walk

https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_st_john_s_8_secrets_of_success