

Presenting structures through power point slides

Ana Guadalupe Torres Hernandez¹, Isai Ali Guevara Bazan² Emily Librado Torres³

E-mail: guatorres@uv.mx, ana_gth@hotmail.com
Universidad Veracruzana Centro de Idiomas (México)

Abstract

Teaching English as a second language does not need to be difficult for teachers. Learning English as a second language must be enjoyable for students. That is why English teachers should try to forget using the board and the CD player as the main tools in class. Our students today use advanced technology to make phone calls, to upload videos to the web, to chat, among other fun activities. But in most cases, they do not use this technology to study.

For all these reasons, we present a good option to catch student's attention in learning English: the presentation of grammar structures through power point slides. This is a compilation of power point slides presenting different structures in English for students to learn in a joyful way.

Introduction

In several occasions, ESL teachers work hard in order to motivate students to learn the language. Sometimes, teachers prepare lovely materials by themselves, or use great materials elaborated by others. However, teachers should take advantage of technology. For instance, Power point presentations usually increase student's interest in class.

First, teachers can use a variety of ways to present grammar structures by means of technology, but we have chosen power point slides because it is one of the easiest ways for teachers to prepare a class.

The Power Point slides presented here contain materials for different English grammar structures, elaborated by ourselves. Some of them include pictures and videos especially taken for the presentations, and some others have materials taken from the web. We have not applied a statistical test to measure the effectiveness of PPT presentations to present English structures. However, we can observe that students learn in a significant way, intrinsic motivation is enhanced, and we have noticed that student's attendance and interest in the class is being increased.

Some theory about the presentation of materials and the use of technology in class.

According to the global needs and the increasing race of recourses and information, learning has become more important than teaching, so that individuals can face to learn new multiple skills. We also know that the object of a course is to teach students, not to finish the book. It is also known that students are more likely to enjoy the subject and to succeed at it, if they are involved in the learning process and, as far as possible, have a chance to influence what happens, and how it happens. For this reason, teachers need to prepare themselves. Nothing is more certain to guarantee a disastrous lesson than an unprepared teacher. Of course, all experienced teachers learn to provide fill-in lessons when they need to, and every teacher has given the occasional wonderfully successful, spontaneous

and unprepared lesson. In general, however, success is directly proportional to the care of preparation. (Lewis, 1992)

The process of teaching a foreign language is a complex one. It has necessarily to be broken down into components to be studied: 1) presenting and explaining new material; 2) providing practice; and 3) testing. (Ur, 2006)

In the classroom, it is the teacher's job to promote these three learning processes by the use of appropriate teaching acts. Thus, he or she, presents or explains new material in order to make it clear, comprehensible and available for learning; gives practice to consolidate knowledge; and tests, in order to check what has been mastered and what stills needs to be learned or reviewed.

As Penny Ur (2006) mentions, one of the steps in the process of teaching is the presentation of new material, which in this case are grammar structures. It would seem fairly obvious that in order for our students to learn something new (a grammar structure), they need to be first able to perceive and understand it. One of the teacher's jobs is to mediate such new structure or material so that it appears in a form that is more accessible for initial learning.

This kind of mediation may be called "presentation"; the term is applied here not only to the kind of limited and controlled modeling of a target item that we do when we introduce a new word or grammatical structure, but also to the initial encounter with comprehensible input in the form of spoken or written texts, as well as various kinds of explanations, instructions and discussions of new language items or tasks.

The presentation of material in the language learning process is really important because can help to activate and harness learner's attention, effort, intelligence and conscious learning strategies in order to enhance learning.

Sometimes, it is difficult for teachers to present structures in a way students feel motivated and animated, because, they prefer using the usual blackboard (or whiteboard) , or the presentation in the book, due to the lack of time for preparing interesting materials.

Students today do not want to see the teacher writing on the board all the time. Students today love technology and live with technology. So, it is essential that teachers use technology in class in order to catch student's attention.

One of the main reasons for using computer technology in the English class comes from the idea that for students technology can:

- be very motivational
- be the source of a significant amount of material
- be fun – and when it is fun you learn!

Technology is an ever-increasing part of the English language arts classroom. Today's teachers are developing new and exciting means of integrating language, writing and literature with innovative technologies.

As it has previously mentioned, the presentation of materials or grammar structures is an important part of the learning process, and technology is a great tool which can help our students to motivate themselves to learn the language. These are the two main reasons we prepared a series of grammar presentations using power point slides as one of the easiest programs for teachers to use.



How did this adventure start?

In the beginning, these materials were created in order to give a demonstration English Class to be evaluated for applying the post as an English teacher at the Universidad Veracruzana Language Centers. About five power point presentations were used in a successful way in these examinations, because the assessment committee gave them the highest score. After that, these presentations were used in the classroom with students of different levels with excellent results.

How were the presentations created?

We used Microsoft office power point 2003 to create the first presentations using the following structures: present perfect vs. simple past, past tense of regular verbs, comparatives, there is/there are, and causatives (have, get, make) for the entrance examinations.

The first grammar structure presented through power point slides was "present perfect vs. simple past. It was created in a very simple way, such a similar way we use the board or the grammar book. It was presented by just reading the grammar rules and examples. After that, some examples were elicited from students, and finally, they answered some exercises taken from the web. We can say that this first experience was very traditional, but students loved having the structure presented in a different way.

The second grammar structure was "past tense using regular verbs". In this presentation we added two important tools: photographs taken from the web, and a script to tell students a story in past tense, so that they can deduce the grammar rule. It was difficult at first, but as the story went on, students started participating and producing sentences in past tense. The grammar rule was presented after students produced it. An important fact in this presentation is that we discovered that presenting the grammar rule by telling a story (script), increased our students' attention.

The third presentation was created to present "comparatives". It was a nice work because the first slide presented a famous artist and different adjectives written all around the artist's picture, to describe her in the way the teacher preferred. Immediately after that, another slide presented the picture of another famous artist, but in this slide, the teacher used the same adjectives given in the previous one comparing both artists, and of course, using the comparative form in its short and long forms. The next slide presented the two artists' pictures together, for students to compare them. After students produced the grammar rule, it was presented in the next slide, and at this time, the teacher was able to elicit students' participation to explain the grammar rule by themselves. The teacher's job and good guidance would be the key to help students achieve this task, and the teacher's performance has great importance in the presentation of the script, emphasizing the intonation in the comparative forms. Finally, several slides presented different pictures of two famous people, cities, animals, movies, etc., for students to compare them in an oral or written way. It is important to point out that teachers can present the slides in the order they think would fit better with the kind of students they have in class.

"Causatives" (using make, have and get) is a structure presented to students of higher levels. As it is known, causatives have two forms: active and passive. When the power point presentation for this grammar structure was created, the main objective was to identify and use the causative verbs have and get in the passive form. So, a series of slides presenting materials containing the active form were created to refresh students' recent knowledge. To present the passive form, a special slide was created. It first showed a house, a car, clothes, etc. Finally, and using the slide animation, the picture of a famous singer appeared. Then, it is the teacher's job to describe different actions related to the pictures. For example: "A woman cleans the singer's house", "a man washes her car", "a designer designs her clothes" and so on. Once students know the artist does not do any of the activities

described. It is the time to introduce the causative verbs in the passive form by saying "She has her house cleaned by a woman", and she gets her clothes designed by a fashion designer. When it is noticeable that students have understood the structure, we can elicit examples and make them produce the rule before it is presented. Once students participate using the causative verbs have and get in the passive form through another slide, it is time to present and explain (if necessary) the grammar rule, and after that, some exercises for students to practice. It is important to point out that a teacher can present the slides in the order he or she prefers. We think that if students understand and produce the structure before the rule is explained, they will learn in a more significant way. But what works for one teacher in a certain context, may not be useful for another in a different context. I would like to mention that this is my favorite presentation because it helped me to gain the mayor score in my demonstration English Class for the full time teacher post I applied for at the Universidad Veracruzana Language Centre.

Now we have been creating presentations using videos. Some of them were downloaded from the web; others were specially created for the presentations using a digital camera and our best students as actors. It was a very funny task for me and my students.

One of the structures presented using a video was "there is/there are. In most occasions, teachers use a picture of a house to present this structure by describing the furniture each room contains (There's a TV in the bedroom). It can be possible to do it through a video as well, by filming a house and describing what it contains using the structure. But we decided to present this structure in a birthday party. The one who celebrates, is the one who uses "there is" and "there are" to describe the food, the people and other things in the party. We asked our main actor to speak in a normal speed, so our students could understand what the actor was describing. This video was presented in a special slide, and after that, different slides with different pictures taken from the video were presented for students to describe what they saw on them using the structure. In this part, teacher's monitoring is really important. Later, a slide containing the grammar rule was presented, and then, a final slide with exercises. We need to point out that whenever necessary, teachers can use the board to write other examples.

As recording special videos for the presentations was time consuming, we decided to use real life videos downloaded from Internet. There is a special web page containing different videos with famous and not famous people performing different activities. Students love this web page and spend a lot of time watching its videos. So, the structure we decided to use with this technology was "present continuous". In the first slide, we refreshed our students on how to change infinitive verbs into -ing forms. Next, we presented a video of a famous person singing, and we asked our students: "What is he doing?". They answered "he is singing" enthusiastically. Then, different slides showing videos of different people doing different activities were presented for students to use the structure. In this part, the correct management of the teacher's presentation is important. Spending a long time watching a video can make students get bored. And of course, teacher's monitor and guidance are really important for a successful presentation. Once students have described what other people are doing, it is time to present the grammar rule (if necessary) on another slide. It depends on the students' participation and teacher's criteria to skip this part and go straight to the slides with exercises.

After presenting some of these materials in class, we decided to divide the group in order to present a grammar structure (causatives) in two different ways. The traditional way would be given to the first half, and the power point way would be given to the second half. What did I find?

The first half listened to me, watched the examples on the board, and just participated because I asked them to do it. The second half looked enthusiastic from the very moment they saw the PC, the LCD projector and the images on the board. They listened to the story (script), showed great interest, and immediately started participating and giving their own examples. The next day, when we reviewed



the structure through an oral practice, students from the second half participated more than students from the first half.

Conclusion

As we observed, the presentation of grammar structures through power point slides is a good way to catch students' attention and interest in the class. However, the teachers' management of the presentation will be the real key for a significant learning.

It is relevant to consider that all the presentations should not contain slides with exercises, because students can practice with exercises from their textbook, or exercises provided by the teacher or other means. We have also found out that students show more interest when pictures or videos are included in the presentations.

Presenting structures through power point slides may not be the easiest way to teach grammar, because it requires a hard work behind and the teachers' good will to give something new to their students. But in our experience, the reward and satisfaction are enormous. However, it would be helpful to carry out a formal research on this subject in order to measure the impact the presentations have in the students' learning.

References

- [1] Ur, Penny. (2006) A course in language teaching: practice and theory. Cambridge University Press. United Kingdom
- [2] Lewis, Michael and Hill, Jimmie. (1992) Practical techniques for language teaching. Language teaching publications.