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A new step in teaching ESP students

Translation is one of the activities that all professional science technicians ought to learn for it is important for the comprehension of scientific texts throughout their career as professionals.

Translation for ESP¹ students is sometimes difficult because they face unknown grammatical structures such as –ed and –ing forms.

While teaching English to a group of students of Informatics I asked them to translate the following paragraph into Spanish:

...You can then examine variables, start tracing, or run the program until another breakpoint is encountered. You can also break at any point during program execution by pressing Ctrl-Break. This has the effect of stopping at the next source line, as if a breakpoint had been set there.

The parts of speech that are underlined caused a lot of trouble for them. Most of them did not know how to translate these phrases into Spanish and others used –endo and –ando endings.

So, the teaching of –ed and –ing forms playing their different grammatical roles should be included in the current programmes of English for Specific Purposes. This work intends to provide professors with a theoretical background on this content and some exercises based on a new approach.

Traditional methods of learning a foreign language die hard, new active teaching methods have appeared. Learning a language is not a matter of acquiring a set of rules, building up a large vocabulary or how much a student knows about it; it is a matter of how well he can use it.

To achieve a correct translation the students must be trained in all for skills: understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. That's why the teacher must make efficient use of the time at his disposal, which is quite often not enough.

To put into practice this approach about language learning outlined above it is suggested that the teaching of this content should be as follows.

The students must be taught –ed and –ing forms as derivational suffixes when teaching word formation. Since they are among the most common affixes in English for Specific Purposes. –ed is an adjective-forming suffix meaning, having e.g. T-shaped, shielded. On the other hand, –ing is a noun-forming suffix meaning, that which results from the activity of the verb, e.g. forging, breaking.

¹ESP- English for Specific Purposes.

-ing and -ed endings form a lot of grammatical structures. Two of which are the most known by the students. However, if we go over some grammar books, we will realize that -ed and -ing have many functions within a sentence. For this reason, the professor must be careful deciding what part of this content should be taught.

After a search throughout scientific literature, we may say that the most common functions of -ing and -ed structures are:

-ing

- Verb Form Used as a Noun. (Gerund)

Planning shaves off the metal by a straightline movement of the tool or work.

Turning is usually performed on a lathe.

Electrical engineering is concerned with the conversion of energy from other forms into electrical energy.

- After prepositions.

A program can have errors that keep it from working correctly.

The computer is capable of storing and manipulating numbers, letters, and characters.

For outputting information, two common devices are used a printer and a displays screen.

- In Participial Phrases. (-ing clauses)

Newton's laws of motion are three principles relating the effects of force, mass and motion to an object.

The most convenient type consists of a steel bottle containing liquid carbon.

Engineers deal with rods having a considerable degree of stiffness.

- After Some Verbs, Verb + ing.

To keep the generators rotating we apply some readily available form energy.

These options have corresponding risks as well, so reenable them if your program starts behaving strangely.

It is important to make clear that some verbs in English can take -ing or the infinitive with a change in meaning or not. (See "Master the Basics of English for Spanish Speakers" by Jean Yates).

-ed

- In Participial Phrases. (-ed Clauses).

Carbon deposited on the catalyst is burned off in the regeneration zone.

Production is a process whereby raw material is transformed by factory methods into things wanted by society.

Most of goods made in this factory are exported.

Note that deposited and wanted are past participle. Many verbs have past participle that do not end in -ed (made).

Traditionally the teaching of grammar is presented in the form of rules along with long explanations where the professor explains the function of every word within a sentence. This does not encourage students to use the language and they fall in the inevitable drudgery involved in this kind of lesson.

In order to avoid this, the professor must make his students an active part of his class and teach them grammar as a way of saying something and not as an exemplification of some abstract grammar-rule.

On the other hand, sometimes it occurs that professors present grammatical or other contents by parts in a set of class, but this is a waste of time and does not allow students to appreciate language as a system. It is recommendable to introduce all grammatical aspects treated on this paper in one class, and then keep on reviewing it while teaching something else.

Exercises

1. Listening Exercise

(Tape-script)

Milling is performed with a rotating cutting tool having multiple cutting edges. The work is fastened to a movable table and then slowly fed past the revolving cutter. In the standard milling machine, the cutter revolves on a horizontal axis to produce flat or curved surfaces, slots or grooves, depending on the shape given to the cutting edges.

- Before playing the recording, show your students some examples about the new content.

It is not necessary to explain them deeply. Wait until the end of the exercise.

- Divide the class into three teams and give an assignment to each team.
Team 1: Find -ing nouns.
Team 2: Find -ing adjectives.
Team 3: Find another way of saying the expression that is underlined ... *with a rotating cutting tool which have multiple cutting edges.*

The professor can present milling as a noun and -ing clause taking as a starting-point what the students already know: milling as an adjective and the expression which have.

2. Look at the following examples.

Don't keep working till late.

The computer will start compiling the program, when you press the right option.

- Complete the sentences for each situation using -ing.



You broke
into the
workshop

No, I
didn't ;



He denied breaking into the workshop.

- An effective way of doing this exercise can be the work in pairs.
- The students could act out the conversation and afterwards, they write the sentences.
- This very exercise can be done using verb + to and verb + -ing structures to present verbs that can take -ing or the infinitive with a change in meaning or not.

3. Look at these examples.

The carbon dioxide produced (which is produced) when the sodium hydrogen carbonate reacts with the acid builds up a very high pressure inside the container.

The gas comes from the gas tap on the laboratory bench through the piece of rubber tubing attached (which is attached) to the metal inlet in the base up the bunsen.

The class can divided into three teams and each team will be given cards with parts of the sentences written on them.

For example:

Team 1: - The Bunsen Burner is a device.
- In nature.

Team 2: - There is water like the pure water which is defined by chemists.
- Which is used to provide a source of heat.

Team 3: - In laboratory work.
- Which is made up of only hydrogen and oxygen.

The students will be asked to find another way of saying the underlined phrases and then arrange the expressions into sentences.

CONCLUSIONS

The new trend in teaching foreign languages is aimed at developing the fundamental communicative methods in a classroom situation. For this, students become the center of the teaching- learning process and the teacher must create every time he stands before a class. The teaching of any grammatical aspect is not an exception and should be taught following the same procedure.

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes includes translation and within this, special attention should be given to some grammatical structures mainly –ed and –ing forms which have been treated in this work so as to provide the teacher not only with a theoretical but also a practical approach.

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