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DIFFERENT WAYS OF TEACHING ARTICLES

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Abstract: This article deals with two types of articles definite (the) and indefinite (a/an), the use of which depends mainly on whether you are referring to any member of a group, or to a specific member of a group. It focuses on different rules of using definite, indefinite and zero articles and peculiarities of teaching articles.

Key words: Teaching articles, definite, indefinite and zero articles, grammar, teaching English, teachers, countable and uncountable nouns.

Articles are a problem for students of English because of their meaning and grammar. The correct use of the article is one of the most difficult points in English grammar. Students must understand the main difference between definite and indefinite article. Teaching articles should be based on such methodological principles as a conscious approach to forming and developing the skill of using articles. Pupils learn to use articles in the word-combinations, sentences in the target languages more successfully if they understand what they write, read or hear. Most grammar cannot be learnt in passing but has to be studied and thoroughly practiced before students can produce it confidently and accurately in new contexts. [7:54]

In the process of teaching English, teachers should pay special attention to countable and uncountable nouns. The distinction between countable and uncountable nouns must be clearly understood because it affects our choice of articles.

Countable nouns are words like cat, bridge, house, idea. We can count them (one cat, two houses, three ideas), so they can have plurals. The indefinite article a/an really means one, so we can use it with singular countable nouns (a house, an idea), but not with plurals.

Uncountable nouns are words like water, rice, energy, luck. These are things that we can divide (a drop of water, a bowl of rice, a piece of luck), but not count. You cannot say one water, two waters, etc. These words do not have plurals. The indefinite article a/an cannot be used with uncountable words.

Water is made of hydrogen and oxygen. (Not: A water...)

A lot of words can be both countable and uncountable, with different meanings or uses (e.g. iron, an iron; coffee, a coffee). Some plural words have no singular (e.g. trousers, scissors).

Putting it in another way, we can use:

a/an or the +singular countable: a hat – the hat,

the or zero + plural countable: the hats – hats,

the or zero + uncountable: the water – water.

In order to show the difference in using definite and indefinite articles with countable and uncountable nouns I use pictures and tables (see Appendix 1). There is a great number of exercises which can help students to understand the difference between countable and uncountable nouns. For example:

1. Which of the underlined parts of these sentences is right?

I had to buy a / some bread because I wanted to make some sandwiches.

2. Complete the sentences with the correct form, singular or plural, of the given nouns. When necessary, choose word in parentheses in some of the sentences.

The importance of teaching articles is obvious. It is necessary for teachers to be better informed how present and practice grammar and articles.

If the teacher has to teach the use of articles, then this is the place to begin. This is the basic rule for using articles. In fact, I often tell pupils that this is the only rule, but there are many exceptions. The problem is that there are so many exceptions that you could spend an inordinate amount of time going over these exceptions. In the end, pupils would not be able to internalize these rules anyways.

Another important rule is when something is unique or, in other words, there is only one of that objects. In this case, the definite article is used.

After explaining the main rules of using articles and showing the examples it is easy for pupils to understand the correct use definite and indefinite articles. First of all, it is suggested that the teacher should use dialogues for discussion with different articles. The pupils must learn the rules and discuss speakers' use of articles.

After that pupils can easily cope with different exercises. The following exercises are presented in an order of increasing difficulty. In the first exercises the pupils complete a sentence by choosing the correct articles from the suggested.

Teachers should pay their attention to such activity as asking questions. There are several reasons why questions are important: they stimulate and maintain pupils' interest; they encourage pupils to think and focus on the content of the lesson; they enable teachers to check pupils' understanding; the questions helps the pupil both with the words and with pattern required for the answer.

Many textbooks and methodology manuals writers argued that games are not just time-filling activities but have a great educational value. Most games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms. In the easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better. That is why games are important part in the process of teaching articles and I try to use them in all possible ways. At the same time teachers should be very careful about choosing games if they want to have any results. They must correspond to the pupils' level, age, to the material that is to be

introduced or practiced. Here is the example of the game which can help teachers to combine teaching articles and vocabulary.

What's in the picnic basket?

The teacher asks pupils to look at the picture. Make sure that they know the English names of everything in the basket. Pupils write the words in the correct column with a or an. The teacher can add some additional tasks to this game. Such as: make a list of foods you can take on a picnic.

What are they?

Review nationality adjectives with the aid of a map of the world. Pupils look at the pictures and say the correct nationality adjective for the objects with a or an. For example: an American, a Greek, a Spanish, an English, an American, an Italian, etc.

Presenting the rules of using articles and doing different exercises are only primary activities. At the output phase every teacher needs information about the learners' grammar skills. For assessing learners' knowledge and ability to use the articles appropriately different testing techniques can be used. Such as:

There is no "magic" way to learn articles. The best way to approach them is through regular and extensive practice. Exercises presented will give pupils practice in both understanding the meaning and using articles appropriately in context. [7:53; 11:138]

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