

Common Grammar Mistakes

In spending time with any student involved in the learning of English, even when a decent grasp of the language is had, there are still common errors that arise. Most of these are the idiosyncrasies that make up the more complicated factions of the English language, so the fact that a learner of said language has trouble grasping them is understandable. When tutoring these students, it often becomes apparent quickly to the tutor that the rules are hard to define without a clear definition. If the tutor does not know these rules, then negative things can happen in the tutor/tutee relationship: the tutee may doubt the tutor's abilities, both may become confused, or worst of all, the tutee may give up on the grounds of, "If a native speaker doesn't know how to do this, how can I?". With a basic exploration of some of the most common mistakes, a more lucid grasp of the problems of common mistakes in learning English can be identified and solved.

One of the most common misused grammar mistakes is the switching of prepositions. Although there are over 150 prepositions in the English language (englishclub.com), not all of them are incredibly useful in the beginning stages of learning English. As put in a simple and entertaining way by the classic cartoons of Schoolhouse Rock, the most common prepositions that "do most of the work" are "of, on, to, with, in, from, by, far, at, over, across" (youtube.com). Using helping tools such as simple songs could be utilized by tutors as well, providing the tutees don't feel patronized. The fact is, with a explanation of their functions and their placements in sentences, the bright cartoon helps to remember these most common prepositions in a way that can be understood much easier than a academic definition. When a tutee is having trouble with English basics, academic definitions would do nothing but discourage. Simply stated by the video, a preposition simply bonds a noun or pronoun to another, then proceeds to give easy examples. When learning something new, generally, if it can be kept simple, it should.

Another problem that arises with basic grammar is the errors that stem from verb tense. As the illustrious Judy Hubbard says in her quintessential Grammar Packet, "there are three main time frames in English: Past, Present, and Future" (12). She then explains that it is the present tense that is most useful to a student, as it is the

form that is used to state opinions and facts, which sums up almost the entire experience of college writing. She states that the present is happening now, which, once taught to a tutee, can solve many of the errors that are often found in their papers. When converting the verbs to the past tense, it is generally an easy switch. By adding the suffix of "ed", the past tense is gained, but the tutor and tutee will soon realize that this doesn't work in many cases. This is the emergence of one of the most infuriating aspects of any language being learned: irregular verbs. A website from an English professor lists 174 irregular verbs in the English language (gsu.edu). Although many of these verbs probably would not be very common in a beginning essay (smite-smote), there are many that would be (run-ran). This site also touches on the issue of past participle, but that is more of an advanced issue.

Although the switching of present tense to past has been addressed, the agreement of these verbs to their subjects is a common error as well. The Purdue OWL website offers a wealth of information for the tutor, but the tutee may be a bit daunted by the amount of academic language used throughout. However, if a tutor needed information on how to link the subjects and verbs in a common tense together, this is surely the place to garner information. The most basic lesson comes from section five, when the site simply states that if the subject is singular, then the verb is as well, despite what words may come between (owl.english.purdue.edu). If a tutee or can handle the amount of information that is absolutely distilled in this arena and wanted a mastery of any facet of the English language, then further reading can be done throughout the page. Exceptions are listed as well, such as rather nit-picky issues such as the fact that "scissors" requires a plural verb as it is a singular noun comprised of two pieces of metal (owl.english.purdue.edu). Whether or not a tutee (or tutor, for that matter) is ready for such pinpoint accurate materials is left to each specific student.

Subjects and verbs provide their own amount of problems for the new writer, and often they are accompanied with the issues of adjectives. Not wanting to leave a sentence without some bit of spark, the writer will often place an adjective in the right place, but the spelling form will not be correct. A common mistake is the switching of adverbs and adjectives. As the Owl website says, the simple definition is that an adjective will modify or help a noun and

an adverb will modify the remaining parts of language: verbs, adjectives or other adverbs (owl.english.purdue.edu). An oft occurring mistake in an ESL paper could be a sentence such as this: "The man was interesting in the book". Although this can be simply solved by telling the tutee that "interesting" can be switched to "interested", thus making a coherent sentence. The reasoning behind it is that although both are adjectives, one is the "receiver" (interested) of the "feeling", and the other is the "cause" of the "feeling" (grammar-quizzes.com). To explain this better, the difference is how the subject is affected by the adjective. If the subject is causing the effect of the adjective ("the dog is annoyING"), then the suffix of "ing" is used, but if the subject is the receiver of the effect of the adjective ("the man was annoyED"), then "ed" is used.

Although the functions of prepositions, subjects/verbs, and adjectives have been hopefully examined in an enlightening manner, this is truly only scratching the surface of the problems facing those attempting to understand the English language. While it can be frustrating often, the fact remains that only tenacity can be relied upon when learning anything new, especially a language. By steadfastly hacking away at the rough edges of speech and writing, eventually a honed tool of communication will be uncovered.

Works

Hubbard, Judy. Judy Hubbard's Grammar Packet: Correcting Grammatical Errors.

<http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/passive3a.html> viewed 11/22

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/eslsubverb.html> viewed 11/22

Jones, Susan. <http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwesl/egw/verbs.htm> viewed 11/22

<http://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/prepositions.htm> viewed 11/22

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4jIC5HLBdM> viewed 11/22

[archives/v31/31.5.htm](#)>