Embracing opportunities for English language development in higher education through innovative online resources

Dr Julia Miller
The University of Adelaide
Outline

1. Online resources for English as an Additional Language (EAL)
2. The English for Uni website
3. Evaluation
4. Discussion and questions
1. Online resources for EAL students

What would you include on an English grammar website for international EAL students?

- articles
- conditionals
- prepositions
- tenses
- passives
- essay writing
- oral presentation skills
- conditionals
- prepositions
What would you include on a website?

Abstract

In English grammar, English article system is considered as one of the difficult aspects. It is not only a subject of inquiry for linguists but also it is very much appealing for its wide variety. Article is an important topic because of its interactions with linguistic and nonlinguistic knowledge. Warden (1976) has presented articles as ‘referring expressions’ which enable a speaker to introduce or comment upon an item in a discourse. For nonnative English speakers, article becomes one of the major reasons to make grammatical error if they do not have sound knowledge about it.

Articles

Abstract. In English grammar, the English article system is considered as to be one of the most difficult aspects. It is not only a subject of inquiry for linguists but also it is very much appealing for its wide variety. Articles are an important topic because of their interactions with linguistic and nonlinguistic knowledge. Warden (1976) has presented articles as ‘referring expressions’ which enable a speaker to introduce or comment upon an item in a discourse. For non-native English speakers, articles become one of the major reasons to make grammatical errors if they do not have sound knowledge about of them.

Abstract. In English grammar, English article system is considered as one of the most difficult aspects. It is not only a subject of inquiry for linguists but also it is very much appealing for its wide variety. Articles are an important topic because of their interactions with linguistic and nonlinguistic knowledge. Warden (1976) has presented articles as ‘referring expressions’ which enable a speaker to introduce or comment upon an item in a discourse. For non-native English speakers, article becomes one of the major reasons to make grammatical errors if they do not have sound knowledge about of it.

Even native speakers disagree

• It’s different to/from/than what I expected.
Tenses

Conclusion:

‘Finally, in this paper “accuracy” of the English article system of EFL learners and “accuracy order” of various semantic articles uses in different noun phrase (NP) environment are shown. The findings of the story-retelling test show that users can use definite article more accurately than the indefinite article, with the zero article in between. From the story-retelling test, it is found that referential definite and generics are easy, whereas referential indefinites are not easy for the user’ (Kamal 2013, p. 26).
Passives

When do we use the passive?

• Robin opened the door.  
  Active
• The door was opened by Robin.  
  Passive
• The door opened.  
  Ergative
  • By itself?
  • Who opened it?
• La porte s’est ouverte.  
  Reflexive
  • It opened itself
Ergatives – why bother?

‘As the usage of article is increased, the language proficiency of the learners is also increased’ (Kamal 2013, p. 25).

As article usage increases, learners’ language proficiency also increases (Kamal 2013, p. 25).
Articles (a/an/the) – Thanks a Million!
Prepositions - *With a Revolver in the Library*

Cognitive linguistics

Academic Word List (Averil Coxhead)
Tenses – You’ve got Talent!

Academic Word List (Averil Coxhead)
Passives – *Stolen on the Outback Express*
Conditionals – *If You Love Me*
非诚勿扰 (Fēichéng Wùrǎo)
Essay writing – *Essay Chef*
Oral presentation skills

Funded by a Flinders University Teaching and Learning Innovation Grant
Exercise 1: Introduction

Drag the following sentences into the correct order, then click 'submit' to check your answers.

The essay which follows gives a brief history of prepositional theory and compares the traditional and cognitive linguistics approaches, arguing that a cognitive linguistics approach helps students to understand the concepts underlying prepositions and so is more effective in helping students to use prepositions correctly.

One popular teaching method relies on students learning combinations of nouns and prepositions.

Using prepositions correctly in English is very difficult if English is not a person's first language.

Prepositions are small connecting words that do not necessarily exist in other languages, or may not have exactly the same meanings.

Such language differences make teaching of this area very difficult.

Another method takes a cognitive linguistics approach, in which prepositions are studied in relation to spatial relationships.
The English for Uni website
3. Evaluation

Google analytics for 16 June – 22 June 2014

Pageviews
- 1200
- Average time on page 2 minutes

Visitors’ countries
- Australia
- Hong Kong
- Mozambique

Access to website
- Directly to the website
- Via Google
Evaluation – June 2014

- 5 focus groups (total of 22 people)
  - 6 lecturers in Perth, Australia
  - 5 EAL university students in Perth, Australia
  - 4 EAL university students in Henan, China
  - 4 EAL students in a university preparation program in Adelaide, Australia
  - 2 language discipline lecturers and 1 English preparation course lecturer in Adelaide, Australia

- Online survey for students/teachers

- Lecture with a control group
Biggs’ SOLO taxonomy

The SOLO Taxonomy with sample verbs indicating levels of understanding

- Competence
- Incompetence
- Prestructural
- Unistructural
- Multistructural
- Relational
- Extended Abstract

- Fail
- Incompetent
- Misses point

- One relevant aspect
- Several relevant independent aspects
- Integrated into a structure
- Generalized to a new domain

- Identify
- Name
- Follow simple procedure
- Combine
- Describe
- Enumerate
- Perform serial skills

- Justify
- Explain causes
- Relate
- Contrast
- Argue
- Apply
- Analyze

- Theorize
- Reflect
- Hypothesize
- Generate
- Formulate

- Create
Comments from focus groups

Students:

- I think I understand better because before I watched the website, I didn’t know how to use the passive voice correctly. And [now] I understand the passive voice . . . So when I watched the video I thought ‘Oh my gosh, how I couldn’t see this before?’ Now it’s easy to write because I didn’t know where to put passive voice in my essays. I looked at my essays and I thought why did you put passive voice here in this sentence? Now I know where to put it; I can identify where I should use passive voice. I don’t just put it in the text because I need to use it.
- The essay writing page was like a light bulb for a local student.

Lecturers:

- Lecturers thought that it could be promoted by discipline heads as a way to make their life easier.
- The website is really helpful, and I'll definitely recommend it to my students.
Lecture – November 2013

Lecture (n=297)
Convenience sample (majority from China)
Preparation English program in Australia
IELTS 5.5
Pretest/posttest around a 30 minute lecture using the resources on articles
Short term improvement
No control group
Lecture – June 2014

Lecture with control group (n=approx. 400)
  Convenience sample (majority from China)
  Preparation English program in Australia
  Average IELTS 5.5
  Pretest/posttest around a 30 minute lecture using the new resources on passives.
Experimental group – new resources
Control group – resources based on two text books
Control test June 2014, n=50 processed so far, scale from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials stimulated interest in learning</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear explanations</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>5.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour stimulated interest in content</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation made content more interesting</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>5.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Discussion and questions

• How could you use this website?
• What is the best way to evaluate this website?
Team members

University of Adelaide – Julia Miller, Richard Warner, Kayoko Enomoto, Ben McCann

Victoria University – Fiona Henderson

Edith Cowan University – Anne Harris

Henan University – Wang LiJuan

Funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.
English for Uni

www.adelaide.edu.au/english-for-uni