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O. O. Kotlyarova

TEACHING WRITING TO ESL BEGINNER STUDENTS

Nowadays people do less and less writing, and a great deal of what we actually write becomes quite short – postcards, answers in question forms, brief notes to friends, application forms, etc. This is obviously reflected in the modern classroom where speaking, listening and reading activities are found more often than those of writing. Nevertheless we must not forget that writing is considered to be one of the basic skills a student should obtain while mastering a foreign language.

This problem has been studied by many prominent methodologists among whom we can single out Raimes A., Tompkins G., Taberski Sh., Simic M., Scrivener J., Kenny S. and others.

The aim of the article is to single out and analyze peculiarities in teaching writing to ESL beginner students.

First of all, writing involves a different kind of mental process. There is more time to think, to reflect, to prepare, to make mistakes and find alternative and better solutions. Another reason is that many students who intend to continue their education abroad and want to apply for exchange programs need to formulate in writing the grounds for granting them a scholarship in an intelligent, correct and coherent way. Business English and examination preparation are the two areas where good writing skills remain very important. Taking into consideration the reasons mentioned, in a writing class students need to be taught both how to use the process to their advantage as language learners and writers, and also how to produce an acceptable product upon demand [1, p. 153].

Analyzing writing work in class we may say that it falls on a continuum from copying to free writing.

At one end of the continuum the student is practicing forming letter shapes in a handwriting book or copying examples from a textbook.

The second stage involves doing exercises which make students pay attention to the form rather than the content. For example, they are given a paragraph and asked to make changes in it: the paragraph may be given in the first person and the students are asked to change it into the third person.

Guided writing is the next very important stage of teaching a) being actively encouraged to follow through a series of preparatory steps before the final text is produced, and b) becoming more aware of that preparation process, so that it can be done more independently and transparently in future. You may give help in thinking through ideas, ordering them, considering vocabulary and grammar, co-operatively preparing notes and draft copies, and in other ways of making preparations to write. This often seems to be a

preferable alternative to simply giving students an essay title and leaving them to get on with it [2, p. 57].

At the other end of the continuum the student himself chooses both subject matter and form producing a piece of written work.

Most researchers single out the following approaches to teaching writing:

1. The Controlled-to-Free Approach

The controlled-to-free approach is sequential to the audio-lingual method which dominated in the 1950s and early 1960: students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically by changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular. They might also change words to clauses or combine sentences. With these controlled compositions, it is relatively easy for students to write and yet avoid errors, which makes error correction easy. Students are allowed to try some free composition after they have reached an intermediate level of proficiency. As such, this approach stresses on grammar, syntax, and mechanics. It emphasizes accuracy rather than fluency or originality [1].

2. The Free-Writing Approach

This approach stresses writing quantity rather than quality. Teachers who use this approach assign vast amounts of free writing on given topics with only minimal correction. The emphasis in this approach is on content and fluency rather than on accuracy and form. Once ideas are down on the page, grammatical accuracy and organization follow. Thus, teachers may begin their classes by asking students to write freely on any topic without worrying about grammar and spelling for five or ten minutes. The teachers do not correct these pieces of free writing. They simply read them and may comment on the ideas the writer expressed. Alternatively, some students may volunteer to read their own writing aloud to the class. Concern for “audience” and “content” are seen as important in this approach.

3. The Paragraph-Pattern Approach

Instead of accuracy of grammar or fluency of content, the Paragraph-Pattern-Approach stresses on organization. Students copy paragraphs and imitate model passages. They put scrambled sentences into paragraph order. They identify general and specific statements and choose to invent an appropriate topic sentence or insert or delete sentences. This approach is based on the principle that in different cultures people construct and organize communication with each other in different ways [1].

4. The Grammar-Syntax-Organization Approach

This approach stresses on simultaneous work on more than one composition feature. Teachers who follow this approach maintain that writing can not be seen as composed of separate skills which are learned sequentially. Therefore, students should be trained to pay attention to organization while they also work on the necessary grammar and syntax. This approach links the purpose of writing to the forms that are needed to convey the message.

5. The Communicative Approach

This approach stresses the purpose of writing and the audience for it. Student writers are encouraged to behave like writers in real life and ask themselves the crucial questions about the purpose and the audience: *Why am I writing this? Who will read it?*

Traditionally, the teacher alone has been the audience for student writing. But some feel that writers do their best when writing is truly a communicative act, with a writer writing for a real reader. As such, the readership may be extended to classmate and pen pals [1].

6. The Process Approach

Recently, the teaching of writing has moved away from a concentration on written product to an emphasis on the process of writing. Thus, writers ask themselves: *How do I write this? How do I get started?* In this approach, students are trained to generate ideas for writing, think of the purpose and audience, write multiple drafts in order to present written products that communicate their own ideas. Teachers who use this approach give students time to try ideas and feedback on the content of what they write in their drafts. As such, writing becomes a process of discovery for the students as they discover new ideas and new language forms to express them. Furthermore, learning to write is seen as a developmental process that helps students to write as professional authors do, choosing their own topics and genres, and writing from their own experiences or observations. A writing process approach requires that teachers give students greater responsibility for, and ownership of, their own learning. Students make decisions about genre and choice of topics, and collaborate as they write [1].

So, what are the peculiarities of teaching writing to ESL beginner learners? To enable students to become effective writers, teachers should start at the beginning. To build a strong foundation for creating phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and stories teachers need to begin by focusing on words. In fact, trying to teach students to write before they fall in love with words is like teaching a child to run before he masters his first step [3].

Students who are near the start of their English studies are not going to have the tools to write a five paragraph essay or take an essay exam. But completely eliminating writing assignments for beginning students doesn't help them in the long run. For these students, short writing assignments are best. When they can write a few sentences that serve a practical purpose, they will see the progress they have made in English as well as the practical applications of that knowledge [4].

Beginning level writing classes are difficult to teach because students have a large number of challenges to deal with. For a beginning level student the instructions usually are: Write a paragraph about your family, Write three sentences describing your best friend, etc. However, from the point of view of the beginner such work can be extremely difficult, which is why it is more effective to start with some very concrete tasks leading up to those first few sentences, or a short paragraph. Here are some of the most important first steps

in writing that will certainly help beginning level students gain confidence in writing skills.

1. For many students knowing that a sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop is a major first step. It is important to teach:

Begin each sentence with a capital letter.

End each sentence with a full stop.

Use capital letters only with proper names, the pronoun 'I', and the first letter of the first word in each sentence.

Each sentence contains a subject, verb and, usually, a complement.

Basic sentence structure is Subject + Verb + Complement.

Begin writing with simple sentences.

2. Focus on Parts of Speech.

In order to learn writing, students must know basic parts of speech. Make sure to review what nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are. Ask students to categorize words in these four categories. Taking time to ensure students understand the role of each part of speech in a sentence will help them become better writers.

3. Suggestions to Help with Simple Sentences

Once students have understood the basic points, help them begin writing by limiting their choices. It is a good idea to ask students to write sentences that focus on expressing certain ideas with very limited structures. Make sure students keep to simple sentences, compound and complex sentences are much too confusing at the very beginning. Once students gain confidence in a number of simple exercises they will be able to move on to more complicated tasks [3].

One of the first writing assignments any student receives is writing a composed paragraph. Just about any topic you are teaching in class can be the subject of a paragraph. When you break the paragraph into smaller elements, your students will see that four to six sentences do not have to be overwhelming. The first element of a paragraph is the topic sentence. This sentence gives the reader the main point of the paragraph. The last sentence of a paragraph, when it stands alone, is a concluding sentence. It gives some final thoughts about the topic. In between are two to four sentences that expand the idea, give examples, or argue a point. Here are some suggestions for writing tasks [3].

Exercise 1: Describing Yourself

In this exercise, pre-teach standard phrases on the board are such as:

My name is ...

I am from ...

I live in ...

I am married / single.

I go to school at ...

Use only simple verbs such as 'live', 'go', 'work', 'play', as well as set phrases with the verb 'to be'. Once students feel comfortable with these simple phrases, introduce writing about another person with 'he', 'she', or 'they'.

Exercise 2: Describing a Person

Once students have learned basic factual descriptions, move on to describing people. In this case, help students by writing out different descriptive vocabulary on the board in categories. You can then use these categories with specific verbs to help narrow choices. For example,

Physical Appearance

tall / short *fat / thin* *beautiful / good looking*
well-dressed *old / young etc.*

Personality

funny *shy* *outgoing* *hard-working*
friendly *lazy* *relaxed etc.*

Verbs to Use

Use 'be' with adjectives describing physical appearance

Use 'have' with physical attributes (long hair, big eyes, etc.)

Simple verbs such as: work, live, play, use, speak, go

Ask students to write about one person. As you check the students' work, make sure that they are writing simple sentences and not stringing too many attributes together with commas, or by using 'and'.

Exercise 3: Describing an Object

Continue working on writing skills by asking students to describe objects. Use the following categories to help students classify words to use in their writing:

Shapes: round, square, oval, etc.

Color: red, blue, yellow, etc.

Textures: smooth, soft, rough, etc.

Materials: wood, metal, plastic, etc.

Verbs: is made from / of, feels, is, has, looks like, looks

A variation of this exercise is asking students to write a description of an object without naming the object. Other students should then guess what the object is. At this point, it is better if students do not use multiple adjectives in a sentence which requires a good understanding of adjective order.

Thus, teaching writing to ESL beginner students has its peculiarities which should be taken into consideration in the classroom. The tasks offered to students and the techniques used by teachers differ a lot from those present when dealing with ESL students of other levels.

In conclusion it should be mentioned that while teaching students speaking, listening and reading skills, we must not underestimate the importance of developing writing skills, which they will certainly find useful throughout their professional and personal lives.

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Котлярова О. О. Навчання письму студентів, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну на початковому рівні

В статті детально розглянуто сучасні підходи до навчання письму студентів, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну на початковому рівні, серед яких превалює процесуальний підхід, який стає дедалі популярнішим серед викладачів іноземних мов. Вчителі, що використовують даний підхід, дають студентам час подумати і оцінити свою роботу в чорновому варіанті. Таким чином, письмо стає для студентів процесом відкриттів, оскільки вони відкривають для себе нові ідеї і нові мовні форми для їх вираження. Особливо було виділено так зване „творче письмо”, – метод навчання письму, що якнайкраще дозволяє розвивати не лише мовленеві навички, а й уяву та творчі здібності студентів. Творче письмо є для студентів прекрасним інструментом навчання, який розвиває їх уяву. На сучасному етапі даний метод навчання письму стає дедалі популярнішим серед викладачів іноземних мов. Навчання письму студентів, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну на початковому рівні, має свої особливості. Ці особливості полягають, перш за все, в тому, що навіть найпростіші завдання можуть поставити студентів у глухий кут, оскільки їх рівень оволодіння граматиною і лексикою англійської мови досить низький. Саме тому, завдання, запропоновані викладачем, не повинні бути занадто складними для виконання як в класі, так і вдома. Крім цього в статті наведено низку прикладів інтерактивних письмових завдань, які можуть бути використані при навчанні письму студентів, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну на початковому рівні.

Ключові слова: навчання, види мовленєвої діяльності, письмо, творче письмо, інтерактивні завдання.

Котлярова О. А. Обучение письму студентов изучающих английский язык как иностранный на начальном уровне

В статье детально рассматриваются современные подходы к обучению письму студентов изучающих английский язык как иностранный на начальном уровне, среди которых на передний план выходит процессуальный подход, который становится все более популярным на занятиях иностранных языков. Учителя, использующие данный подход, дают студентам время подумать и оценить свою работу в черновом варианте. Таким образом, письмо становится для студентов процессом открытий, поскольку они открывают для себя новые идеи и новые языковые формы для их выражения. Особенно было выделено так называемое „творческое письмо”, – метод обучения письму, который

позволяет развивать не только речевые навыки, а также воображение и творческие способности студентов. Творческое письмо является для студентов прекрасным инструментом обучения, который развивает их воображение. Обучение письму студентов, изучающих английский язык как иностранный на начальном уровне, имеет свои особенности, которые, прежде всего, заключаются в том, что даже самые простые задания могут поставить студентов в тупик, поскольку их уровень овладения грамматикой и лексикой английского языка достаточно низок. Именно поэтому задания, предлагаемые преподавателем, не должны быть слишком сложными для выполнения, как в классе, так и дома. Кроме этого в статье представлено несколько примеров интерактивных письменных заданий, которые могут быть использованы на занятиях иностранных языков.

Ключевые слова: обучение, виды речевой деятельности, письмо, творческое письмо, интерактивные задания.

Kotlyarova O. O. Teaching writing to ESL beginner students

In the article modern approaches to teaching writing to ESL beginner students are analyzed. The process approach prevails among the mentioned above, becoming more and more popular among foreign language teachers. In this approach, students are trained to generate ideas for writing, think of the purpose and audience, write multiple drafts in order to present written products that communicate their own ideas. Teachers who use this approach give students time to try ideas and feedback on the content of what they write in their drafts. As such, writing becomes a process of discovery for the students as they discover new ideas and new language forms to express them. Special emphasis was made on the so-called “creative writing” method which is widely used in the modern classroom. A definition of creative writing could include many things, but the major distinction is that a piece of work will express thoughts, ideas and feelings in an imaginative way. Creative writing is a valuable tool for students. It is fun, and can stimulate their imagination. It utilizes both past experience and future ideas, and can aid in promoting artistic expression and self-growth. Beginning level writing classes are difficult to teach because students have a large number of challenges to deal with. But completely eliminating writing assignments for beginning students doesn't help them in the long run. Several examples of interactive writing tasks that can be used while teaching English to ESL beginner students are presented. While teaching students speaking, listening and reading skills, we must not underestimate the importance of developing writing skills, which they will certainly find useful throughout their professional and personal lives.

Key words: teaching, types of speech activity, writing, creative writing, interactive tasks.

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