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THE USE OF ICE BREAKERS IN ONLINE ENGLISH GRAMMAR CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

In the English language teaching process, every teaching phase is paramount for the achievement of its goals. At the beginning of the classes, the teachers might bring an ice breaker. Based on the previous studies, ice breaker is considered a crucial component in EFL classes. Considering the prominence of ice breakers, the researcher regards the importance of a literature study about ice breakers, especially in grammar class. English grammar is frequently considered a complicated element. Besides, nowadays, the learning process has to be conducted online. This study is mainly aimed to explain the concept of ice breakers, English grammar, and online learning, and the examples of ice breaking possibly used in online grammar classes. The method employed was the literary study conducted through several stages called collecting, reducing and presenting the data and concluding the results. This study suggests several relevant theories to the usage of ice breakers in online grammar classes. Moreover, this study proposes some ice breakers for teaching grammar. The ice breakers are jumbled sentences, correcting mistakes, English songs, storytelling activities, and English humour.

Keywords: Ice breakers, English grammar, Online learning, EFL context

INTRODUCTION

Every English teacher is always encouraged to prepare every learning activity carefully since a well-prepared activity helps the students to achieve the learning objectives. One of the proposed teaching activity to implement is ice breakers. Ice-breaking activities are generally used at the beginning of the class. According to Astuti et al., (2020), an ice breaker is an effort to break or melt the rigid atmosphere that is like ice to become more relaxing and comfortable. Panggua (2016) points out that *ice breaker* can be interpreted as breaking the ice, and *the ice* here might refer to many situations. Simply put, an ice breaker is a kind of activity done by the teachers to create comfortable teaching and learning process, and it can be carried out through many activities.

An ice breaker is also regarded as an essential aspect in EFL classes. Ice breakers is applied to prepare the student to join the class and introduce the material that is going to be taught. Ice-

breaking activities might bring great gains. According to Astuti et al., (2020), an ice breaker can be employed to overcome the students' nervousness and boredom during the teaching and learning process so that they feel happier and readier to join the next core activities. Hutasoit & Tambunan (2018) point out that ice breakers are an amazing way to start a meeting, and they can be used to lessen stress and give required breaks during intense meetings. Marneni et al., (2017) state that the first few minutes of English class is crucial for setting the tone for the whole period, so it is crucial, to begin with, a bang.

Based on the previous description, the right implementation of ice-breaking activity might help the teachers to conduct an effective learning process especially in a difficult subject like grammar. Grammar is still considered a difficult component of English (Effendi et al., 2017; Nawira et al., 2019). Yuliyanto & Fitriyati (2019) add that the learning structure is frequently considered difficult since the students feel bored so that they do not engage in the learning process. Furthermore, the way of teaching is commonly not varied. The structure, in short, is still regarded as a problematic element of English, and it might be caused by some factors.

Moreover, during the pandemic era of COVID 19, the teaching and learning process must be done online. Many obstacles have happened during online classes. According to Nartiningrum & Nugroho (2021), difficulty in delivering the materials, poor internet connection, students' slow responses, and problems in adjusting teaching plans are the problems commonly faced by teachers. Efriana (2021) adds that in online classes, problems are not only experienced by teachers, but also by the students and parents. The obstacles encountered by the teachers include the difficulty of using IT and the limited access to supervise the students. The problems faced by the students are the passiveness to join the class, limited supporting facilities, and internet connection. The concern of parents is the limited time to accompany their children during online classes. In brief, during online learning, the problems can be encountered by many parties like teachers, students, and parents, and it might be very varied.

The difficulties in learning grammar and the obstacles of online learning might hamper the students in mastering the objectives in learning English grammar. That is why the researcher considers the urgency to do a literature study about ice breakers in online grammar classes. There are some studies discussing ice breaking in the EFL context, but they have not explored the usage of ice breaking to teach structure especially for online classes.

Marneni et al., (2017) conducted a literature study about the implementation of ice breakers in language teaching. They provide some types of ice-breaking activities, but they are mainly concerned with offline classes. Astuti et al., (2020) also carried out a study about icebreaking, but they focus on the influence of ice-breaking activity on students' motivation of learning. Yeganehpour (2017) did a study focusing on the implementation of ice-breaking activity for productive skills. Meanwhile, some others studies are mainly concerned with the use of ice breakers to teach speaking skills such as the studies from Panggua, (2016) and Hutasoit & Tambunan, (2018). They conducted experimental researches about the use of ice breakers for speaking skills. Furthermore, there is also a study by Yeganehpour & Takkaç (2016). This study is concerned on the usage of ice breakers to enhance students' speaking abilities. As a matter of fact, the literature study about ice breakers in online grammar classes is quite different from the previous researches.

This study itself aimed to explore the concept of an ice breaker, grammar, and online learning and the instances of ice breakers possibly used in online grammar classes. This research might help the teachers to prepare an effective ice breaker in their grammar class. Furthermore, this study might help the other researchers who want to conduct experimental or action research related to ice breakers and grammar.

METHODOLOGY

This study was a literature study conducted through several phases. Miles & Huberman (1994) state that qualitative data analysis is managed interactively and continuously to completion that is explained in four steps called collecting, reducing, and displaying the data and verifying the results. Here is the brief explanation of those four steps.

First stage was collecting the data. The researcher searched the literature related to ice breakers, teaching grammar, and online learning in EFL context. The sources employed were printed books, e-books, and articles of journals. The second phase was data reduction. The researcher selected the most relevant literature, then simplified, abstracted and transformed the data obtained. The third phase was developing and expressing the ideas through words and pictures. The last stage was concluding and verifying the data presented. The researcher had to make sure all the results were in line with the purposes of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Ice Breaker

An ice breaker commonly only lasts a few minutes at the beginning of the class, but it might bring plenty of advantages to the students. Astuti et al., (2020) state that ice breaker derives from two foreign vocabularies called *ice* (a rigid, cold, and hard nature), and the *breaker* (overcoming). Indeed, an ice breaker is an effort to break or melt the rigid atmosphere that is like ice to become more relaxing and comfortable. Ice-breaking can be carried out in assorted activities like a short story, a game, and guessing, and an ice-breaking activity is normally managed in 5 until 15 minutes. Panggua, (2016) points out that *ice breaker* can be interpreted as breaking the ice, and *the ice* here might refer to many situations. Hutasoit & Tambunan (2018) mention that an ice-breaking activity might help the teachers to create the successful exchange of thoughts by creating more comfortable situation for the students, so they are going to participate more in conversation. An ice breaker, in short, is a learning activity used to create comfortable teaching and learning process. In this study, ice-breaking is a type of activity used at the beginning of the class, and it is used to make the students ready to join the class and lead to the topic that is going to be learned.

Ice breakers are one of the paramount aspects in EFL classes. According to Astuti et al., (2020), an ice breaker can be utilised to overcome the students' nervousness and boredom during the teaching and learning process so that they feel happier and readier to join the core activities. Hutasoit & Tambunan (2018) argue that ice breakers are a great way to start a meeting and can be employed to lessen stress and give required breaks during intense meetings.

In implementing ice breakers, every teacher has to consider several aspects such as student level, student interest, learning objective, time, and others. According to Witkowski in Farwati et al., (2018), there are several principles in applying ice breakers. They are as follows:

1. Goals : An ice breaker must be matched with teaching goals.

2. Participants' age and skills must be considered as the significant aspects.

3. Time Allocation : 20 minutes is the normal time of an ice breaker.

4. Control : The teachers must control the implementation of ice breakers since ice-

breaking activities are fun and short activities employed to liven up and

to relax the situation.

The Concept of Grammar

Structure is known as the rule of constructing words into larger components like phrases and sentences. Every language has its own grammatical rules includes English. Grammar is considered as the explanation of rules in which words are combined into a larger elements called sentences (Debata, 2013; Harmer, 2003; Wang, 2010).

As the way of constructing sentences, grammar is believed as a crucial part of English. Grammar is commonly considered as essential component of English (Ameliani, 2019; Aniuranti & Rizkina, 2019; Effendi et al., 2017; Handayani & Johan, 2018; Nawira et al., 2019; Yuliyanto & Fitriyati, 2019). Therefore, every student has to get a sufficient notion of grammar. Utomo & Ahsanah (2020) mention that mastering grammar assists the learners in arranging better language structure and create meaningful messages. Harmer (2003) argues that communication may suffer if the speakers use grammar rules too carelessly. Suwartono & Priyanti (2006) also state that inadequate usage of structure influences the flows of ideas. Wang (2010) adds that in foreign language learning and teaching process, grammar has always played a role.

Even though the importance of English grammar is undeniable, many pupils often face problems in mastering structure. According to Utomo & Ahsanah (2020), commonly the students have realized that learning grammar can be effortful. Effendi et al., (2017) add that many students who have studied grammar for several years at the university level still have problems arranging correct and good sentences. Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam (2011) even argue that grammar leads to the student moments of discomfort and sometimes even terror. Yusnitasari & Suwartono (2020) even argue in terms of structure errors frequently appear. Grammar, in short, has a significant role in a language, yet having a good understanding of grammar needs a lot of effort.

The Concept of Online Learning

Since the spread of COVID 19 disease, many activities in various fields have to be conducted online includes educational programs. The teaching and learning process has to be managed online. Arumsari & Octaviani (2021) state that during pandemic era of COVID 19, the teaching and learning process has been carried out online since March 2020, and we have not known when it will be ended. Online learning itself is generally regarded as a type of teaching and learning process that is not carried out face to face or directly in the classroom. The teaching and learning process is done through numerous platforms requiring the use of technology, and it can be so varied started from the simple to the most sophisticated platforms. Some of the platforms normally utilized in online learning are Learning Management System (LMS), Google Classroom,

Zoom, Google Meet, *WhatsApp*, Telegram, *Instagram*, YouTube, etc. According to Efriana (2021) online learning mixes electronic technology and internet-based technology or ICT in learning and it is a part of distance learning. Bannan-Ritland in Efriana (2021) propose some of the characteristics of online learning. They are constructivism, social interaction, inclusive community of learners, computer-based learning, digital classroom, interactivity, independence, accessibility, and enrichment.

The implementation of online learning is not easy for many parties. Based on the previous studies about the challenges of online learning in the EFL context, there are many problems occurred during online classes. According to Nartiningrum & Nugroho (2021), difficulty in delivering the materials, poor internet connection, students' slow responses, and problems in adjusting teaching plans are the problems commonly faced by teachers. Efriana (2021) adds that in online classes, problems are not only experienced by teachers, but also by the students and parents. The problems encountered by the teachers include difficult usage of IT and limited access to invigilate the students. Meanwhile, the obstacles faced by the students are the passiveness to join the class, limited supporting facilities, and internet connection. The problem of parents is the limited time to accompany their children during online classes.

All of the problems occurring during the online classes absolutely have to be anticipated. According to Efriana (2021), to minimize the barriers or obstacles in online learning faced by teachers, there are several suggested solutions. They are as follows:

- 1. Interesting materials should be prepared by the teachers.
- 2. Simple learning platforms might be employed if the teachers have problem in IT mastery.
- 3. Keeping in touch with inactive students and their parents.
- 4. Having discussion with the counseling teachers to figure out the students' obstacles during the online classes and contacting the students' parents.

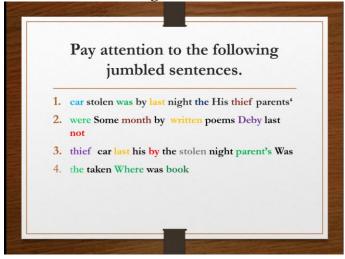
The Examples of Ice Breaking in Online Grammar Classes

Here are several instances of ice-breaking activities for online grammar classes. The teachers may use Zoom or Google Meet or even a simple platform like *Whatsapp*. All of the recommended ice breakers are simple yet useful to manage online grammar learning. Here is the complete explanation.

1. Jumbled Sentences

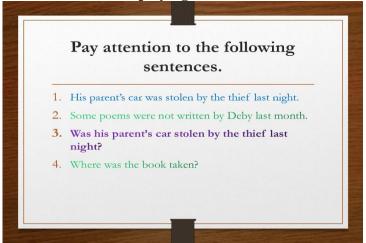
One of the suggested ways of doing ice-breaking activity is jumbled sentences. According to Ur & Wright (1993), the teachers may write jumbled sentences on the board or dictate them. In online learning, the teachers may use PowerPoint as the replacement of the board. After the teachers provide the jumbled sentences, the students need to arrange the words into good sentences. Here is the example of using jumbled sentences to teach the passive voice of past simple.

Picture 1. Showing the Jumbled Sentences



At the beginning of the meeting, the teachers ask the student to pay attention to some jumbled sentences, then ask the students to construct those jumbled sentences into the correct forms. To assist the student in arranging the words, the teachers may give the first word by using a capital letter in that word. After a short discussion, the teachers may display the correct sentences on the next slide.

Picture 2. Displaying the Correct Forms



After displaying the correct forms of the sentences, the teachers may discuss the adequate formula, meaning, and function of sentences in the passive of past simple.

2. Correcting Mistakes

Another ice breaker suggested by Ur & Wright (1993) is correcting mistakes. In this way, the teachers provide some incorrect sentences and ask their students to correct the

sentences. For online learning, the teachers can display the sentences on a PowerPoint. Here is the example of correcting mistakes to teach question forms of past simple.

Picture 3. Showing Incorrect Forms Find the mistakes in the following sentences then revise them. Who did write the book? 2. Where you go? Why you angry at me? 4. How the condition of the room? When you went there? What you do last night? **Picture 4. Displaying the Correct Forms** Pay attention to the following sentences. Who wrote the book? Where did you go two days ago? Why were you angry at me? How was the condition of the room? When did you go there?

In Picture 3, the teachers show six incorrect questions in the past simple, then ask the students to find out the mistakes of the sentences and revise them. After a short discussion, the teachers may show the correct sentences, then guide the students to understand the function, meaning, and form of questions in past simple.

What did you do last night?

3. English songs

The next ice breaker likely used in teaching grammar is fun teaching media like English songs. Ur & Wright (1993) recommended some versions of employing English songs in EFL classes, and across those versions, there are two feasible ways of teaching grammar. The first is asking the students to listen to an English song while filling in the blanks. The second version is giving the students complete lyrics of an English song. Then, the teachers ask the students to listen to it while finding out the inadequate parts in the lyrics. Here is an example of an English song to teach present simple.

Version 1 Don't Give Up by Bruno Mars

Don't give up, keep on moving.
You're gonna get there just keep on grooving
Don't give up, don't pack it in,
Try and try and you will win, don't give up.
No no no, don't give up
No no no, don't give up
No no no, don't give up, no no
Don't give up

Version 2 Don't Give Up by Bruno Mars

When you wanna do something that's new.
And it seem really, really hard to do.
You feel like quitting, you feel you're through.
Well I has some advice for you

Don't give up, keep on trying, Y'all gonna make it (ah yeah) don't give up. Don't ever quit, try and try and you can do it, don't give up (yeah)

If you want to catch a ball, but you're having no luck at all.

The ball hit your head, it hit your nose.

It hit your belly, your chin and toes.

Well try and try and try again, keep on trying and soon

You'll put your hands out in the air,

You'll catch that ball, yes this I swear

Don't give up, keep on going.
You on a boat, so keep on rowing
Don't give up, don't ever stop,
Try and try and you'll come out on top, don't give up.

You got yourself new roller-skates.
You puts them on and you feels great,
Stand up, but then you fall,
Don't think you can skate at all.
You gets back up and then you trips
You skip and tip and slip and flip
Well try and try and try some more,
And soon you're skating across the floor.

Don't give up, keep on moving.
You're gonna get there just keep on grooving
Don't give up, don't pack it in,
Try and try and you will win, don't give up.
No no no, don't give up
No no no, don't give up,
No no no, don't give up, no no
Don't give up

In version 1, the teachers create several blanks on the lyrics and ask the students to complete those parts. Meanwhile, in version 2, the teachers provide some inadequate components, and the students have to find those mistakes and revise them. In preparing these activities, the teachers have to consider several factors such as the teaching objectives, teaching topics, student-level until cultural values of the songs.

4. Storytelling Activity

Besides those three activities, the teachers may use storytelling as ice-breaking activity. The researcher has done this in an advanced grammar class. I chose a short story that contains the grammar element relevant to the teaching topic. Then, I try to retell the story, and before I do it, I ask my students to write the grammar element that we are going to learn. The feedback from my pupils was very positive, and they seemed happy to join the class. Because the students will only see the teachers' faces in Zoom or Google Meet, intonation and facial expression are crucial. In addition, the teachers might also record a video when they retell the story, then upload it in YouTube channel or Google Drive link. So, the students can access it easily.

5. English Humour

Another way of doing ice-breaking activities is using authentic material like jokes or humour. According to Al-Duleimi & Aziz (2017), humour stories have several advantages. They are physiological, psychological, social, and educational benefits. In using jokes, the teachers may show funny stories through PowerPoint or tell the jokes orally. Ask the students to enjoy the story while finding some grammar elements. Here are examples of humour stories to teach past simple taken from Woolard (1999).

Humour 1

Mum, Aunt Sarah kissed me. >Did you kiss her back?
Of course not, I kissed her cheek.

Humour 2

Ronald got into trouble at the zoo yesterday.

>Really! What did he do?

He fed the monkeys.

>There's nothing wrong with that!

Oh yes, there is. He fed them to the lions.

In joke 1, the students may focus on regular verbs like *kissed* and the use of DID. In joke 2, the students may learn irregular verbs like *fed* and question form. It means that such jokes might be an acceptable introduction to past simple. For the other examples of jokes to teach many elements of grammar, the researcher recommends a book entitled *English with Laughter* by Woolard (1999).

CONCLUSIONS

An ice breaker is a significant element in EFL classes. Employing ice breakers may affect the process of teaching and learning positively especially the learning process of a problematic component like grammar. Nowadays, because of the spread of the COVID 19 disease, all classes have to be run online includes grammar classes. Plenty of obstacles arise during online meetings. That is why the teachers as learning facilitators might take ice-breaking activities as a possible attempt to overcome the problems. This study suggests several theories related to the usage of ice-breaking activities in online grammar classes and recommends some ice breakers that are feasible to implement. They are jumbled sentences, correcting mistakes, English songs, storytelling activities, and English humour.

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