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CONTENTS

Pronunciation activities using the card popular game Uno! by David Ockert.....	2
Research Paper: The Effect of Grammar Learning on Speaking Ability of EFL Learners By Parnaz Kianiparsa and Sara Vali	7
Video: SpeechSchool.TV Programs	16
News: Is txtng killin Nglsh @skool? No way sez Prof.....	17
Article: Using poems to develop productive skills.....	18
Article: 'TEFL Teaching - Business English' by Natasha Mason	19
ICT in Education: Class Blogmeister – Learning as conversation	20
GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS	21

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Pronunciation activities using the card popular game Uno!

By David Ockert

Key Words: Young learners, games, activities, pronunciation

Learner English Level: Pre-beginner, beginner

Learner Maturity Level: Young learner

Preparation Time: 5 minutes or less

Activity Time: Usually from 10-30 minutes

Materials: The card game Uno!

The activities presented herein are hoped to help young Japanese learners of English (JLE) understand and recognize the differences in pronunciation of /b/ vs. /v/, and /l/ vs. /r/, which are possibly the most distinctively recognizable of any English consonants when mispronounced by Japanese students of English, because so many words in English have different meanings when these sounds are not pronounced correctly (Avery & Ehrlich, pp.134-138). They make the difference between hearing, “Would you like some more lice?” vs. “Would you like some more rice?” And, in my case, the name is Dave, not Debu - fatso in Japanese (Ockert, 2006).

Given time, the activities presented will do something to alleviate this nagging problem. By including the proper pronunciation of these sounds in a simple word-list activity (the popular card game Uno), then moving up to a statement activity (Concentration), and on to a simple question & answer game (Go Fish!), teachers may also find other advantages to using these activities. Accordingly, the students will learn how to pronounce the sounds first in a word (blue, yellow, five, seven, have), then in a statement (It's a blue seven.), then in a question form (Do you have a yellow five?). All of the these spoken forms place an emphasis on suprasegmentals, therefore, helping the students develop proper pitch, intonation, and word stress, especially when a native speaker's role is emphasized as a model for speech patterns. For example, the teacher can help the students develop proper word stress by

asking such questions as “Did you say a yellow seven?” when asked, “Do you have a *yellow* seven?” with emphasis on the word yellow.

Activity 1: Uno

Here I will explain a little about each activity, beginning with the popular card game Uno. As many readers may be familiar with how to play the game Uno, and the rules are contained in the game, I shall simply continue with the speech acts necessary to carry out the game.

Step 1: Practice the following phrases and clarify understanding.

Whose turn is it?

Is it my turn?

It’s your turn.

Finished!

Uno!

Draw four!

Draw two!

(yellow / blue / red / green).

Yellow / blue / red / green Draw two.

Yellow / blue / red / green Reverse.

Yellow / blue / red / green Skip.

Yellow / blue / red / green Wild.

These are the various color and number combinations:

Yellow / blue / red / green zero.

Yellow / blue / red / green one.

Yellow / blue / red / green two.

Yellow / blue / red / green three.

Yellow / blue / red / green four.

Yellow / blue / red / green five.

Yellow / blue / red / green six.

Yellow / blue / red / green seven.

Yellow / blue / red / green eight.

Yellow / blue / red / green nine.

Step 2: Play the game. The game can be played with from two to as many as six or more players. Obviously, the fewer the students in number, the more opportunities to speak arise.

Activity 2: Concentration

Another activity that can be played using the same cards is Concentration. Because of the number of possible combinations of pairs (36 pairs for a total of 72 cards), and the desired goal of focusing speaking time on the sounds /l/ and /v/. Educators may wish to use the following card pairs for this activity in order to focus on these sound differences:

Yellow one, yellow three, yellow five, yellow six, yellow seven, yellow eight, blue two, blue four, blue five, blue seven, blue eight, blue nine, green five, green seven, red five, and red seven.

These are a total of sixteen pairs, each number from one to nine is present, all of the colors, and a majority of yellow and blue cards for /l/ practice, as well as four 'five' pair combinations and four 'seven' pair combinations for /v/ practice.

Step 1: The game is played by first shuffling the cards.

Step 2: Arrange the cards face down on a table or the floor.

Step 3: Play the game as follows: A student takes a turn by turning over one card and stating its color and number, for example yellow seven. Then they continue the turn by turning over another card in an attempt to find a match. The student again states the card

color and number, for example blue nine. Since this is not a match, the student returns these cards to their original position, face down, and the game continues with the next student. If the student's upturned cards should match, the turn continues until two cards that do not match are revealed. The game is finished when all of the possible pair combinations are matched, and the winner is the student who has the most pairs.

Activity 3: Go Fish!

The last activity is Go Fish! For this game, the card pairs identified above can once again be used. However, for a large number of students I often use the entire thirty-six pairs. To play the game, first shuffle the card pairs and deal out seven cards to each student. For younger learners, who have smaller hands and difficulty holding onto their cards, use fewer cards to start. If a student should be lucky enough to have a matching pair of cards (both color and number), they can set them down.

Step 1: The game begins by choosing someone to start and an order of turns. In Japan, this is commonly done using the game rock, paper, and scissors. A student takes a turn by asking one of the other players if they have a certain card, for example:

Do you have a blue five?

A student can answer either positively with: Yes, I do. Here you are.

Or negatively with: No, I don't. Go fish!

The types of questions and statements above are all that are necessary to play the game, but students should also know:

Is it my turn?

Whose turn is it?

It's your turn.

Step 2: If the student responds positively, he hands over the card and the person whose turn it is makes a pair and sets it on the table. He continues until he does not get a card from another player, whereupon he is told to Go fish! and draws a card from the pile in the center of the table and adds it to his hand. If, however, the player should be fortunate to draw the exact same card as he just asked another player for, his turn continues. If a different card is drawn from the deck, the turn passes to the next player.

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David Ockert was born in Michigan, USA. He has a dual-major BA in Political Theory and Constitutional Democracy (PTCD) and East Asian Studies (Japanese) from James Madison College, Michigan State University, and a MEd in Curriculum, Instruction & Technology in Education from Temple University. He is the author of *An Introduction to Academic Writing* (ISBN 4-9902048-4-0) and *An Introduction to PowerPoint Presentations* (ISBN 978-4-9902048-5-3) and several journal articles. His research interests range from student motivation, motivational orientations, learning strategies, and their relationships between specific classroom activities, either traditional or communicative task-based, to educational system development. He can be contacted at davidockert1@gmail.com.

Research Paper: The Effect of Grammar Learning on Speaking Ability of EFL Learners

By **Parnaz Kianiparsa**^[1] and **Sara Vali**^[2], Payame Noor University In Iran

Abstract

Nowadays, the most important aspect of language learning is how to express your ideas fluently in the target language in order to be understood by native speakers. To reach this aim, foreign language learners should know how to use different words and phrases in sentences. In other words, they should be familiarized with the grammatical points in the target language which have been overlooked in the recent years. Grammar learning and speaking are two significant poles in foreign language acquisition. It seems they are nearly related activities, but various opinions are expressed about the underlying relationship between these two components of language learning. Some indicate a positive relationship between grammar learning and ability to speak a foreign language, and others depict no and even a negative connection between these two aspects of language acquisition.

This paper tries to have a brief review on the literature to investigate whether grammar learning and speaking influence one another. The results suggest that scholars have opposing views about this issue; however, most of them believe that grammar learning can have a positive effect on speaking a foreign language. At the end, the opinions of some Iranian EFL learners (about 30 boys and girls) are presented as well to clarify the purpose of the study better.

Introduction:

Nowadays, one of the hottest issues in the field of foreign and second language learning or teaching is how to converse fluently in the target language. Generally speaking, most of the EFL learners believe that their knowledge in English is nearly assessed by the way they can interact in the target language. They maintain that their linguistic knowledge and their abilities in other skills—reading, writing, and listening—are not that much important. What is significant is their ability in conversational situations. Of course, this belief belongs to lay and ordinary people. Unfortunately, a majority of EFL teachers and instructors follow this point of view in a broader sense, too. These instructors declare that in learning English

EFL learners do not have to be trained from the grammatical point of view. Now, the question is that is it really no relationship between the grammatical rules and learning to communicate fluently in a foreign language?

The linguistic knowledge in English consists of the ability to analyze and recognize the structural features and components in the language. These abilities are concerned with phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic issues. The building blocks of the communication are grammatical points which make the structure of a language. Before starting to speak many factors and components must be formed in a person's mind. First, the sounds should be matched with each other to shape different words. Second, these words need to be united together to form phrases, clauses, and at last sentences through which a particular meaning can be conveyed. Considering these facts, we can say that it is probably impossible to communicate in a foreign language without knowing the grammatical rules and structures of the target language. The focus of this paper is to review the literature in order to find any possible relationships between these two elements in the view of other researchers in this field of study. Also, at the end of this article, the opinions of a group of Iranian EFL learners will be presented about this issue to clarify the aim of our research better.

Background:

Language proficiency is a multidimensional construct which consists of different levels of abilities and domains (Carrasquillo, 1994). Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that concerns producing, receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Speaking skill is one of the major abilities that is somehow troublesome for EFL and ESL learners. The ability to communicate in a new language – target language—based on its grammatical, contextual, social, and cultural rules, and variations are always difficult for EFL learners (Shumin, n.d.). As mentioned before, one of the current questions in terms of speaking ability is the effect of learning grammatical rules on the level of speaking in the target language.

Merriam Webster Dictionary defined grammar as “the study of the classes of words, their inflections, and their functions and relations in the sentence.” Canale and Swain (1980) suggested that communicative competence includes grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Thus, we can say that grammatical rules are one of the fundamental aspects of speaking skill. According to Scacella and Oxford (1992, p.141):

Grammatical competence is an umbrella concept that includes increasing expertise in grammar (morphology, syntax), vocabulary, and mechanics with regard to speaking, the

term mechanics refers to basic sounds of letters and syllables, pronunciation of words, intonation, and stress.

This implies that our learners should understand English language structures accurately to become fluent. Swan (1998) believed that knowing how to build and use certain structures makes it feasible to communicate common types of meaning successfully. Without these structures, it is difficult to make comprehensible sentences. He stated that in some social contexts, serious deviance from native-speaker rules can put off integration and arouse prejudice—a person who speaks badly may be considered uneducated or stupid.

The language competence means that one has a good command of grammar and words, and can speak, read and write in grammatical foreign or second language. In conversation, if someone made mistakes in his pronunciation, grammar or words spelling, it will lead to misunderstanding and tedium to others, and even spoil their relationship. Therefore, we should try to develop the students' ability of using language in communication in a correct way (Zhong-guo & Min-yan, 2007).

Nakagawa (n.d.) stated that we have two points of views in speaking. One view is that the learner should make himself/herself understood regardless of the grammatical mistakes in the target language, whereas another view insists on correctness in every aspect of language. The former is known as the fluency-oriented approach in which the small grammatical or pronunciation errors are unimportant, especially in the early learning stages. In fact, too much emphasis on correcting them is considered harmful since it may impede the natural acquisition of spoken skills (Ebsworth, 1998).

The latter, in contrast, places most emphasis on accuracy by pursuing mainly grammatical correctness. This view is called the accuracy-oriented approach. Stern (1991) said that the teachers using this approach complained about the lack of success in the long run and the boredom they endangered among the students.

As Ebsworth (1998) said, a fixed stream of speech which is highly incorrect in vocabulary, syntax, or pronunciation could be so difficult to realize as to break a fundamental aspect of fluency being understandable. On the other hand, it is possible for the speaker to be stumbling but accurate... Sentence level grammatical accuracy that violates the basic rules of discourse and correctness is also probable.

The fluency-oriented approach, however, is not free of flaw. Possibly, the most fundamental is fossilization, errors that have become a stable part in the manner a learner speaks (Nation, 1989). Although the accuracy-oriented approach is fairly ignored among the present EFL pedagogues, one can still see in it some advantages over the fluency-oriented approach,

especially concerning the points stated above. Firstly, feedbacks from the teachers provide learners with chance to correct errors. They will become aware of frequent mistakes before fossilization happens. It is true that modification of errors that are provided unconsciously may discourage learners from speaking. But correction itself can also be motivating, given in an appropriate manner, because it enables learners to make sure where exactly the problem happens in their speech (Nakagawa, n.d.).

Speaking requires that learners not only know how to construct particular points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary (*linguistic competence*), but also that they recognize when, why, and in what ways to produce language (*sociolinguistic competence*). Finally, speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions different from written language (Burns & Joyce, 1997; Carter & McCarthy, 1995; Cohen, 1996; Florez, 1999).

However, Krashen (1981) suggested that

What theory implies, quite simply, is that language acquisition, first or second, occurs when comprehension of real messages occurs, and when the acquirer is not 'on the defensive'... Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill. It does not occur overnight, however. Real language acquisition develops slowly, and speaking skills emerge significantly later than listening skills, even when conditions are perfect. The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production. (6-7)

Beside Krashen, Johnson (2004) believed that nowadays, English language teaching methods or approaches have some problems. These problems are: (1) lack of exposure to vocabulary (EFL learners, most of the time, encounter unknown words), (2) early emphasis on speaking (in the early stages of learning, the emphasis need not be on speaking since working on listening skills will ultimately carry over to speaking (Bradlow et al., 1997; Rvachew, 1994).

While speaking is eventually essential for communication, developing good listening skills is required for students to comprehend what the teacher is saying.), (3) failure of automatic processing (the only way for processes to become automatic is through practice and repetition (Gray, Mulhere, & Neil, 2000; Segalowitz, Segalowitz, & Wood, 1998)), and (4) dependence on translation and grammar-oriented approach (generally, the use of the native language and the study of grammatical rules interferes with the acquisition of a second language (Gabrielatos, 1998; Green, 1998)).

However, Corbett (2009) stated that learners and teachers describe grammar and its significance in different ways. English learners believe that grammar is a rule which helps them to make a sentence in order to talk with others. They use grammar as an instrument to form meaning. But, grammar is not an ideal factor to produce a meaning. On the other hand, teachers define grammar as what they should say, do say and what they teach. The principal goal of teaching is to realize combined goals, permit restructuring, focus on accuracy and increase fluency.

Buhary (2009) mentioned that you don't need a good knowledge of grammar to obtain your aim across in English. We see children achieve knowledge of new languages naturally because they learn that particular language without bothering about grammar. They may not even know what grammar is. Virtually, most of us learn grammar instead of learning to speak English. The only way is to practice the everyday English instead of worrying or fearing about grammar.

Reynaud (n.d.) claimed that while children learn English without paying any attention to grammatical rules completely, adults require more than sixty hours of teaching per year. She said that the better a learner knows the grammar of a language the easier it will be for him to get knowledge of correct usage, and the easier it will be for him to communicate in the language and not be misunderstood by others.

Runmei Yu and Suzhen Ren (n. d., p. 54) claimed that “grammar, on the one hand, seems not so appealing to foreign language learners. Whenever the word 'grammar' is mentioned, the learners will relate it to the complex sets of rules, which are boring and require a great deal of memorization. On the other hand, it has always been their No.1 concern in the process of learning. Grammar is regarded as one of the key components in language.”

As Palmer (1971, p. 8) stated “it is grammar that makes language so essentially a human characteristic. For though other creatures can make meaningful sounds, the link between sound and meaning is for them of a far more primitive kind than it is for man, and the link for man is grammar”. Batstone (1994, p. 3) also emphasized the importance of grammar when he declared that if there were no grammar, language would be disorganized, leaving us seriously handicapped.

Thus, knowledge of grammar is usually considered to be the essential area of the language system around which the other areas revolve. Cook (1996, p. 14) emphasized this point when he claimed that “however important the other components of language may be in themselves, they are connected to each other through grammar. Grammar is often called the computational system that relates sound and meaning, trivial in itself but impossible to manage without.” In this case, grammar is known as an important coordinator of other components of language.

In a study by Wu, Ching-Hsuan (2007) on the effects of an explicit grammar teaching method on a group of English teacher candidates' spoken grammatical accuracy in Taiwan, it was found that grammar teaching could improve spoken grammatical accuracy of English teacher candidates in Taiwan, who are advanced English learners. Furthermore, the increased grammatical accuracy was not acquired at the cost of fluency.

As mentioned above, aside from some opposing views, most studies in the field of learning grammar and speaking indicate that grammar is one of the influential factors in speaking fluently. However, most EFL teachers do not pay attention to this issue, and believe that speaking a foreign language is just a reflection of first language acquisition; thus, in learning a foreign language we should consider our learners as children who want to learn their first language. In this case we do not need to learn grammar and it is necessary to add new words to our learners' vocabulary knowledge. In the rest of this paper, we are going to take a look at the framework of our study.

Our study:

The design of our study is mostly descriptive. In other words, as mentioned before, the concern of this paper is to have a short review on the literature about the issue of grammar and speaking. However, to clarify this subject better, we try to ask the opinions of some Iranian EFL learners in this regard. We chose our subjects or participants from a group of students who were studying English at one of the institutes in Iran. They were selected from different levels with different command of English. All the students were learning English through 'Interchange' system. They were asked to write about the influence of learning grammar on speaking English. No time limit was imposed on the learners; thus, they had enough time to write about their opinions in this regard at home. They were supposed to write about 2 or 3 paragraphs to express their ideas. As mentioned above, these 30 students were from different levels of English, but each level was considered separately in terms of their English to observe the homogeneity of the participants. Here, you can find the opinions of the subjects in various levels:

Most of our students believed that speaking is the most important skill in learning English or it's better to say a foreign language. They said their main aim is to learn how to speak; however, in order to reach this goal they have to learn grammatical rules and points because observing grammatical points is essential for putting words into proper sentences. However, none of them considered this issue, and they tried to speak in such a way that every body can understand their speech. Our subjects believed that learning grammar is always troublesome for them because most of the rules are very difficult to be learnt by the EFL learners, and sometimes EFL teachers are not qualified enough to teach grammar so that they ignore grammar, and try to work on other skills—writing, listening, and reading.

Having studied the frame work of our research, now it is the time to discuss the results of the paper, to conclude the article with the overall views in this issue, and maybe to suggest future studies in terms of grammar and speaking a foreign or second language.

Conclusion:

In line with the literature, the result of the paper depicted that in some Iranian EFL learners' point of view, learning grammar is effective in speaking English as a foreign language. As shown in the background section of this research, most of the time, it was stated that in order to speak a foreign language fluently it is necessary to learn grammatical rules. It has been suggested that vocabulary knowledge and grammatical knowledge are complementary for speaking a language. However, we do not have a lot of studies to investigate the relationship between grammar and speaking. Thus, it is recommended to conduct more studies in this issue to write appropriate materials for helping students speak easily. These kinds of descriptive researches can introduce new ideas in ELT to improve EFL teachers' knowledge in different aspects of language learning. Also, more studies can be done in finding the effect of grammar instruction on learning other skills, such as reading, writing, and listening.

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News: Is txtng killin Nglsh @skool? No way sez Prof

“

If you're worried that texting and instant messaging are destroying children's respect for proper English, Kristen Turner, Ph.D., assistant professor of English education, wants you to relax.

“I can't tell you how many times I introduce myself to parents, and the first thing I hear is, 'Oh, this texting language is ruining English. All my kids do is text,’” she said. “That's a big misperception of what's happening.”

Turner has coined the phrase “digitalk” to encompass communication that occurs between adolescents via modern communication technology, such as text messages, instant messages and social networking comments. “People think that texting is random and that it's born from laziness. Actually, it's neither of those things,” she said.”

Read the complete story by visiting <http://eltweekly.com/more/2010/03/53-news-is-txtng-killin-nglsh-skool-no-way-sez-prof/>

Article: Using poems to develop productive skills

“

You and your students might already enjoy reading and listening to poetry in your own language and perhaps in English too. Poems are, after all, authentic texts. This is a great motivator. Poems are often rich in cultural references, and they present a wide range of learning opportunities. For me, the aim is to teach English through poetry, not to teach the poetry itself, so you don't need to be a literature expert.

Most of the tried and tested activities used regularly by language teachers can be adapted easily to bring poetry into the classroom.

- Communicative speaking activities
- Working on pronunciation
- Writing activities
- Some pros and cons
- Conclusion

Communicative speaking activities

Before doing any productive work, I like to give my students plenty of pre-reading activities so that they are adequately prepared.”

Read the complete article at <http://eltweekly.com/more/2010/03/53-article-using-poems-to-develop-productive-skills/>

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Article: 'TEFL Teaching - Business English' by Natasha Mason

This article is about teaching business English. From a personal point of view, this has always been my favourite form of teaching English. My experience is in Madrid, Spain but this advice covers most countries with teaching Business English.

I was lucky to have a strong business background in law and HR so it felt like a natural route for me to take. However many of my graduates get very nervous about teaching business English, especially if they are new graduates with limited experience in the business world

What are you teaching?

The first thing to remember is that you are teaching English in a business context, not teaching business in English. Many of the directors I have taught have talked about how patronizing they find it for a college graduate to walk into their office and start teaching them how to give a presentation! They know how to give a presentation, they need help with the tone and terminology in English - ensure your classes are never patronizing. Many of the teaching text books do fall into this trap so make sure you adapt your classes to your audience.

On the other hand, even with limited experience of business it means that you can be a good teacher to any student who needs business English. If you are teaching finance English for example, the majority of the help they will need is the English you already know, for everything else there are specialist books and dictionaries. Don't get me wrong, there are always students who need people with specialist knowledge and skills but it is the exception not the rule. When I was teaching at the Banco de España (The Bank of Spain), I knew very little about finance English and I was very honest about this to my students. They had no problem with this as they needed help with emails, presentations, small talk, grammar etc. They already knew their finance terminology but needed helping putting it all together so it sounded right to the recipients.

Hours

Business English classes tend to fit around the ebb and flow of business hours. Classes are normally early in the morning 7-9 or 9.30, lunchtime 1-4 and evening 7-9. The more senior

the student, the more flexibility they have with their schedule but this is a double edged sword as they also have busy lives, constant meetings and often travel a lot which means they cancel more classes. I once had a student who I actually taught for only 21 hours in a whole academic year! Luckily enough his secretary was really friendly with an endless supply of croissants.

Whether you have got your hours directly with a Company or through a teaching agency, make sure you find out what the cancellation policy is. Whilst it may seem glamorous to have lots of senior executives as your students, they are more likely to have one-2-one classes and as stated above, have higher than average cancellations. In Madrid, many of the agencies now have an 80-85% cancellation policy which means that you get paid 80-85% of the classes regardless of how many they cancel. If you do have a large amount of one-2-one classes, it is very important to check this out in the contract to make sure you can still earn a decent living despite what goes on in your students' business lives.

Resources

When teaching business English, the internet is your new best friend. If your client works for a bank make sure you look at their internet site and the sites of their competitors. Do a search and find out what articles have been written about them which you can then use as reading material in the classroom. Check out finance reports on the BBC that you can download onto your iPod. YouTube is another excellent resource for videos on meetings, presentations and negotiations (for both the right and wrong way to do it!).

Whenever you go back to your home country or have friends and family visit, get them to collect all the pamphlets they can. One man's junk mail is another man's teaching resource!

The text book industry has really stepped up the pace in the last couple of years and there are a range of books to suit the most junior to the most senior employees. Lots of influential newspapers and magazines (the Financial Times, the Economist etc) have joined up with the publishers to produce some very comprehensive business text books with real articles, interviews and up to date news. Make sure you do a proper needs analysis with your student to see what they need before making the choice about a text book.

Finally, stay confident and calm. Students need to feel that you are in charge and know what you are doing. Read up on what you are teaching the night before and plan ahead. Do a comprehensive needs analysis and level test and stay one step ahead.

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years. <http://www.ttmadrid.com> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TU3se92BLoU>

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- 1. Papers / Articles:** All articles should be computerized using double-spacing, including tables, references and footnotes. Submission of manuscripts should be done in electronic form only. Electronic version of the article/research paper should be e-mailed to the Editor, ELTWeekly at info@eltweekly.com.
- 2. Abstracts:** An abstract in approximately 200 words should assist the article.
- 3. Abbreviations:** No stops are needed between capitals e.g. ELT, IELTS.
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- 7. Book Reviews:** Book reviews must contain the name of the author and title / subtitle of the book reviewed, place of publication and publisher and date of publication.
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