

## Teaching English Grammar through Animated Movies

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### Abstract:

*This study seeks to examine how various components of English grammar can be taught through animated movies. The study demonstrates the use of gerunds in a sentence or a discourse through an animated feature film Tangled. The data for this research was taken from the students of grade eight. The students were shown various video clips, comprising dialogues and songs, from the movie and asked to identify the use of gerunds. Later, the students were given various worksheets containing tasks, based on the use of gerunds in a sentence. The students remained very responsive during the whole lesson and effectively learned the use of gerunds and the difference between gerunds and the present participle. The study concluded that animated movies in grammar teaching classes can serve as a positive reinforcement tool for the language learning process as the animated movies considerably increase the learning speed and proficiency of the students.*

**Keywords:** Gerunds, Teaching English, Animated Movies, Grammar, Tangled

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The use of technology in students' lives has increased so much that the students of the contemporary era should aptly be called digital-natives or the net-generation [Pransky (2001)]. There is an obvious need to teach students with the help of modern technology. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to teach the use of gerunds in a sentence or a discourse through the animated feature film *Tangled*. The term 'gerund' is a derivative of a Latin word, which means 'to carry on'. A gerund is derived from a verb which ends in *-ing* form and its purpose in a sentence is to function as a noun. The word '*verbal*' specifies that a gerund is built

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upon a verb and hence it demonstrates action. For example, in a sentence, “You will get in trouble for faking an illness to avoid work”, the word ‘faking’ is a gerund. As the purpose of a gerund is to function as a noun, it has the same position in a sentence that a noun normally has (*Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*).

Describing the gerunds, Kolln and Funk state that we consider gerunds to be nouns because they are like nouns though they do not name things, persons, places which mean they do not function like nouns. Gerunds function like verbs while naming behaviours, activities or states of mind (1998). Teaching grammar with the aid of movies and feature films is very appealing and exceedingly motivating. In learning and teaching a language, four aspects of language are very important, which are grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling. These features are also taught in teaching and learning process for the English language. According to Celce Maria (1987), the research in language acquisition recommends that preliminary and early teaching priorities in the areas of any language should be grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Consequently, here in this study, the focus is on the teaching of English grammar, specifically gerunds, with the help of movies, as the era of technology is gaining popularity day by day.

The mode of teaching grammar with the help of visuals and movies has been in practical use of teachers for teaching any language, for years. Sarah and Patricia (2009) hold that the audio and imagery of movies has the capability to develop awareness and provoke intellectual thinking in such a way that words are unable to do. Xing (2011) has demonstrated the use of English movies in order to improve the listening and speaking skills of students in English as a Second Language Culture learning classes. In his research, he cited Kim (1996), who stated that movies can be used by the instructors in lecture rooms to aid students develop their grasp of a certain aspect of the language. Xing (2011) also indicated that a movie has practically a distinctive advantage in familiarizing a foreign language. It could show the actual situation and a real demonstration of the cultural background of any language. The influence and vividness in all these feature films is exceptional as compared to any other methods.

A Film can be a very useful mode of teaching grammar as well as vocabulary of any language to the students. According to Hu (2006), feature films and movies also offer auditory and graphic materials equally, which benefit the students to comprehend the language without much effort. When viewing any movie, the learners listen to the characters and also observe their actions. The scenes of a movie make the communication real in such a way that by seeing the feature film, students can relate to the happenings in the movies and thus are likely to learn in a natural way, picking up language in the process. Similarly, talking about using movies in English teaching classrooms, Xu and Guo (2007) assert that, for almost all the films, students find the moving images to be very eye-catching, fascinating, and inspiring, as compared to the conventional material produced in books, due to the pictorial nature and convenience of the medium. These movies can significantly intensify the eagerness and resourcefulness of the students.

Movies can be very effective in teaching grammar and syntax of any language. Wu (2002) holds that the objectives of teaching and learning through motion pictures are to build up interpretation, listening, speaking, grammar, and vocabulary skills of any language. In the same way, Zhao (2009), in a research article, signifies that an innovative motion picture can be extremely inspiring and thought-provoking and can make language learning more pleasant.

Schirta (2011) in her article “Teaching Grammar and Critical Thinking through YouTube” states the benefits of using movie clips in grammar classes. She suggests that visuals involve students in collaborating activities and kindle their thoughts, memorization and creativity. She also asserts that the video clips enable students to discuss language issues and learn grammar structures. She maintains that a film is administered in the brains of the students to accelerate learning and asserts that movie clips employ both hemispheres of our brain; the left one that handles the discourses, plot, rhythm, and words, and the right one which processes images based on visuals and sound effects. Ishihara and Chi (2004) state that feature films fascinate students and capture their attention with dazzling and mind-blowing Hollywood special effects. They reveal reliable usage of the target language forms because they are not premeditated for instructional motives. In features films, the

prolonged setting, fascinating content, rich graphic imagery, usually embellished actions and exaggerated gesticulations offer students with multi-sensory involvement that is near to what they would discover in their daily communication [Arcario (1993) and Lonergan (1984)]. This real-life setting in films is appealing and inspiring to language learners and helps the students to comprehend the linguistic usage present in the movies [Chapple and Curtis (2000)].

In this research, the major concern is to teach the students how to differentiate between a gerund and a present participle though showing them various movie clips which includes the use of gerunds.

### **1.1 Research Question**

How can clips of animated movies be used in English language pedagogy to boost language learning in EFL classrooms?

### **1.2 Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this research is to teach the students the effective usage of gerunds in a discourse through the animated feature film *Tangled*. Teaching students how to differentiate between a gerund and a present participle can be a challenging task. Therefore, the mode of instruction should be such which can keep the interest and concentration of the students towards what is being taught. For this purpose, the genre of teaching through movie clips was selected in this study. Animated movies like *Tangled* are generally meant for the purpose of entertainment and amusement of younger students who like to watch movies, and if these feature films function to teach the students as well as entertain them, a double purpose is served. Students tend to learn more when they are taught using visuals i.e. movies, video clips, etc., than by regular mode of verbal teaching. Their vocabulary and pronunciation can be improved through the use of movies in language classrooms. Through movies, students can better recall what they have learnt and apply it to everyday life situations. Hence, the purpose of this research is to develop a better understanding of teaching gerunds through the use of animated

films, so that they can acquire a constructive approach towards learning grammar.

## 2. PROCEDURE

Quantitative and qualitative research methods were used for the current study. The research was also experimental in nature. The data for this research was taken from the students of grade eight. The students were shown various video clips from the movie *Tangled* with the help of a multimedia projector in an allotted time of one hour. The clips containing dialogues and songs helped students identify and understand the use of gerunds. After showing the movie clips to the students, they were given various worksheets which consisted of a number of tasks, based on the use of gerunds in a sentence. In the beginning, the students were taught how to differentiate between a present participle and a gerund by using movie clips which included the examples of these grammatical terms. Then, they were asked to complete their worksheets which included various tasks established on the basis of correct use of gerunds. The tasks that students had to do during the class are appended below:

1. Identifying gerunds in the dialogues spoken by various characters and the songs included in the movie.
2. Making gerunds out of common verbs used in the movie.
3. Making new sentences out of the gerunds used in the movie.
4. Writing short paragraphs on images of various characters of the movie, using at least five gerunds.

The purpose of worksheets was to assess what the students had learnt about gerunds and the present participles. The students were assessed through their performance in the tasks provided through the worksheets.

## 3. ANALYSIS

The study found that teaching gerunds to the students can be very problematic. Robinson and Klassen (2010) assert, “using gerunds and infinitives correctly in English is one of the ... challenges for ESL writers” (p1). Conti and Pozzo (2011) state that most foreign language

learners find it confusing to choose between an infinitive verb and a gerund. For example, they cannot decide between “do you like skiing?” and “do you like to ski?” (p3). This problem can be resolved effectively if gerunds are taught through visual graphics like the movie clips of animated movie *Tangled*. In this movie, like any other animated movie, a lot of gerunds are used in the dialogues spoken by the characters. Gerunds occur more frequently in various songs present in the movie which can be taught through carefully planned activities. Students often get confused when it comes to distinguishing between a gerund and a present participle. Therefore, this study resolved the issues regarding the use of gerunds by taking help from an entertaining mode of teaching.

During the one-hour lesson, it was noted that the students themselves picked out gerunds from the movie clips and were able to separate them from present-participles. By watching selected portions of the movie, the students were able to learn gerunds through various examples shown in the dialogues and songs while enjoying the light and entertaining mode of study. All the students scored 85% or above marks in the tasks provided to them through the worksheets. The data, containing gerunds used in the movie, on which the tasks and worksheets were based is given in the table below. Macwan (2015) in this regard strongly asserts the usefulness of the use of movies and other visual aids in teaching English language. She believes that though the idea of using visual aids in EFL classrooms is new, it has great potential as it “can get unflinching attention and interest of the learners” (p91). She is very optimistic about the use of visual aids in English language labs in the near future and proclaims that “the advent and advancement of technology has made it possible to transform English language lab into a mini theatre where visual clips or films can be shown” (p91).

Some of the instances where gerunds were exhibited in the animated film *Tangled* are listed below:

Timings in the movie	Use of Gerunds in the dialogues/songs	Gerunds
2:03	Instead of sharing	Sharing
6:03	The song of Rapunzel (baking, candle-making)	Baking, candle-making
7:33	I’ll keep wondering	Wondering

10:26	Looks absolutely exhausting	Exhausting
10:40	Just teasing	Teasing
11:56	Stop with the mumbling, ..., it's very annoying	Mumbling, annoying
16:07	You guys look amazing	Amazing
22:39	I hate leaving you	Leaving
25:43	Struggling ... struggling is pointless	Struggling
26:37	How's your day going?	Going
26:45	Gallivanting through the forest	Gallivanting
31:34	I could go running and racing and dancing and chasing and leaping and bounding and hair flying and heart pounding and splashing and reeling and finally feeling. That's when my life begin (song)	Running, racing, dancing, chasing, leaping, bounding, hair flying, heart pounding, splashing, reeling, feeling
33:05	Part of growing up	Growing
33:15	You are way overthinking this, trust me	Overthinking
37:04	Don't you want scaring and giving up on this whole endeavor	Scaring, giving
39:39	Tickling the ivories till they gleam	Tickling
40:32	Rowing in a row boat down the stream	Rowing
40:47	Though my face leaves people screaming	Screaming
40:49	There's a child behind it dreaming	Dreaming
50:31	Perhaps you want to stop acting	Acting
53:07	Bring back what once was mine	Bring
58:18	If he is lying, don't come crying	Lying, crying
1:07:14	Watching from the windows	Watching
1:07:22	All that time never even knowing	Knowing
1:09:06	All that time never truly seeing	Seeing

The students were first taught the definition of a gerund and then shown short video clips taken from the movie *Tangled*, which included numerous examples of gerunds. Students successfully identified these gerunds and remained very excited and focused during the activity. After showing the movie clips to the students, they were asked to fill in worksheets, for testing and evaluating their understanding of gerunds. All fifteen worksheets were filled by the students and were checked by

the researchers to evaluate their grasp on the use of gerunds. All the students scored more than 85 percent marks which was a significantly high score to conclude that they had learnt and absorbed the concepts. Nation (2014) asserts that language can be learned very effectively through listening activities including watching a movie, particularly a movie containing subtitles of the target language. Students, however, need to have a lot of vocabulary before watching a movie as “to follow most of the words in a movie without any preparation, you need to have a reasonably large vocabulary – at least 3,000 words and preferably around 9,000 words” (p.18). That is why, in case of children, use of animated movies is more helpful because of the obvious fact that these movies make use of easier vocabulary. The current study remained successful in teaching grammatical concepts to the students due to the fact that it used a famous animated movie with easier vocabulary items and the students were also made familiar with the difficult vocabulary items beforehand. Hayati and Hashemy (2013) also agree with researchers like Nation that the use of technologies in teaching is extremely helpful in speeding up the learning process and improving the effectiveness of teaching in the long run. They claim that the use of technology in teaching process is useful as it “simulate real-life situations” and assert that “computer assisted language learning opens up vistas of expansion in the field” (p.181). Movies, games, images and a mixture of many other visual effects facilitate language learning process to a great degree also due to the colourful content they offer together with striking audio effects. The current study also came up with similar conclusion and further asserted the usefulness of the use of visual aids in English language classrooms.

After marking and evaluating the worksheets of the students, it was found out that all the students understood the use of gerunds very well. It was decided that the students getting marks below 50 percent would be considered weak, and it will be assumed that all the students getting marks above 75 percent have successfully learnt the concept. However, all the students got 85 percent and above marks which suggested that all the students had learnt the concepts well. All the students showed high level of interest in the pedagogical process during the whole lesson. They focused on both words and images and paid a



great deal of attention as compared to traditional learning activities. Thus, the students during the current study remained enthusiastic about their lesson due to the fact that they were told to watch the movie and pick out gerunds from the dialogues; this process kept them absorbed and attentive towards what was being taught to them. The process of teaching gerunds to the students by making use of the movie clips from *Tangled* allowed the students to learn grammar in an exciting way and stimulated their learning capabilities.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Movies in grammar teaching classes can serve as a positive reinforcement for the education of the students, and can help in increasing their learning speed and proficiency. Macwan (2015) asserts that the use of movies in English language classrooms has no parallel; Movies have a great impact on the psyche of the students as they have the power to “thrill, motivate, shock, entertain and render the masses powerless to resist the temptation of the silver screen” (p.94). Macwan posits that the most powerful way of teaching language is teaching it through the visual media including English movies as “movies...exercise an appeal on the collective imagination of youth across countries and cultures” (p.93). Apart from this, since movies do not change over time, they provide a consistent source that can be consulted again and again for rehearsal or repetition of the learned concepts. Likewise, during the research, it was observed that the students remained interested in the learning process throughout the lesson due to the pleasant and entertaining environment of the class. The use of clips from the movie *Tangled* in teaching gerunds to the students resulted in their enhanced performance in learning grammar.

The study concluded that animated movies are a very effective mode of teaching English grammar since they provide entertainment and add pleasure to the learning process. Students learn on both conscious and unconscious levels while enjoying the movie clips. The process also helps them recall the learned concepts more efficiently due to the link between the learned concepts and the animated images in the movie. The main target of this research was to explore the usefulness of movie clips

in teaching gerunds to the beginners. The study also revealed that the use of movie clips to teach students can be an exciting process of enhancing learning capabilities of language students. Animated movies provide very high language learning prospects to the students, if the teachers select appropriate films which are focused on the learning needs of the language students. Animated movies provide significant content from which students can learn different aspects of grammar, thus facilitating learners through interesting content while at the same time encouraging them to acquire English language.

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