

**GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE IN ESL LEARNERS: TEACHING COUNTABLE  
AND UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the challenges faced by ESL learners in mastering countable and uncountable nouns. It presents a case study of a learner, analysis of grammatical issues, and a tailored lesson plan based on observed errors. Pedagogical approaches grounded in applied linguistics are suggested to address learner needs.

**Keywords:** countable nouns, uncountable nouns, ESL learners, grammar instruction, communicative language teaching, error analysis, remedial teaching, language acquisition

**1. Introduction**

A doctor cannot give a diagnosis without knowing the full medical history. Further tests are required to confirm the diagnosis and the same occurs with teachers. So as to treat (fill) learners' wounds (grammar gaps), some research should be carried out. The purpose of the project work is to establish a definite diagnosis by approaching the sole student individually. The paper comprises of three main parts, a learner profile, a grammatical explanatory part, and a lesson plan. The initial section analyzes deeply the selected learner's lack of grammatical points through a short interview with him and a brief piece of writing by him. After having identified the grammatical needs of the student, some possible pedagogical approaches will be suggested regarding those mistakes done by the student. The last part of the project work presents the lesson plan specially designed taking account of the learner's current state of grammatical knowledge, his/her weak sides in grammar points.

**2. Methodology**

I am currently unemployed with two years of official experience. Recently I have had to make careful observations and conduct vocabulary and writing sessions with freshmen at UzSWLU. Among these students, I have selected one of them, Sarafroz-Sara as my learner profile with her consent. The first reason for her selection as a volunteer in my project is that she is extrovert, and curious, and via my observations, I noticed she has a spirit of adventure as whenever asked a question, one receives meaningful and enthusiasm-filled responses that can make anyone impress. Moreover, regardless of interaction modes, she has leading, team-building skills and is able to be an active listener and participant. When I asked her whether she is eager to participate, she agreed willingly. Her long-term goal is to get an IELTS certificate with an 8.5 band score, and her short-term one is to complete a project from the integrated skills class.

On the occasion of the Eid holiday, she was not in the city, so we made an interview through telegram, I asked her to record her voice sharing her English learning experience.

Sara is among the best of her classmates in English. She is an active and broad-minded girl, even if she is noticeable good at language learning, she keeps her first language often. There are some social factors that affected her education in the target language positively. She causes her grandmother and mother for her successful learning experience since both of them were English teachers. Sara was provided with extrinsic motivation by her family members from early childhood, they all influenced the quality of her knowledge and availability of education. The project provider has evaluated the learner profile's current linguistic proficiency checking her writing and speaking skills from the perspective of grammatical structures. The recorded sample of Sara's spoken English is transcribed in the appendix part along with written English. In spite of perceiving six-year compulsory education in the target language, some minor grammar mistakes occurred in her speech and writing. Having analyzed both of her works, some common mistakes observed in her speech are illustrated below.

She overused the same adverbs:

- I **really** remember learning some common words, when we were eating with our family;
- I **really** wanted to get the first place;
- I **really** made an effort to learn grammar;
- I **really** wanted to improve my other skills;
- She **really** wanted me to learn this language;
- I **really** wanted to learn this language from her videos;

There are some extracts of her speech with different grammar mistakes:

- I got IELTS certification. – missing indefinite article “an”
- I asked my mother to give some extra books to learn this language.- missing the object pronoun “me”
- I'll certficate to enter the university. – spelling mistake/ the wrong usage of active with a verb “certificate”
- I watched some videos apart from my teachers' advices. – wrong usage of plural noun “advices”
- And they were also helpful for me. – preposition “for”is misused

Discussing some of her errors, she asserted that she made them unconsciously in speech, she asked to consider these mistakes as slips but not errors. I was persuaded by her on this matter having checked her piece of writing. The task was to write a complaint letter according to the university schedule. Her letter is almost free of grammar mistakes. Below careful analysis of writing is performed.

“It surprises me such unfortunate incident has happened”. – incident is a countable noun so that an adjective followed by a singular form is used with indefinite articles.

“I really do hope you handle my case in a top-urgent fashion and provide and adequate solution fast.” – the word “and” is misspelled.

Most EFL learners are likely to face problems in speaking the target language. The initial factor is the fear of making mistakes while having a speech which results in failure to establish effective communication. As a result of fear or lack of linguistic knowledge, learners tend to make grammar mistakes consciously and unconsciously. In this context, Sara's writing proves an increased awareness of her grammatical knowledge. The researcher preferred to select the grammar topic by concentrating on the learner profile's writing since, in oral interaction, it is figured out she made several mistakes negligently having confirmed the rules for her mistakes later. On the basis of her writing, it is proved that the learner has some confusion about nouns to identify whether it is countable or uncountable even if she knows the usage of articles but she is not sure about countability and uncountability of noun which plunges most learners into hesitation to choose the correct article. Taking into account above mentioned analysis, countable and uncountable nouns is chosen to explain Sara so as to help her avoid further mistakes on this grammar topic.

### 3. Discussion

Celce-Murcia (2014) in her book *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* notes that knowing a word also entails understanding its grammatical function (e.g., suggest is a transitive verb; advice is an uncountable noun) and word components (e.g., difficulty instead of \*difficultness, and value instead of \*valuability). Finally, understanding a word entails understanding its register, or formality degree. Although extolment is a noun (it means "enthusiastic acclaim and admiration"), it is a fairly formal term that is rarely used (p.288).

Murphy (1985) explains briefly a countable noun is a thing that can be counted (p.312). It is demanded to define the countability of what a noun describes. Swan (2005) describes "countable nouns are the names of the separate object, people, ideas, etc. which can be counted. Uncountable or mass nouns are the names of materials, liquids, abstract quantities, collection and other things which we see as masses without clear boundaries, not a separate objects" (p.148). Azar (1999) adds to the list of non-count nouns natural phenomena, fields of study, languages, solids, gases, and fluids.

The only challenge students may face is that they use countable nouns as uncountable or vice versa. Knowing whether a noun is countable or non-countable is an essential issue since it impacts the rest structure of any statement. For instance: the usage of noun quantifiers such as a few /few, a little/ little, many/ much, or definite and indefinite articles.

Task-based learning, according to Jane Willis (1996), is more than merely completing one job after another. The teacher introduces and explores the topic, as well as identifies key terms and phrases, during the pre-task stage. Techniques like brainstorming, thought mapping, matching phases to pictures, categorizing words and phrases, and picking the odd one out can be used to accomplish the initial task.

According to Krashen (2009), pupils are required to mimic and memorize dialogue. It also draws pupils' attention to the new structure.

Brown (2007) defines communicative language teaching is the method of language structure highlights student-centered learning, task-based activities, interaction and communication in the real world.

**4. Lesson Plan**

|                 |  |           |                            |
|-----------------|--|-----------|----------------------------|
| Teacher's name: | <b>Shalola Rakhmonova</b>              | Topic:    | <b>Revision</b>            |
| Target grammar: | <b>Countable and uncountable nouns</b> | Level:    | <b>Upper- Intermediate</b> |
| Course:         | <b>Communicative Vocabulary</b>        | Duration: | <b>80 minutes</b>          |
| Target learner: | <b>Sarafroz Isomiddinova</b>           |           |                            |

**Preparation**

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Content Objectives:</b>  | Students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- justify opinions about the selection of the particular type of nouns</li> <li>- discover the rule themselves</li> <li>- distinguish countable, uncountable nouns, and nouns that fall into both groups</li> </ul> |
| <b>Language Objectives:</b> | Students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- apply countable and non-countable nouns to generate statements</li> <li>- discuss words belonging to both uncountable and countable nouns through visual aids</li> </ul>  |

| <b>Procedures</b>                 | <b>Descriptions/Instructions</b>  | <b>Time</b> |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------|
| <b>Warm-up sharing caring</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher asks the difference between countable and uncountable nouns</li> <li>- Students share what they know on this grammar topic</li> <li>- Teacher gets students in pairs to list countable and uncountable nouns in two columns</li> <li>- Teacher checks how well students cope to complete the task</li> </ul> <p>The pairs who listed more correct examples are the winners.</p>  | 10 min      |
| <b>Stage 1 Reading discussion</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher distributes a handout which expresses a dialogue in upper intermediate level</li> <li>- Students need to underline countable nouns with a red pen, and non-countable ones with another color, the words can be both countable and uncountable nouns should be underlined in another distinctive color</li> <li>- Teacher asks the reasons for selection of each underlined word</li> <li>- Teacher corrects students if they have wrong choices for countable, uncountable nouns, and countable – uncountable nouns</li> </ul> | 10 min      |

|   |   |        |
|---|---|--------|
|   | Appendix 1  |        |
| <b>Stage 2<br/>self-<br/>discovery</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher gives students handouts that illustrate the list of frequently used uncountable nouns</li> <li>- Students are supposed to read statements and memorize the words as much as possible</li> <li>- Teacher has students count only uncountable words and how well they could recall the words on the list</li> <li>- Teacher asks for the summary of the list from students</li> <li>- Students try to discover rules from the handout shared regarding countable and uncountable nouns<br/>(Appendix 2)</li> </ul> | 15 min |
| <b>Stage 3<br/>visual<br/>supported<br/>activity/self-<br/>discovery<br/>(discussion)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher sets 3 pictures on the board taken from the presentation</li> <li>- Students look at these pictures and discover the rules that different forms have different meanings</li> <li>- Teacher checks students' responses and corrects them if it is required<br/>(Appendix 3)</li> </ul>  | 15 min |
| <b>Stage 4<br/>Writing</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students are invited to watch a 3-minute short video taken from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfBL21DKiZI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfBL21DKiZI</a></li> <li>- Students watch it and take some notes</li> <li>- Students are to write a short report due to the clip that they watched using count – non-count words as much as viable</li> <li>- Teacher checks how many words students could use in their report considering accuracy</li> </ul>   | 20 min |
| <b>Assessment</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students are provided with the link below</li> <li>- Teacher assesses student's performances via 20 questions in the quiz<br/><a href="https://quizizz.com/admin/quiz/6270fe4227b416001d70f0cf/count-and-noncount-nouns">https://quizizz.com/admin/quiz/6270fe4227b416001d70f0cf/count-and-noncount-nouns</a></li> </ul>   | 10 min |
| <b>Homework</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher gives 6 sentences</li> <li>- Students need to find mistakes and correct the statements<br/>Appendix 4</li> </ul>   | 2 min  |

## 5. References

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