

WAYS OF TEACHING IRREGULAR VERBS AT THE LESSON OF ENGLISH

Stella GORBANI,

Senior Lecturer,

Alecu Russo State University of Bălți, Republic of Moldova;

Roxolana GALIȚ,

MA Student,

Alecu Russo State University of Bălți, Republic of Moldova

Abstract

The present article is devoted to the practical activities for the reinforcement of irregular verbs at the lesson of English. It contains various types of exercises for training the usage of problematic verbs for students at different levels of language acquisition. Among the exercises we have included: odd-man-out, fill in the gaps, matching exercises, multiple choice, puzzles and a special attention is given to ways of using songs and poems in teaching the irregular verbs.

Rezumat

Articolul ia în vizor un șir de activități de consolidare a cunoștințelor despre verbele neregulate din limba engleză. Aceste activități pot fi propuse elevilor cu un diferit nivel de cunoaștere a limbii în cauză. Ele înglobează exerciții de completare, de sortare, de alegere multiplă, pazluri etc. O atenție deosebită e acordată utilizării cântecelor și poeziilor în predarea acestor verbe.

The acquisition of irregular verbs is a very difficult process for the English language learners. It is connected with several problems which EFL learners are facing. They are: the number of irregular verbs. There are 160 the most used irregular verbs in English. Each verb has two different forms although in some cases they occur to be the same in the forms of Past Simple and Past Participle. Spelling of irregular verbs can be frustrating - many verbs do not follow the general rule of forming Past and Participle I. There are verbs which have the same vowels in the roots of the infinitive form but they can undergo different changes in the forms of the Past and Past Participle I:

to hear – heard – heard;
to tear – tore- torn;
to bring – brought – brought;
to cling – clung – clung;
to ring – rang - rung.

Another category of problematic verbs are the verbs *pay* and *say*. These verbs have the same combination of vowels as in the verb *to stay*, which is a regular verb, while the second and third form of these verbs are: Say-said-said; pay-paid-paid. But pay and say have other ways of formation the Past forms and the Past Participles: *to pay – paid – paid; to stay – stayed – stayed*; or the difficult Verb Pairs. There are groups of homophones among irregular verbs, such as: *find – found – found; found – founded - founded* (to establish). Some verbs have two Past Participle forms and there is usually no difference between them: *learned/learnt, sawed/sawn*. In some cases the two forms are used for two different applications of the verb:

bear – bore - born (to give birth to)
borne (to carry; to endure)

We would like to present a number of exercises that might be helpful for the reinforcement of the two forms of irregular verbs. We shall begin with the last category of difficulty, and namely two different applications for the same form of the verb. The first type of exercise that we chose is fill in the gap exercise:

Exercise 1: Chose the correct form of the verb to fill in the gaps:

Forms: *fall – fell – fallen, fell – felled - felled (to cut down)*

Prices for computers have _____ since last year.

Old trees should be _____ because they are dangerous.

A small child _____ heavily.

Forms: find – found – found, found – founded – founded (to establish)

My father _____ his company in 1999.

While checking my notes, I _____ this odd address.

The United Nations Organization was _____ in 1945.

Forms: bind – bound – bound (to tie up), bound – bounded – bounded (to jump; to border)

The USA is _____ by Canada and Mexico.

The dog _____ forward.

The young man was _____ hand and foot by the thieves.

Forms: see – saw – seen, saw – sawed – sawed/sawn (to cut with a saw)

I suddenly _____ a man at the window.

He _____ an old tree in the yard.

Two prisoners _____ through the bars of their cell window and escaped.

Forms: grind – ground – ground (to crush into powder), ground – grounded – grounded (to compel; to remain on the ground)

The ship went too near the coast and was _____ on rocks.

The beans are _____ in this machine.

The airline has decided to _____ one of its planes until all the luggage was checked.

Forms: wind – wound [waund] – wound (to twist), wound [wu:nd] – wounded – wounded (to injure)

The train _____ its way up the hillside and stopped just below the top.

The police opened fire and _____ six of the robbers.

Just a minute and I will _____ a bandage round your leg.

Forms: lie – lay – lain (to be or put oneself in a horizontal position, intransitive), lay – laid – laid (to put, transitive)

He _____ the heavy box on the ground and waited for his friends.

In each school emphasis is _____ on discipline and hard work.

I'm tired. I think I will _____ down for a while.

Forms: bear – bore – born (to give birth to), borne (to carry; to endure)

He was _____ in Tokyo in 1906.

The winner was _____ through the streets on the shoulders of his supporters.

No one else could have _____ the terrible accident she went through.

Forms: cost – cost – cost (to be of certain price), cost – costed – costed (calculate the cost of)

The headmaster has _____ a new heating system for the school.

Apartments have never _____ more than they do today.

The proposed new road system has been _____ by experts at 3.000.000 lei.

Forms: hang – hung – hung (to suspend), hang – hanged – hanged (to kill by hanging)

Come and _____ your coat up.

Before the abolition of the death penalty, convicted killers were sometimes _____.

This picture has been badly _____.

Forms: strike – struck – stricken (to attack, e.g. with fear, doubt, disease), struck (hit)

Thousands of people have been _____ by this terrible illness.

I have never _____ anyone in my life.

Panic – _____ and they rushed through the flames to the exits.

Exercise 2: Find the regular verb in each line and fill in the gaps.

Example: to see, to talk, to make, to do – to talk

- 1) to take, to come, to wash, to have - _____
- 2) to run, to play, to buy, to begin - _____
- 3) to sit, to tell, to work, to hear - _____
- 4) to swim, to feed, to cook, to ride - _____

Multiple choice exercises provide pupils with opportunities to think again about the forms of the verbs. The following activity, named *Fist Names Only*, is an appropriate exercise for senior pupils for checking their knowledge of irregular verbs and not only. These exercises give opportunities to revise some topics, such as: propositions, adjectives, and adverbs.

Exercise 3: Select one form of the two suggested out. If you do it correctly, write each letter you chose and you will get 2 names of 2 famous men and 2 names of famous women. The consecutive correct letters, chosen by you will spell out these four famous first names.

1. The operator had (*P begun, Q began*) to place the call.
2. One of the bells (*E rang F rung*) last night at midnight.
3. Each of her children had (*K swam L swum*) in that meet.
4. I had (*D saw E seen*) how they make glass containers at the museum.
5. Had you (*M known N knew*) that bit of information?
6. When did the shirt (*A shrink B shrunk*) so badly?
7. Some musicians had (*C took D taken*) their instruments back to the bus.
8. (*O Mike and he N/Mike and him*) were chosen to represent this county.
9. Neither of the players (*M were N was*) on the ballot.
10. (*N We/O Us*) drivers need to have better working conditions.
11. Yogi was (*Z more short A shorter*) than his older brother.
12. The program started off (*E well F good*).
13. My dad felt (*K uncertainly L uncertain*) about the decision they made.
14. The ministers speak (*U clear V clearly*) during their sermons.
15. Most of the wires were (*H lain I laid*) by those workers yesterday.
16. All of the pictures had (*S fallen T fell*) because of yesterday's humidity.
17. When did the ship (*B sank C sink*)?
18. Every one of the rules (*G were H was*) followed well by the students.
19. "The Three Musketeers" (*D were E was*) written many years ago.
20. The comedy team of Burns and Allen (*Q were R was*) popular in the 1950s.

Answer: the four famous first names are PELE (the soccer player), MADONNA, ELVIS, and CHER (all singer-entertainers)¹

The type of activity called "Suffix dilemmas" is based on the formation of Past Participles of the irregular verbs. Pupils have to choose correct suffix for each verb:

Exercise 4: Match suffixes from Column B to form the Past Participles of the verbs from the Column A? Write the answers in the Column A:

Column A	Column B
<i>to write</i>	Suffixes:
<i>to shake</i>	-en
<i>to spell</i>	-ed
<i>to eat</i>	
<i>to ride</i>	

¹Umstatter, 2002, p. 23.

to hide
to take
to give
to bite

The usage of songs during the lessons of English has a special effect upon the pupils. Firstly they help to develop various skills: listening, speaking, and reading. Secondly songs change the atmosphere in the classroom, motivating students, building cultural awareness along with its didactic functions. Songs are good for teaching the prosodic features of English, especially stress and rhythm. Mark Hancock in his book "Singing Grammar"² suggests a funny song, entitled "What a crazy day!" which is abounding in action irregular verbs:

What a crazy day

I woke up this morning and I got into bed.
Then I ate a cup of tea and drank a slice of bread.
Oh, what a crazy day! Oh, what a crazy day!
I went to the bus stop, and caught the train to school.
Then I rode my bicycle in the swimming pool.
Oh, what a crazy day! Oh, what a crazy day!
Someone broke the telephone. So then I rang my friend.
We went to the football field, and swam from end to end.
Oh, what a crazy day! Oh, what a crazy day!
I came home this evening, and watched the radio.
I lay down on the ceiling, and read a video.
Oh, what a crazy day! Oh, what a crazy day!

Instructions for working with this song:

1. Give pupils the title of the song. Play the song and ask them to listen and explain why it was a crazy day.
2. Ask pupils to underline all verbs
3. Ask pupils to underline irregular verbs and give the three forms of the verbs.
4. Take the verbs out of the song, making a list of them at the end of the song. Ask the pupil to replace the verbs.
5. Ask the pupils to chose one funny episode and draw a picture of it.
6. Ask pupils to focus on the vowel sound in *bed*. Ask them to find eight more words in the song with this sound. (Answers: ate, bread, went, then, telephone, friend, end, read) Point out that *ate* may be pronounced like the number *eight* or as /et/. The past tense of *read* is spelt the same but pronounced like the colour *red*³.
7. Mix up the pictures of the pupils and play the song again, asking the pupils to arrange the pictures in the right sequence.
8. Arrange the lines of the song in the correct order. Then listen to the song again to check:

Then I rode my bicycle in the swimming pool
I came home this evening and watched the radio
Then I ate a cup of tea and drank a slice of bread
Someone broke the telephone so then I rang my friend
I woke up this morning and I got into bed
I lay down on the ceiling and read a video
I went to the bus stop
And caught the train to school
We went to the football field and swam from end to end
Then I rode my bicycle in the swimming pool
I came home this evening and watched the radio

²Hancock, 1998, p. 34.

³Hancock, 1998, p. 35.

Then I ate a cup of tea and drank a slice of bread
 Someone broke the telephone so then I rang my friend
 I woke up this morning and I got into bed
 I lay down on the ceiling and read a video
 I went to the bus stop
 And caught the train to school
 We went to the football field and swam from end to end.

9. Find the Past Tense of the following verbs in the chart that follows:
 swim, go, ring, break, come, watch, lie, read, catch, ride, drink, wake, get, eat.

a	t	e	d	r	a	n	к	b	c
g	o	t	r	c	a	m	e	r	a
s	w	l	a	r	e	a	d	o	u
w	e	a	n	r	o	d	e	к	g
a	n	y	g	w	o	к	e	e	h
m	t	w	a	t	c	h	e	d	t

10. Complete these sentences with the verbs you found in the previous exercise:

1. You didn't _____ into bed, you _____ out of bed!
2. You didn't _____ a slice of bread, you _____ a cup of tea!
3. You didn't _____ a cup of tea, you _____ a slice of bread!
4. You didn't _____ the train to school, you _____ the bus to school!
5. You didn't _____ your bike in the swimming pool, you _____ park!

11. Write two more similar sentences to complete the song.

The use of poems during the lessons of English has approximately the same value as songs. They have not only cultural linguistic value as well. The advantage of using the poems is the opportunity it has in teaching the rhythm, rhyme, word stress and sentence stress. Short poems are good as warming-up exercises. We would like to introduce you to the following poem, provided by the teacher of English from Russia, Deviatkina Tatiana⁴. It is a nice combination of the three forms of the verbs which are nicely rhyming with funny statements in Russian, containing the same verb in the Russian part. It provides the students the opportunity to remember the meaning of the English verbs and to make some associations for better acquisition of the forms of Irregular verbs at the early stages of learning these forms. Here they go:

- (1) To go - went - gone: Все пошли мы на приём.
 To have - had - had: Съели вкусный там обед.
 To get - got - got: Удовольствия на год.
 To come - came - come: Приходите в гости к нам.
 To do - did - done: Очень рады будем вам.
- (2) Забияки - fight - fought - fought - Их никто не разведёт.
 Уже оба - weep - wept - wept, - Воспитатель- sleep - slept - slept.
 Я в буфете - buy - bought - bought - Первокласный бутерброд.
 За него я - pay - paid - paid - В классе в парту - lay - laid - laid,
 И совсем не - think - thought - thought - Что сосед его умнёт.
- (3) Я кирпичик - throw - threw - thrown.

⁴<http://www.probelov.net/lesson/1926-v-pomoshh-v-zubrezhke-nepravilnykh-glagolov.html>

Он в окошко fly - flew - flown.
Меня дядя - catch - caught - caught.
К маме с папой - bring - brought - brought.

- (4) I've found a kitten: To - write - wrote - written.
I've seen a bird: To hear - heard - heard.
I've made my bed: To read - read - read.
I've eaten a bun: To run - ran - run.

Another good material for teaching irregular verbs for advanced students are the quotations and proverbs. We have selected a number of quotations that contain irregular verbs and its forms after which follow exercises for their use:

Quotations:

1. Houses are built to live in, and not to look on. (F. Bacon)
2. A successful marriage is an edifice that must be *rebuilt* every day. (A. Maurois)
3. Difficulties are *meant* to rouse, not to discourage. (W. Channing)
4. If many men *knew* what many men knew,
If many men *went* where many men go,
If many men *did* what many men do,
The world would be better - I think so, don't you? (Unknown)
5. A distinctive feature of a good school is to make the student learn more than he is *taught*, even more than the teacher himself knows. (M. Eminescu)
6. The world was *made* to be inhabited by beasts, but studied and contemplated by man. (Sir Thomas Browne)
7. The creation *was* an act of mercy. (W. Blake)
8. No-one shall be *held* in slavery; slavery and the slave trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. (Article 8. *Vienna declaration*)
9. All that we do is *done* with an eye to something else. (Aristotle)
10. Man has *gone* long enough, or even too long, without being man enough to face the simple truth that the trouble with man is Man. (J. Thurber).

Proverbs:

1. To be *born* with a silver spoon in one's mouth. (*Родиться в рубашке (сорочке).*)
2. A *broken* friendship may be soldered, but will never be sound. (*Замирённый друг ненадежен.*)
3. The mountain has *brought* forth a mouse. (*Мучилась гора родами, да родила мышь. Из пустяков да много шуму.*)
4. Rome *was* not *built* in a day. (*Москва не сразу строилась.*)
5. Well begun is half *done*. (*Хорошее начало полдела откачало.*)
6. What is *done* by night appears by day. (*Шила в мешке не утаишь.*)
7. What is *done* cannot be undone. (*Сделанного не воротишь.*)
8. Do as you would be *done* by. (*Поступай с другими так, как ты бы хотел, чтобы они поступали с тобой.*)
9. Self *done* is soon *done*. (*Скоро делается то, что делается своими руками.*)
10. If you want a thing well *done*, do it yourself. (*Свой глаз - алмаз.*)
11. Lost time is never *found* again. (*Потерянного времени никогда не воротишь.*)
12. If God had meant us to fly he'd have *given* us wings. (*Рождённый ползать летать не может.*)
13. Ill-*gotten*, ill-*spent*. (*Чужое добро впрок не идет.*)
14. A man is *known* by the company he keeps. (*Скажи мне, кто твой друг, и я скажу тебе, кто ты. С кем хлеб-соль водишь, на того и походишь.*)
15. A bird may be *known* by its song. (*Видна птица по полёту.*)
16. A friend is never *known* till needed. (*Неиспытанный друг ненадежен. Без беды друга не узнаешь.*)
17. Soon *learnt*, soon *forgotten*. (*Выученное наспех быстро забывается.*)
18. A good deed is never *lost*. (*Доброе дело без награды не остается. Добро всегда вспомнется. За доброе дело жди похвалы смело. Доброе добром поминают.*)
19. A good name is sooner *lost* than won. (*Слава приходит золотниками, а уходит пудами.*)
20. We know not what is good until we have *lost* it. (*Цену вещи узнаешь, когда потеряешь. Что имеем, не храним, потерявши, плачем.*)

Exercise 1: Read the proverbs (quotations) and select the irregular verbs in the forms they are presented in each statement.

Exercises 2: Comment on: What grammatical structure does it belong to? How is it formed?

Exercise 3: Make up similar sentences using the same structure.

The variety of techniques will promote interest and motivate the learners to revise again and again the three forms of irregular verbs at the lesson of English.

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