

ChatGPT: ELT Uses for Vocabulary and Grammar

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Admittedly, ChatGPT has emerged as quite a promising tool for generating educational content. Nonetheless, the outputs produced must be carefully fine-tuned by teachers of English as a foreign language, especially at tertiary level, where syllabi can be strictly constrained by extremely specific topic and scope limitations. This article looks at some of the potential uses of ChatGPT in ELT, with a special focus on vocabulary and grammar. By inputting detailed prompts and analysing ChatGPT-generated responses, the author evaluates its capabilities for assisting both teachers and students. The examples elicited are critically examined in terms of clarity, relevance and accuracy, with due attention to both their strengths and weaknesses. The author concludes with a few practical recommendations for integrating ChatGPT into ELT, highlighting its role as a supportive resource rather than a standalone solution, i.e. reinforcing the idea that ChatGPT may be considered a means to an end (a tool), rather than an end in itself (an independent output as such).

ChatGPT; ELT; grammar; prompt; vocabulary.

1. Introduction

Since its release to the public at large in November 2022, ChatGPT has certainly come a long way (c.f. version 4o). While still fraught with controversy, mainly engendered by lack of regulation and moral reasons – c.f. the issue of ‘plagiarism’ or the perceived threat to employment in certain professional areas – ChatGPT can still be considered a teaching and learning tool, albeit in its infancy. However, enough time has passed for its users, myself included, to have been able to explore its current capabilities in detail and arrive at informed conclusions about its possible uses in the classroom – in this case, foreign language instruction.

The premises underlying the use of ChatGPT as a teaching / learning tool – as far as this review is concerned – are exclusively *pragmatic*. At the risk of oversimplification, I would consider ChatGPT *a non-human text generator trained on human-generated text*. ChatGPT-generated text can be used in 2 ways: *either* (A) *directly*, as the desired output *per se* (= a finished product), *or* (B) *indirectly*, as raw input towards the desired output (= a tool). ChatGPT can be useful for: (1) language teachers (course design, materials, tests); (2) language learners (guided practice, reference, examples). Moral implications, like the possibility of cheating in exams, are *not* the object of this review.

This article sets out to examine a number of ways in which ChatGPT can be put to optimal use in ELT, either by teachers or students, based on *very specific prompts* covering two main language areas: vocabulary and grammar. For enhanced readability, I have used a simplified and unitary structure throughout: each example is adequately signposted for clear focus and contains a prompt followed by a ChatGPT-generated response and a comment on the quality of the response provided. The ChatGPT-generated responses are discussed in terms of the suitability, relevance and exactness expected. The series of examples is followed by conclusions intended as a brief guide to teachers and students of English as a foreign language.

Example 1: vocabulary > topic presentation

Prompt: “(Write) a text of up to 200 words, in British English, explaining BUSINESS TRAVEL; include the most typical and frequent language used to talk about this topic.”

ChatGPT response:

Business travel refers to journeys undertaken by individuals for work-related purposes, such as meetings, conferences, or client visits. It plays a crucial role in facilitating communication, networking, and business growth on a global scale.

One of the most common reasons for business travel is attending meetings or conferences, where professionals gather to exchange ideas, discuss industry trends, and explore potential collaborations. These events provide opportunities for networking, establishing partnerships, and gaining insights into market developments.

Client visits are another important aspect of business travel, allowing companies to maintain relationships with existing clients and cultivate new ones. Face-to-face interactions build trust, enhance communication, and strengthen business connections, ultimately contributing to long-term success.

Business travel often involves booking flights, accommodations, transportation, and managing itineraries. Travel expenses are typically reimbursed by the employer, and employees may use corporate travel cards or expense management systems to streamline the process.

While business travel offers opportunities for professional development and business growth, it can also be physically and emotionally demanding. Jet lag, long hours, and time away from family can take a toll on travellers. Therefore, effective planning, organization, and prioritization are essential to ensure productive and enjoyable business trips.

Comment: A perfectly usable text of 194 words was generated in terms of length, relevance, clarity, substance and quality of language. The text is perfectly usable as an introduction to the topic, also featuring high-frequency words and phrases adequately contextualised.

Example 2: vocabulary > general topic language

Prompt: “(Give me) 10 example sentences of typical and frequent language usage to talk about the topic of **MARKETING AND ADVERTISING**, in British English. Include collocations, idioms and phrasal verbs.”

ChatGPT response:

Our marketing team is brainstorming ideas for the new advertising campaign.

The company's latest TV commercial has really caught the public's attention.

We need to target a younger demographic with our social media marketing efforts.

The billboard placement in the city centre is generating a lot of buzz.

Our goal is to create a compelling brand story that resonates with our audience.

We're considering partnering with influencers to increase brand visibility.

The product launch was a huge success, thanks to our strategic marketing plan.

We need to refine our messaging to ensure it aligns with our brand values.

The email marketing campaign resulted in a significant increase in website traffic.

Our marketing budget allows for flexibility in trying out different advertising channels.

Comment: All 10 sentences required are relevant to the prompt. The language used is typical and natural, including a substantial number of lexical items, as required.

Example 3: vocabulary > specific topic language

Prompt: “(Give me) 1 example sentence for each of the following expressions to illustrate typical and frequent usage relevant to the topic of FINANCE AND BANKING, in British English: TO WRITE A CHEQUE FOR £300, TO MAKE OUT A CHEQUE TO SOMEONE, TO GO BUST, TO BE STRAPPED FOR CASH, TO GO BANKRUPT, TO GO TO THE WALL, TO BE ON THE BRINK OF BANKRUPTCY, TO TAKE OUT A LOAN, TO TAKE OUT INSURANCE, TO PAY OFF ONE’S DEBTS.”

ChatGPT response:

I need to WRITE A CHEQUE FOR £300 to pay my monthly rent.

Can you MAKE OUT A CHEQUE TO SOMEONE for the contractor who completed the renovations?

The company's financial mismanagement caused it to GO BUST last year.

After the unexpected expenses, I'm STRAPPED FOR CASH until my next paycheck.

The business's failure to adapt to changing market conditions led it to GO BANKRUPT.

Despite efforts to turn the business around, it eventually WENT TO THE WALL.

The company is ON THE BRINK OF BANKRUPTCY after months of declining revenue.

I had to TAKE OUT A LOAN to cover the cost of my daughter's tuition fees.

It's essential to TAKE OUT INSURANCE to protect your home and belongings.

With careful budgeting, I managed to PAY OFF MY DEBTS within a year.

Comment: All the expressions are accounted for in the 10 examples provided. They are also capitalised, as featured in the prompt; however, although the prompt expressly specifies 'British English' as one of the requirements, an American spelling is included in one of the sentences (c.f. 'paycheck'): "*After the unexpected expenses, I'm STRAPPED FOR CASH until my next paycheck.*"

Example 4: vocabulary > confusables

Prompt: "Explain and illustrate the differences between the words (and their usage) in the following pairs, in example sentences, in British English: ECONOMIC / ECONOMICAL; HISTORIC / HISTORICAL; LITTLE / FEW."

ChatGPT response:

ECONOMIC / ECONOMICAL:

ECONOMIC refers to matters relating to the economy or financial system.

Example: The government implemented new economic policies to stimulate growth.

ECONOMICAL means using resources efficiently to avoid waste or save money.

Example: Buying in bulk is a more economical way to shop for groceries.

HISTORIC / HISTORICAL:

HISTORIC refers to something significant or important in history.

Example: The signing of the treaty was a historic moment for diplomatic relations.

HISTORICAL pertains to events, people, or things that belong to or occurred in the past.

Example: The museum houses a collection of historical artifacts dating back to ancient times.

LITTLE / FEW:

LITTLE is used with uncountable nouns to indicate a small amount or quantity.

Example: There is little milk left in the fridge.

FEW is used with countable nouns to indicate a small number of people or things.

Example: There are few seats available for the concert.

Comment: The response generated is short and to the point. Each confusable word is briefly explained, then illustrated in a sample usage sentence. However, with 'LITTLE / FEW', more information would have been desirable, i.e. while 'LITTLE' and 'FEW' are used for negative ideas, 'A LITTLE' and 'A FEW' are used for positive ideas. ChatGPT seems to have focused solely / mechanically on the specifics in the prompt. The explanations should have been elaborated on, with the examples preserved as given.

Example 5: vocabulary > key words and phrases in a single text

Prompt: "(Write) a cohesive and coherent text of up to 200 words, in British English, incorporating all the following words and expressions (CAPITALISE these words and expressions in the text): ECONOMIC; FUEL; COMPANY'S HEADQUARTERS; TO AXE JOBS; MADE HIM REDUNDANT."

ChatGPT response:

The ECONOMIC downturn has forced many companies to reassess their operations, including our own. As a result, the decision was made at the COMPANY'S HEADQUARTERS to AXE JOBS in certain departments. Unfortunately, John, a long-time employee, was among those affected. He was informed by his manager that the company had no choice but to MAKE HIM REDUNDANT due to financial constraints.

John had been a loyal and dedicated employee for over a decade, so the news came as a shock. He felt a mix of emotions, ranging from disbelief to anger and uncertainty about his future. Losing his job meant more than just a loss of income; it also meant losing a sense of stability and identity.

Despite the setback, John remained determined to bounce back. He decided to use his redundancy as an opportunity to explore new career paths and enhance his skills. With the support of his family and friends, he began to search for new opportunities in industries less susceptible to economic fluctuations, such as renewable energy or healthcare. John knew that the road ahead would be challenging, but he was determined to turn this setback into a stepping stone towards a brighter future.

Comment: The text provided as an answer (197 words) contains 3 paragraphs. While the text is cohesive and coherent as a whole, the words and phrases specified are all crammed into the first paragraph, with 'fuel' unaccounted for. Additionally, while the required 'to axe jobs' is included in the original form, the required 'made him redundant' appears as 'make him redundant' in the generated text. This *also* indicates that ChatGPT may 'have its own mind' (or ignore prompt specifics), especially if restrictions are *not extremely clearly* set.

Example 6: grammar > illustrating single tense usage based on a topic

Prompt: “(Give me) 10 example sentences to illustrate the use of PRESENT PERFECT in British English as relevant to the topic of RECRUITMENT / EMPLOYMENT; in the sentences, capitalise the tense forms required.”

ChatGPT response:

The HR department HAS RECEIVED numerous applications for the vacant position.

We HAVE INTERVIEWED several candidates for the sales manager role.

The company HAS HIRED a new marketing director to lead the upcoming campaign.

Sarah HAS WORKED AT the company for five years, demonstrating her commitment and loyalty.

The recruitment team HAS CONDUCTED extensive background checks on the shortlisted candidates.

John HAS JUST BEEN PROMOTED to the position of senior project manager.

Our CEO HAS ANNOUNCED plans to expand the team to accommodate the company's growth.

The training department HAS ORGANIZED a series of workshops to enhance employees' skills.

We HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED positive feedback from the new recruits about their onboarding experience.

The human resources manager HAS UPDATED the employee handbook to reflect recent policy changes.

Comment: The sample sentences are concise and to the point, featuring an extensive range of topic-based lexis.

Example 7: grammar > illustrating multiple tense usage based on a topic

Prompt: “(Write) a coherent and cohesive text / story to illustrate the usage of the PAST TENSE SIMPLE, PAST PERFECT SIMPLE and PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS as used

within a context referring to BANKING; in the sentences, capitalise the tense forms required.”

ChatGPT response:

Mark had been working as a bank manager for ten years before he decided to pursue a new career path. He reminisced about his time at the bank and the challenges he had faced. One particular incident stood out in his memory.

Several years ago, a client had approached Mark with a complex financial issue. The client's account had been compromised, and significant funds had been fraudulently withdrawn. Mark immediately contacted the authorities and initiated an investigation. By the time the fraud was discovered, the perpetrator had already disappeared.

Mark had felt immense pressure to resolve the situation quickly and restore the client's trust. He worked tirelessly with the bank's security team and law enforcement to track down the criminal. Despite facing numerous obstacles, Mark remained determined to find a resolution.

After weeks of investigation, the authorities finally apprehended the culprit. Mark felt a sense of relief knowing that justice had been served. He had learned valuable lessons from the experience, including the importance of vigilance and proactive measures to prevent fraud.

Looking back on that challenging time, Mark realized how much he had grown professionally. The incident had tested his skills and resilience, ultimately shaping him into a more capable and vigilant banker. As he moved forward in his career, Mark carried the lessons learned from that experience with him, always striving to protect the interests of his clients and uphold the integrity of the banking industry.

Comment: Cohesion and coherence are excellently accounted for in the format of a *story*. Nonetheless, past perfect continuous is featured just once (in the introductory paragraph) – some of the details could have been left out and 2-3 more usage examples for the past perfect continuous should have been included, for balance (admittedly, the past perfect continuous is a rarely used tense in English).

Example 8: grammar > explaining and illustrating usage

Prompt: “What is the difference between the future with WILL and GOING TO? Are there any other ways of expressing the future? If so, explain them with sentence examples in British English.”

ChatGPT response:

The future tense in English can be expressed using "will" and "going to," each with its own nuances. Additionally, there are other ways of expressing the future.

Let's break them down:

Will:

Used to express spontaneous decisions or actions made at the moment of speaking.

Often used for predictions or promises.

Example: "I will call you as soon as I arrive home." (Promise)

Going to:

Used to express intentions or plans that have already been made.

Often used for future events based on present evidence or intentions.

Example: "I am going to visit my parents next weekend." (Intention)

Present Continuous:

Used for future arrangements or plans that are already confirmed.

Example: "She is meeting her clients tomorrow morning."

Future Continuous:

Used to describe an action that will be ongoing at a specific future time.

Example: "This time next week, I will be attending a conference."

Future Perfect:

Used to express an action that will be completed before a certain time in the future.

Example: "By the time you arrive, I will have finished my presentation."

Future Perfect Continuous:

Used to emphasize the duration of an action that will be ongoing before a certain time in the future.

Example: "By next month, I will have been working on this project for two years."

These different forms of expressing the future allow speakers to convey various shades of meaning and certainty about upcoming events or actions.

Comment: The response covers the basics but is incomplete: there is no mention of the present simple as used for fixed events in the future, timetables etc.; example sentences are *not* given for all the uses mentioned in the explanations – c.f. ‘will’ and ‘going to’.

Example 9: grammar > explaining and illustrating usage based on a topic

Prompt: “How frequent is the PAST SIMPLE in comparison with the PAST PERFECT? Explain and illustrate with a text or sentences in British English. The text you provide as an example must be relevant to the topic of MANAGEMENT.”

ChatGPT response:

In British English, the past simple tense is generally more frequently used than the past perfect tense in everyday communication. The past simple is used to describe actions or events that occurred at a specific point in the past, while the past perfect is used to indicate actions that occurred before another past action.

Here's an example illustrating the use of both tenses in the context of management:

Past Simple:

"Last week, the management team conducted a performance review of the staff members. They assessed each employee's performance based on their productivity, teamwork, and contribution to the company's goals. During the meeting, the managers discussed areas for improvement and set targets for the upcoming quarter."

Past Perfect:

"By the time the management team convened for the performance review, the HR department had already collected feedback from supervisors and peers. They had

also analyzed past performance data to identify trends and areas of concern. This preparation allowed the team to make informed decisions during the review meeting."

In this example, the past simple tense ("conducted," "assessed," "discussed") is used to narrate the actions that occurred during the performance review meeting. On the other hand, the past perfect tense ("had already collected," "had analyzed") is used to describe actions that occurred before the specific point in the past represented by the meeting.

Comment: The response provided meets all expectations – the grammar explanations are perfectly clear, with pertinently contextualised lexis referring to the topic in question.

2. Conclusion

ChatGPT does have a great potential to be a highly valuable tool in ELT, in that it can generate explanations and usage examples on a wide range of vocabulary and grammar topics, which can greatly support language teaching and learning (course / task design or self-study management). Nevertheless, ChatGPT is not without its limitations. Teachers will still play a crucial role in guiding and refining such AI-generated outputs in order to ensure quality, relevance and contextual appropriateness; ChatGPT can *omit* / *ignore* requirements / items or simply, it can be *inexact*.

Additionally, students should be encouraged to use ChatGPT under the supervision and guidance of teachers so as to avoid over-reliance on what should be considered *a tool* and *not a substitute* for language learning itself. ChatGPT should not be approached mechanically, as a provider of ultimate answers, but as a flexible resource in aid of language learning. ChatGPT is *an instrument* apt to *enhance* human teaching but *not replace* it – the structured guidance of a *human* language expert cannot be underestimated in such a new educational context.

References

OpenAI. (n.d.). Retrieved from
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