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Using concordance lines to teach participial adjectives

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Level(s): Elementary

Aims

- Develop students' ability to distinguish between participial adjective meanings
- Develop students' knowledge of lexicogrammar
- Improve students' ability to identify derivational morphemes that change the meaning of words

Class time: 30 minutes

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Resources: Printed lists of relevant concordance lines

Introduction

Students are sometimes confused about the difference between participial adjective pairs like *boring* vs. *bored*, *interesting* vs. *interested* and *exciting* vs. *excited*. Although both words in these pairs have similar meanings, they are used differently, which can lead to confusion and awkwardness.

Both parts of these pairs are often used to describe feelings. Typically, the *-ing* form describes the cause and the *-ed* form describes the effect, so one would say that "surprising news makes one feel surprised". While it is easy to describe these adjectives in theory, their practical use can be difficult.

Asking students to differentiate these forms by using concordance lines should help their production of such adjectives. In addition, the activity can also increase students' metalinguistic awareness of derivational morphology by seeing how the verb *bore*, for example, can become the adjectives *boring* and *bored*.

Steps

1. Ask students to define *boring* and *bored* and to provide simple example sentences.
2. Using the whiteboard, make two lists of any common elements and differences in their definitions and examples. The lists could focus on associated subjects, modifiers or verbs ("She feels bored.", "The film looks boring.", etc.), which should draw students' attention to some initial collocations (e.g. in the British National Corpus, *bored* is used with *I*, *get* and *be* while *boring* collocates with *bit*, *job* and *pretty*). Try to elicit answers that indicate that *boring* is used for causes of emotions while *bored* indicates the emotional effect.
3. Distribute a previously prepared list of concordance lines for the adjectives *boring* and *bored*, such as these examples from the British National Corpus, that contain both attributive adjectives ("That is a very boring ambition." / "Bored kids are fed up with the long summer holiday.") and predicative adjectives ("Award ceremonies are boring." / "She's now getting extremely bored with that job."). (Additional examples are listed in the support materials for this lesson.) To simplify the lesson, avoid the inclusion of any instances where these words do not function as adjectives (i.e. *boring* as part of a present progressive verb phrase and *bored* as the past simple of *bore*). For a more difficult lesson, leave these forms in to increase the complexity of the exercise.

4. Ask students to read the lines and identify who or what is being described as *boring* or *bored*.
5. Make lists of the *boring* and *bored* people and things on the board.
6. Ask students to categorise the things into word classes. To simplify the lesson, provide students with word classes: nouns, pronouns and so on.
7. The *boring* list will likely include non-human common nouns – both concrete (e.g. *boring statistics*) and abstract (e.g. *boring ambition*). The *bored* list will likely be made up primarily of humans – whether common nouns (e.g. *bored kids*) or pronouns (e.g. *She's now getting extremely bored.*)
8. Ask students to identify any outliers that do not match the usual pattern and explain them. For example, while it is possible to describe people as *boring*, it is often rude. However, they may note that people are not afraid to describe themselves and their own actions as *boring* (e.g. *Sorry, my speech was a bit boring.*).
9. Encourage students to engage in personalised language practice. They could talk or write about things that bore them, then use *interesting* and *interested* to extend their discussions.

Points for consideration and alternative steps

- Depending on students' English language proficiency, some of the steps could be conducted in their first language (e.g. the request for definitions in Step 1).
- The class time for this activity will be longer at first, as students will need to learn how to read concordance lines. As students become familiar with the activity, they should be able to analyse the lines more quickly.
- The activity could be extended by presenting words with the same form, but different functions, then asking students to distinguish the functions based on concordance lines. For example, show concordance lines for *painting*, then ask students to distinguish between present continuous ("Now that we're painting..."), common nouns ("One remarkable painting shows...") and gerunds ("Painting a fence is...").
- For a follow-up activity, ask students to search an online corpus in class or at home to see if the same patterns hold true for other similar pairs: *disappointing* vs. *disappointed*, *shocking* vs. *shocked*, and so on.
- The British National Corpus is easily accessible at <https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/>.
- A useful list of participial adjectives is available from the British Council at <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/quick-grammar/adjectives-ending-ed-and-ing>.

Online support materials

Boring

1 a movie star. That is a very boring ambition. I just would like
2 ours too long and was full of boring statistics and graphics.' Th
3 h design, except perhaps in a boring and unread appendix, but in
4 train journeys are often very boring and tiresome, especially if
5 erything.' Mostly, it is very boring here. We try to play togethe
6 alzany:' Award ceremonies are boring. We wanted to liven things u

Bored

1 liday's too long for kids # BORED kids are fed up with the l
2 nd in particular, to occupy bored young people. It was this
3 easant and ever-so-slightly bored horse, but she also has lo
4 Thursday and Friday. He got bored silly and considered it a
5 five years, admits:' I was bored with being told to smile a
6 She's now getting extremely bored with that job. It's fairly