



Professional Development Programme on
Effective Strategies for Teaching Grammar in the
Primary English Classroom

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Workshop objectives...

- To let participants reflect on their current grammar teaching practices, and on the needs of the primary learners in their respective contexts
- To introduce to participants various grammar teaching approaches and how they can be integrated to suit the needs of the students in primary classroom context through demonstrating sample tasks
- To make participants aware of how grammar is realised at the text level and the corresponding pedagogic implications

Warm-up Discussion

What is grammar?

Please join the assigned breakout room and share your definition of 'grammar' with your group members.

Cambridge Grammar of English

What is grammar?

“Grammar is concerned with **how sentences and utterance are formed**. In a typical English sentence, we can see the two most basic principles of grammar, the arrangement of items (**syntax**) and the structure of items (**morphology**).”
(Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p.2)

I gave my sister
a sweater for
her birthday.

Principles/rules of grammar:

- Syntax – How the words are arranged enable us to interpret what the sentence means.
 - *I* who gave the sweater, not *my sister* as I came before the verb.
- Morphology – concerned with the structure of words and phrases.
 - *gave* not *give* as it happened in the past.
 - *Sweater* not *sweaters* as only one.
 - *I* not *me, mine, or my* as in the subject position.
- Text grammar – concerned with the text type and the text in which this sentence is found, and its relationship with other sentences in the same text.

Metaphor of Grammar



Grammar is the *glue* that holds language together.



Grammar is the *engine* that drives language.



Grammar is a *map* of the language.



Grammar is the *pieces of a jigsaw puzzle*.



Grammar is the *instruction manual* of language.

Should we teach young learners grammar at all? Yes? No? Maybe?

- “it seems increasingly likely that paying attention to grammatical features of a language is not something that happens automatically in communication, and that therefore some **artificial methods of pushing attention are needed, i.e. teaching**” (Cameron, 2001, p.101)
- So if we should teach grammar, what do we need to consider and how do we do it?

Natural cognitive processes in grammar acquisition (e.g. as in mastering L1 grammar)

- Children are **exposed** to meaningful language that is fully contextualised in discourse.
- They **notice** language patterns and how they are used.
- They **hypothesise** about the 'rules' and the system of language.
- They use language meaningfully and in the process they **structure and restructure** their internal grammar.
- Eventually the language patterns become **automatised**, i.e. they are used accurately and appropriate with little conscious thinking or planning.

Implications of this for our classroom practice

1. Provide opportunities for learners to be exposed (**exposure**) to grammar in meaningful contexts.
2. Guide students to **notice** patterns and help students infer rules or **hypothesise**.
3. Provide activities that can guide students to use language and provide opportunities for **structuring** and **(re)structuring**.
4. Provide opportunities for students to produce grammar to express meaning in authentic discourse.


Exposure:

Texts as authentic exposure are

- contextualised in the social world
- reflect **natural** use of grammar
- have varied **social purposes** (text types/genres)
- should be **age-appropriate** and have **interest-value**
- should elicit **meaningful and natural interaction** with the text

Activity 1: Exposure to Authentic Texts/Grammar

- Think of a recipe as a procedural text:
 - What are the social and communicative purposes of a recipe? – Why do people write and read recipes?
 - What content do you expect to find? How might it be organised?
 - What grammatical features might you find? **What are the links between the grammar and the social and communicative function?**
 - What vocabulary might you find?



Let's look at an authentic example of recipes. What do you think of it? Does it meet our expectations?

Analyse the key grammatical features:

- What are the links between grammar and the social and communicative functions?
- If you were to use this recipe to show grammar in context, which feature(s) might you choose to focus on and help learners notice? Why?

Grammar analysis

Workbook example

- No clear social purpose here (Help mum with steps?)
- Grammar features
 - Adverbs of sequence/ connecting adverbs (First, then)
 - Determiner – ‘some’
 - Imperatives – heat, put, cut
 - Conjunction ‘and’
 - Pronouns – ‘it’
 - Preposition ‘into’
 - Adverbs – ‘out’ ‘after’
- Vocabulary
 - Verbs showing action – heat / wash
 - Food Nouns – butter / sugar / apple
 - Utensils – bowl/ oven
 - Specific words – mixture

Authentic example

- Social and communicative purpose – clear and precise procedures on how to make pancakes
- Grammar features
 - Adverbs of sequence / connecting adverbs, ‘then’
 - Imperatives, ‘sift’, ‘pour’
 - Conjunctions, ‘when’ ‘and’ or ‘but’
 - 2nd person pronouns, ‘you’ ‘your’
 - Auxiliary verb ‘will’
 - Use of commas
 - Quantifiers – knob of / lashings of
 - Abbreviations – tbsp, tsp, g, oz
- Vocabulary
 - Adjectives – large
 - Food words – milk, flour, caster sugar, baking powder
 - Specific cooking words – batter, mixture

Implications for learning and teaching grammar

- Grammar is a tool for expressing **meaning**.
- Grammatical features in texts are intimately connected to the **social function and communicative purpose of the text**.
- Textbook texts are often contrived in the following ways:
 - Social context and purpose of the text are lacking.
 - Content and organisation may not be typical.
 - Language used is over-simplified, aiming to exemplify one particular structure.

Implications for learning and teaching grammar

- Teachers need to critically analyse textbook texts and their grammar treatment, and compare them with authentic examples.
- Teachers can encourage students to **notice and hypothesise about** language used in authentic texts, based on their understanding of the meaning of those texts.

Implications of this for our classroom practice

1. Provide opportunities for learners to be exposed (**exposure**) to grammar in meaningful contexts.
2. **Guide students to notice patterns and help students infer rules or hypothesise.**
3. Provide activities that can guide students to use language and provide opportunities for **structuring** and **(re)structuring**.
1. Provide opportunities for students to produce grammar to express meaning in authentic discourse.

Features of good 'noticing' activities

- The grammatical feature has already been encountered in discourse, and responded to meaningfully.
- The noticing activity draws from students' **discourse experience**.
- It helps learners isolate the feature for focused attention.
- It requires active participation (and thus attention) by the learners.
- It makes the learners **think about both form and meaning**.
- It requires thinking and reasoning; cognitive processing and construction of understanding.
- It is at a level of detail appropriate to the learners.
- The learners notice: **they do not use or produce the language**.

(based on Batstone,1994, and Cameron 2001)

- Noticing **for** the learner
- Learners are presented with explicitly formulated information about forms and their functions often in a decontextualised way.

• Teacher centered, transmission oriented



- Noticing **by/with** the learner
- Learners are guided to pay attention to and work out for themselves information about forms and their functions **IN CONTEXT**.

• Student-centered, discovery oriented

(based on Batstone, 1994)

Noticing and hypothesising processes in textbooks: *for* or *by/with* the learner?

An example chosen from a textbook

What are the problems with this approach?

- Students don't have to be engaged with or pay much attention to the grammar point.
- They don't have to think deeply (cognitive depth).

Noticing and hypothesising

- If we use the authentic recipe in Activity 1 to show grammar in context, which language features / patterns might we guide students to notice and help them infer rules or hypothesise? Why?

Language features / patterns might you guide students to **notice** and help them infer rules or **hypothesise**

1. Use of imperatives

e.g. **Peel** and remove seeds from the pumpkin and cut into small cubes.

e.g. **Pour** the milk mixture...

2. Use of quantifiers

2 tbsp / 130ml / ½ tsp / 2 tablespoons

3. Use of the conjunction – when

e.g. **When** melted, add the pumpkin and the cream.

e.g. **When** it's melted, add a ladle of batter.



Activity 2: A grammar noticing activity

- Look at this activity. Which grammar point is focused on?
- How does it help learners notice the meaning and form of the grammar focus in context?
- How does the social purpose of the text impact on this grammar focus?
How could you make learners aware of this?

In promoting noticing for beginners and younger learners...

- We may need to simplify the grammar (and even vocabulary) for learners at the beginning stages—**But still ensure a level of authenticity!** (i.e. authentic Vs authentic-like texts)
- Children will only have partial understanding.
- We should help them **'notice' regularities and patterns** and let them **'grow their own grammar' – this is called 'consciousness-raising'**.
- We do this through tasks and games – rules of the language are ***gradually*** raised. (Nunan, 2005)
- If we do it too fast, we will kill motivation!

Hypothesising

Principle: *By and with the learner*, i.e. involving students **to form their own grammar rules** actively

Strategies:

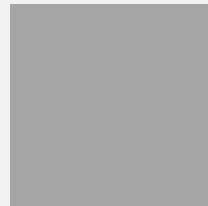
- **Highlight grammatical form** on the board through tabulation, colour coding, arrows, etc.,
- Check understanding of concepts through **concept questions** (yes/no, short answer), eliciting further examples, applying the rule to a few examples
 - NB: Asking students to correct wrong examples is also a strategy for checking concepts, but it may confuse students!
- **Avoid complex metalanguage** and explaining the language or providing lengthy grammar 'rules'
- At this point, **written exercises** may be useful (remember the difference between 'a task', 'a communicative activity' and 'an exercise')

Rules by the Learner



Quantifiers
presented in
textbook

What rules
might they
hypothesise?



Quantifiers in an
authentic recipe

What rules
might they
hypothesise?

Implications of this for our classroom practice

1. Provide opportunities for learners to be exposed (**exposure**) to grammar in meaningful contexts.
2. Guide students to **notice** patterns and help students infer rules or **hypothesise**.
3. **Provide activities that can guide students to use language and provide opportunities for **structuring** and **(re)structuring**.**
4. Provide opportunities for students to produce grammar to express meaning in authentic discourse.



What is a Restructuring Activity?



Features of (re)structuring activities

- They require students to **actively use the grammar point** (as opposed to noticing it) to express meaning i.e. form and meaning are interconnected.
- They involve problematising i.e. **giving students choices in content and form** which compel the learner to make selection and adjustments in grammar to express meaning.
- They push students to **'out-perform their competence'** i.e. they are producing or understanding language which is a **notch more complex than what they would normally produce or understand**, and in this way restructure their internal grammar.
- They involve **sufficient scaffolding** i.e. finely tuned support so that students can focus on grammar and meaning.

(adapted from Thornbury, 1999 and Cameron, 2001)

Teaching Grammar

“The purpose of a pedagogic grammar is to provide the learner with useful insights into the language under study.”

(Willis, 1996)

**PRACTICE STAGE
IS CRUCIAL**

Possible restructuring tasks for YLs

- **Game task:**

Children are asked to use the grammar point in a game setting, which will make grammar use fun and spontaneous.

- **Experimental task:**

Children are asked to apply their knowledge of grammar by producing, for instance, a dialogue or written text.

(Lewis and Mol, 2006, p5-6)

Exploring (re)structuring activities

Activity 3:

Instructions for students:

1. Play the card game in groups, as an example of a restructuring activity for 'quantifiers'.
2. Now do the worksheet focusing on 'quantifiers'.

Discuss the quality of language use and practice in the two activities. What are the similarities and differences? Which activity facilitates the process of restructuring?

(Re)structuring activities

- **Importance of context and importance of choice**
- “In actual contexts grammar is not a static object: it is a resource providing us with options from which we choose in order to express our meanings effectively and appropriately.” (Batstone, 1994: 66)

Implications of this for our classroom practice

1. Provide opportunities for learners to be exposed (**exposure**) to grammar in meaningful contexts.
2. Guide students to **notice** patterns and help students infer rules or **hypothesise**.
3. Provide activities that can guide students to use language and provide opportunities for **structuring** and **(re)structuring**.
4. **Provide opportunities for students to produce grammar to express meaning in authentic discourse.**

Authentic use of grammar in discourse

- Once you have provided exposure, noticing, hypothesising and the chance for learners to practise the language in restructuring tasks, you can then give learners the chance to produce grammar in authentic discourse.
- This can be the task in our TBLT curriculum.

The Power of Text Grammar

What is it?

- Teaching grammar **through texts** enables students to see how the **choice of language items** is **affected by the context** and how it **shapes the tone, style and register of a text**. (CDC, 2017, p.68)

Text grammar

Activity 4 (Nine-second reading challenge):

- Read the start of a text below for three seconds. Can you guess what the text type is?
- Now read what comes next in the text for another three seconds. Would you change your mind?
- Read the final part of the text for three final seconds. Your final comment on the text type?

References

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