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 participants to various approaches to grammar instruction in the primary classroom context, like inductive noticing approaches, and how they can be integrated to suit the needs of the students through demonstrating sample tasks; and

- To make participants aware of how grammar is realised at the text level and the corresponding pedagogic implications.

Grammar is…

- 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.

Cambridge Grammar of English

Traditionally "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, pp.2)

I gave my sister a sweater for her birthday.

- 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.

Grammar beyond the sentence

- Today, grammar is still concerned with syntax and morphology at the sentence level, but we also need to consider grammar at the text level as well.

- We can call this 'text grammar' or 'discourse analysis'.

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, pp.68)

- A text grammar is **the study of texts above the level of the sentence**. It shows how texts are put together so as to convey ideas, facts, messages, and fiction. A similar term is discourse analysis. Both are mostly concerned with natural language use; discourse analysis would include spoken language.

- Language and grammar is about making accurate and appropriate choices depending on the context and social purpose.

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, pp.101)

- So if we should teach grammar, what do we need to consider and how do we do it?

Activity 1: Common Grammar Teaching Approaches

- Think about how you might teach the grammar item -'comparatives'.

- How might you start? What activities would you do?

- Take part in the demonstration lesson.

- Does it match your ideas / current teaching approaches?

- What are the pros and cons of this approach?

Worksheet

monkey	tall	elephant
whale	short	dog
giraffe	big	mouse
tiger	small	cat

Write 4 sentences about animals using the comparative adjectives provided:

tall / short / big / small

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

Reflecting on Activity 1

- The demonstration lesson was an example of the deductive approach.

- The deductive approach is rule-driven.

- A rule-driven approach while being systematic, can lack contexts and texts, and this can make it hard for students to make connections between form, meaning and use of grammar.

    i.e. Students may learn how to form a comparative adjective, and be able to put it in a sentence, but may not be sure in which contexts and texts they should use it.

How else can we teach grammar?

Inductive approach is rule-discovery

- The learner studies examples, from these examples derives an understanding of the rules.
  - Similar to how first languages are acquired.
  - Experiential method – best learnt inductively without use of translation.
  - However, there is a spectrum of opinion on the role of the teacher and the level of authenticity or natural language use (e.g. immersion vs systematic intervention such as teaching).

Cognitive processes in the learning of grammar in our L1

- 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 appropriately with little conscious thinking or planning.

Implications of this for our L2 classroom practices

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 hypothesis.

3. Provide activities that can guide students to use language and provide opportunities for structuring and (re)structuring.

4. Provide opportunities for students to apply the rules to express meaning grammatically.

Texts for 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; and
- should elicit meaningful and natural interaction with the text.

Activity 2: Authentic exposure

- Think of a biography.
  - What are the social and communicative purposes of a biography? – Why do people write and read them?
  - What content do you expect to find? How might it be organised?
  - What grammatical features might you find? What vocabulary might you find?

Now, look at these authentic examples of biographies.
What do you think of them?
Do they meet your expectations?
How are they different from one another? Why?

- Analyse the key grammatical features.
  - What are the similarities between the two?
  - What are the links between the grammar and the social and communicative function?
  - If you use these biographies to show grammar in context, which feature might you choose to focus on and help learners notice? Why?

Possible salient grammar to focus on:

Use of different tenses depending on information being presented

Superlative forms

Vocabulary including extreme adjectives

Use of punctuation

Biography A

Subordinate clause before the main clause – highly descriptive

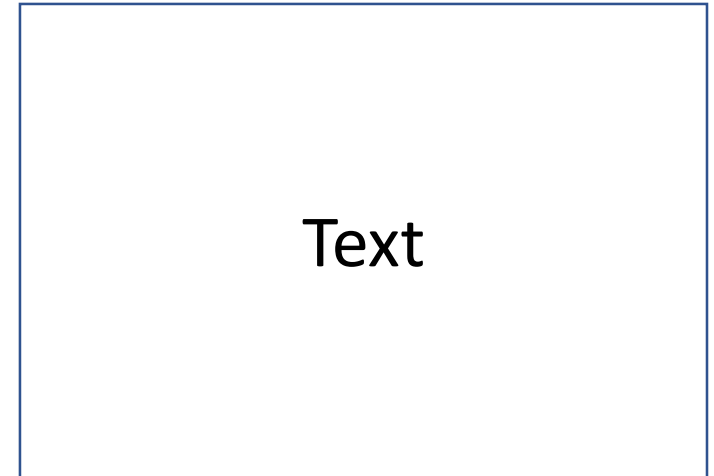**Use of different tenses depending on information being presented**

Biography B

Now look at the example from a textbook.

What do you think of it? Does this meet your expectations?

What features does the text focus on?

Does this match the authentic examples?

Text

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.
- It is important we expose students to texts that make the connection between the social purpose and the grammatical features clearer to students.
- Teachers need to critically analyse textbook texts and their language, and select authentic texts carefully.
- Teachers can encourage students to notice and hypothesise about language used in authentic texts.

Selecting authentic texts

- What criteria might we use?

- Where can we find texts?

Possible Criteria	Authentic texts
Age-appropriacy Interest Difficulty Relevance Availability	Websites School and public libraries In the community

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 hypothesis.**

3. Provide activities that can guide students to use language and provide opportunities for structuring and (re)structuring.

4. Provide opportunities for students to apply the rules to express meaning grammatically.

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 learner.

- It makes learners think about both form and meaning.

- It requires thinking and reasoning; cognitive processing; construction of understanding.

- It is at a level of detail appropriate to the learner.

- 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.

- Teacher centred, transmission oriented

Noticing **by** the learner

- Learners are guided to work out for themselves information about forms and their functions.

- Student-centred, discovery oriented

(based on Batsone, 1994)

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

What are the problems with this approach?
- Students don't have to be engaged or pay much attention.
- They don't have to think deeply (cognitive depth) about the form and meaning.
- They are not given chances to engage with their interlanguage/inner grammar.
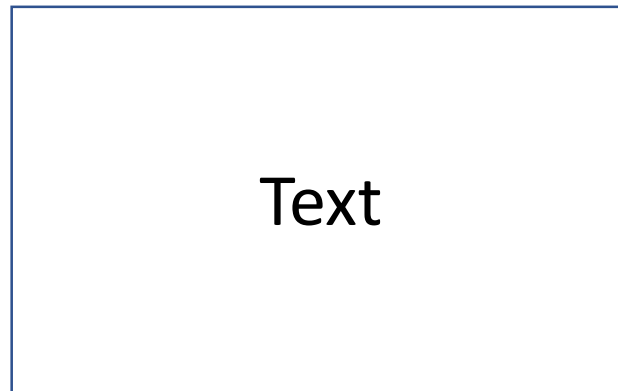
Text

Noticing and hypothesising

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

- What would we want them to know? (Pedagogical rules) Why?

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

1. Use of different tenses depending on information being presented:
- Simple past to show previous achievements
- Simple present to show events that are related to now
- Present perfect to show events to actions that have started in the past and continue to the present

2. Superlative forms to show the extent of achievement

3. Extreme adjectives to show the importance of a person's actions

4. Use of punctuation to provide additional information

5. Subordinate clause before the main clause (Descriptive phrases)

Activity 3: A grammar noticing activity

- Look at this activity.
    - How does it help learners notice the relationship between the use, meaning and form of the grammar?

Typology of activities that promote noticing by the learner
(adapted from Willis and Willis, 1996)

- Reconstructing or deconstructing
    - taking apart or putting back together language in a way which reveals its underlying patterns
- Sorting, classifying or categorising
    - working with a set of data and sorting it according to similarities and differences based on structural or semantic criteria
- Identifying and comparing
    - studying a set of data to identify a particular pattern or usage, including cross language analysis and analysis of errors
- Interpreting
    - identifying the meaning(s) realised by specific grammatical features

In teaching beginners and younger learners…

- We may need to simplify and even oversimplify the grammar for learners in the beginning stages (But still ensure a level of authenticity).

- Children will only have partial understanding.

- We should help them 'notice' regularities and patterns and let them 'grow their own grammar' – this is also 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* the learner, i.e. involving students actively through questions, elicitation and inviting participation.

Strategies:

- Highlight grammatical form on the board through tabulation, colour coding, arrows etc.

- Check understanding of concepts through concept questioning (yes/no, short answer), elicitation of further examples, application of 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'?)

Hypothesising

- How might we help students hypothesise the use of different tenses depending on information being presented?
  - We could ask them to go through another authentic text and find examples of each form.
  - We could give them some key words and ask them to make an accurate sentence in different forms.
- Any other ideas?

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 hypothesis.

3. **Provide activities that can guide students to use language and provide opportunities for structuring and (re)structuring.**

4. Provide opportunities for students to apply the rules to express meaning grammatically.

Features of (re)structuring activities

- They require students to actively use the language (as opposed to noticing it) to express meaning i.e. form and meaning are interconnected.

- They involve problematising i.e. gives students choices in content and form which compel the learner to make 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 **<u>useful insights</u>** into the language under study."

(Willis, 1996)

PRACTICE STAGE IS CRUCIAL

Possible restructuring tasks for YLs

- **<u>Game task:</u>**

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

- **<u>Experimental task:</u>**

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

(Lewis and Mol, 2006, pp. 5-6)

Activity 4: Exploring (re)structuring activities

- Watch me demonstrate the two restructuring activities.

- Which one better reflects restructuring principles? Why?

Activity A

Activity B

(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, pp. 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 hypothesis.

3. Provide activities that can guide students to use language and provide opportunities for structuring and (re)structuring.

4. **Provide opportunities for students to apply the rules to express meaning grammatically.**

Activity 5: Planning for teaching grammar

- In groups, you will receive a text.

- Identify a grammar point that is related to the social purpose of the text.

- Discuss the possible pedagogical rules you could develop for the grammar point.

- Discuss possible noticing and restructuring activities you could develop for the grammar point.

- Share your ideas.

- Receive feedback from the facilitator.

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