

*“On every hand, in every land,
It’s thoroughly agreed,
The English language to explain
Is very hard indeed.”*

Harry Hemsley

Teaching Grammar

“Children have an amazing ability to absorb language through play and other activities which they find enjoyable.” (Scott and Ytreberg) This applies to grammar as well. Children are not interested in long explanations. They can be good at English even if they have not learnt the set of grammar rules. Young learners are not usually mature enough to talk about grammar as such, but they are able to acquire sentence constructions containing certain grammar. They may be aware about the language without talking about grammar.

The teacher should include the smallest minimum of grammar taught as grammar. The explanations must be kept as simple as possible. Of course children come with their “whys” and then it is the right time to offer some simple explanation. It is usually done on an individual or group basis. This may be when the teacher is correcting written work or in the connection with the oral exercise training for example, ‘Do you ...? And Does he ...?’ The explanation which follows must be short and clear. Later with older pupils who are familiar with some Czech grammar rules we may bring a couple of grammatical terms. It may sometimes be useful to compare what happens in our mother tongue and what the English translation is.

Presenting (and eventual explaining) new grammatical structure.

The structure we want to present should be offered in plenty of contextualized examples. Visual materials and listening can contribute to understanding and natural acquisition. Presentation should include both form and meaning and with older ones who are able to write both oral and written forms. A simple generalization is more helpful than a detailed explanation. Terminology should be used just with older children who are more analytically-minded.

We tend to discover some rule when we come across some grammar. Then the inductive method should be used first. Thanks to a number of examples pupils may reveal the rule themselves. The teacher just elicits the things from the learners. What pupils discover themselves they are more likely to remember.

Training.

Pupils may find correct examples in the text and later be able to produce good examples themselves. Not surprisingly they will produce mistakes when they are composing their own speech or writing. Variety of practice activities that familiarize them with the structures in context will be of great use. Practice brings numbers of examples which are similar in a way. The more communicative they are the better. But we will not be able to avoid drill in training grammar.

Mistakes which appear in pupils’ production bring useful feedback both for the teacher and for the pupils. Errors which are based on mis-learned generalization will be followed by more explanation and training, while mistakes which are just occasional slips can be ignored.

The teacher anticipates the mistakes and problems when he writes his/her lesson plan and of course during the lesson. This helps him/her to find the right paths for the pupils; it helps him/her to choose the right types of activities.

The teacher and the pupils should not be afraid of mistakes. They are an integral part of learning. They are symptoms of learner's progress.