**The English grammar**

**Unit one: What is grammar?**

Question 1. Can you formulate a definition of ‘grammar’? Compare your definition with a dictionary’s.

Question 2. Think of two languages you know. Can you suggest an example of a structure that exists in one but not in the other? How difficult is the structure to learn for the speaker of the other language?

Question 3. Choose a structure in your own native language. How would you explain its meaning to learners? How would you get them to understand when this particular structure would be used rather than others with slightly different meanings?

**Unit Two: The place o grammar teaching**

Opinions about the teaching of grammar

**Extract 1**

The important point is that the study of grammar as such is neither necessary nor sufficient for learning to use a language.

(from L. Newmark, ‘How not to interfere with ‘language learning’ in Brumfit, C.J. and Johnson, K. (eds.) *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press. 99, p. 65)

**Extract 2**

The student’s craving for explicit formulization of generalizations can usually be met better by textbooks and grammars that he reads outside class than by discussion in class. (*ibid*.)

**Extract 3**

The language teacher’s view of what constitutes knowledge of a language is a knowledge of the syntactic structure of sentences The assumption that the language teacher appears to make is that once this basis is provided, then the learner will have no difficulty in dealing with the actual use of language.

There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that this assumption is of very doubtful validity indeed.

(from H.G. Widdowson, ‘Directions in the teaching of discourse’ in Brimful, C. J. and Johnson, K. (eds.) *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 49-0)

**Extract 4**

The evidence seems to show beyond doubt that though it is by communicative use in real ‘speech acts’ that the new language ‘sticks’ in the learner’s mind, insight into pattern is an equal partner with communicative use in what language teachers now see as the dual process of acquisition / learning. Grammar, approached as a voyage of discovery into the patterns of language rather than the learning o prescriptive rules, is no longer a bogey word.

(from Eric Hawkins, *Awareness of Language: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 150-1)

*Task* Critical reading

Read the extracts and discuss your reactions.

**Unit Three: Grammatical terms**

Question Look at a text in a course book you know and try to find two or more examples of each of the sentence components listed below.

The **sentence** is a set o words standing on their own as a sense unit, its conclusion marked by a full stop or equivalent (question mark, exclamation mark). In many languages sentences begin with a capital letter, and include a verb.

The **clause** is a kind of mini-sentence: a set o words which make a sense unit, but may not be concluded by a full stop. A sentence may have two or more clauses (*She left because it was late and she was tired*.) or only one (*She was tired*.).

The **phrase** is a shorter unit within the clause, of one or more words, but fulfilling the same sort of function as a single word. A verb phrase, for example, functions the same way as a single-word verb, a noun phrase like a one –word noun or pronoun: was going, a long table.

The **word** is the minimum normally separable form: in writing, it appears as a stretch of letters with a space either side.

The **morpheme** is a bit of a word which can be perceived as a distinct component: within the word *passed*, for example, are the two morphemes *pass*, and –*ed*. A word may consist of a single morpheme (*book*).

Question Using a sentence from a course book you know, find at least one of each of these categories: subject, verb, object, complement and adverbial.

Parts of speech

The main parts of speech are:

* nouns (such as *horse, Syria*)
* verbs (such as *swim, remain*)
* adjectives (such as *black, serious*)
* adverbs (such as *quickly, perhaps*)
* pronouns (such as *he, those*)
* auxiliary verbs (such as *is, do* before a main verb)
* modal verbs (such as *can, must*)
* determiners (such as *the, some*)
* prepositions (such as *in, before*)

Question Open a newspaper. Can you find and underline examples of some or all of the categories?

**Unit four: Presenting and explaining grammar**

*Task* **Classroom or peer-teaching**

*Stage 1: Presentation*

Present and explain a grammatical structure to a class; the presentation should not take longer than five minutes.

The presentation should be recorded in some way; you might tape-record it or ask another participant to observe and take notes. If neither of these is possible, then write down as accurate an account as possible immediately after the lesson.

*Stage 2 (optional)*

If you did not do so before, look up a grammar book to check your explanation: was there anything important you omitted or misrepresented?

*Stage 3: Feedback.*

Ask another participant or student to tell you immediately afterwards how clear they thought your presentation was, and if they have any particular comments.

You may find it useful to use the questions in Box 2 as points of reference.

*Stage 4*

In the light of critical discussion of your presentation, write out for yourself a set of guidelines for presenting and explaining grammar.

Box 2. Questions on grammar presentations.

* 1. **The structure itself**. Was the structure presented in both speech and writing, both form and meaning?
	2. **Examples**. Were enough examples provided of the structure in a meaningful context? Are you sure the students understood their meanings?
	3. **Terminology**. Did you call the structure by its (grammar-book) name? If so, was this helpful? If not, would it have helped if you had? What other grammatical terminology was (would have been) useful?
	4. **Language**. Was the structure explained in the students’ mother tongue, or in the target language, or in a combination of the two? Was this effective?
	5. **Explanation**. Was the information given about the structure at the right level: reasonably accurate but not too detailed? Did you use comparison with the students’ mother tongue (if known)? Was this/would this have been useful?
	6. **Delivery**. Were you speaking (and writing) clearly and at an appropriate speed?
	7. **Rules**. Was an explicit rule given? Why / Why not? If so, did you explain it yourself or did you elicit it from the students? Was this the best way to do it?

**Unit Five: Grammar practice activities**

*Application* Look at the grammar exercises in a locally-used foreign language course book, and classify them roughly according to the types listed in Box 3. Many course books provide plenty of exercises that suit the descriptions of Types 2-3, but tend to neglect the others. Is this true of the book you are looking at?

Box 3. Types of grammar practice: from accuracy to fluency

**Type 1: Awareness**

After the learners have been introduced to the structure (see Unit four above)? They are given opportunities to encounter it within some kind of discourse, and do a task that focuses their attention on its form and/or meaning.

Example: Learners are given extracts from newspaper articles and asked to underline all the examples of the past tense that they can find.

**Type 2: Controlled drills**

Learners produce examples of the structure: these examples are, however, predetermined by the teacher or textbook, and have to conform to very clear, closed-ended cues.

Example: Write or say statements about John, modeled on the following example:

John *drinks tea* but he *doesn’t drink coffee*.

a) like: ice cream/cakeb) speak: English/Italianc) enjoy: playing football/playing chess

**Type 3: Meaningful drills**

Again the responses are very controlled, but the learner can make a limited choice.

Example: In order to practice forms of the present simple tense:

Choose someone you know very well, and write down their name. Now compose true statements about them according to the following model:

He/She *likes ice cream*; OR He/She *doesn’t like ice cream*.

a) enjoy: playing tennisb) drink: winec) speak: Polish

**Type 4: Guided, meaningful practice**

The learners form sentences of their own according to a set pattern; but exactly what vocabulary they use is up to them.

Example: Practising conditional clauses, learners are given the cue *If I had a million dollars*, and suggest, in speech or writing, what they *would* do.

**Type 5: (Structure-based) free sentence composition**

Learners are provided with a visual or situational clue, and invited to compose their own responses; they are directed to use the structure.

Example: A picture showing a number of people doing different things is shown to the class; they describe it using the appropriate tense.

**Type 6: (Structured-based) discourse composition**

Learners hold a discussion or write a passage according to a given task; they are directed to use at least some examples of the structure within the discourse.

Example: The class is given a dilemma situation (‘You have seen a good friend cheating in an important test’) and asked to recommend a solution. They are directed to include modals (*might, should, must, can, could*, etc.) in their speech/writing.

**Type 7: Free discourse**

As in Type 6, but the learners are given no specific direction to use the structure, however, the task situation is such that instances of it are likely to appear.

Example: As in Type 6, but without the final direction.

**Unit Six: Grammatical mistakes**

*Inquiry* **Learner errors**

*Stage 1: Gathering samples*

Gather a few samples of learners’ writing that does not consist of answers to grammar exercise: answers to comprehension questions, essays, letters, short paragraphs. Alternatively, record foreign learners speaking.

*Stage 2: Classifying*

Go through the samples you have collected, noting mistakes. Can you categorize them into types? What are the most common ones?

*Stage 3: Ordering*

Together with other participants, make a list of the most common mistakes, in rough order of frequency.

*Stage 4: Reordering*

There are, of course, all sorts of other factors, besides frequency, which may affect the level of importance you attach to an error. It may be, for example, less urgent to correct one which is very common but which does not actually affect comprehensibility than one that does. In English, learners commonly omit the third-person –s suffix in the present simple, and slightly less commonly substitute a present verb form when they mean the past; on the whole, the second mistake is more likely to lead to misunderstanding than the first and therefore is more important to correct. Another error may be considered less important because a lot of very proficient, or native, speakers often make it. And so on.

Rearrange your list of errors, if necessary, so that they are in order of importance of correction.

**Chapter 6Presenting and practising language**

1 Structures; grammar and functions126

2 Vocabulary142

3 Pronunciation153

One of the teacher’s main roles is to introduce, or ‘present’, and practice new language and to revise language that the students have met before. Presentation and practice techniques are particularly useful at lower level where much of the language that students come across is new. Of course some of this new language will be acquired naturally through exposure to native speaker discourse, but learners also need and want important areas of language to be highlighted by the teacher: to be explored or illustrated in terms of meaning and form (including spelling and pronunciation), and then practised. The relative amount and the type of presentation and practice depend on a number of factors which are explored in the rest of this chapter under the following headings: *1 Structures: grammar and functions, 2 Vocabulary*, and *3 Pronunciation*.

It is convenient to categorize language under these three headings, but it must be noted that the principles behind the presentation of language items (as opposed to the development of skills as discussed in Chapter 5) apply – whether we are dealing with structures, vocabulary or pronunciation. So there are many areas of commonality and overlap in the approaches and techniques described in these three sections.

**Structures: grammar and functions**

Although it is recognized that people learn languages in different ways, it seems that many people can learn a language more easily if they can perceive regularities or patterns. Many of the patterns that students learn are particular grammatical items: verb forms such as the past simple, modal verbs such as *will* or *could*, particular combinations such as the first conditional (for example: *If she gets the job she’ll move to London*). A list of grammatical items which are regularly focused on in language classes can be found in the contents list of any good learner’s grammar book such as *An A-Z of English Grammar and Usage* by Leech (Nelson), *Practical English Usage* by Swan (OUP) or *The Heinemann English Grammar* by Beaumont and Granger (Heinemann).

Language can not only be seen in terms of grammatical form; it can also be seen in terms of ‘what it does’ or its ‘function’ in communication. Often, one language item can be used to perform more than one function in communication: for example, *Can* for both requesting –*Can you pass the salt?* – and expressing ability -*Can you swim?* And one function can often be performed by using more than one grammatical structure: for example, *Let’s … What about …? How about …?* All perform the function of suggesting. (There is no definitive list of functions as there is for grammatical structures.)

Many coursebooks aim to have an *integrated* syllabus – one which combines certain grammatical structures with the functions thought most useful for students at a particular level. So at beginner level the present simple is introduced with the function of describing ‘facts’*: My name’s Marta. I’m 18 and I live in Mexico City. I have three brothers*. At intermediate level the same verb form can be introduced with a different use – timetabled events in the future: *The plane leaves* *at 10.00 am. We arrive at Orly Airport at noon. From there we go straight to the hote*l. Then at advanced level we may want to introduce the use of the present simple to tell stories and anecdotes about past events: *So there I am, in the café, when up comes Jeff. He picks up my drink and he pours it all over my head*.

Some books may be designed with particular groups of people in mind, and introduce structures with functions thought most useful for the students’ special needs and situation. For example, books targeted at business people usually focus on the language needed for making introductions, for arranging meetings, for negotiating, and other business-oriented functions.

***What aspects of a structure should you consider?***

When focusing on a structure, either for the first time or for revision, the following can be considered:

1. **The form**
* The parts of speech. For example, is it made up of a verb plus a preposition (*to put off*)?
* Whether it is regular or irregular. For example, a regular simple past ends in –*ed (listened*), irregular verbs have different forms *(heard, spoke, read, wrote*);
* The spelling;
* the pronunciation. For example, does the structure contain contractions (*I’m, haven’t, should’ve)?*
* the word order and whether the item follows or is followed by any particular words or structures. For example, does the verb usually have to be followed by a noun (*I bought the car*)?

You need also to decide how many aspects of the form you want to focus on at any one time: for example, when presenting a new verb form, you probably wouldn’t want to introduce the affirmative, the question forms, the negative, short answers and question tags all in the same lesson!

**The meaning**

The exact meaning(s) you are concentrating on. This is particularly important to consider if a structure can be used to perform more than one function. For example, the past simple tense can be used to talk about the past (*Last year I was in China*), to ask a question politely (*What was it you wanted?*), to report what someone has said *(Mary said it was her birthday tomorrow*).

1. **The use**

How and when the language item is appropriately used: in what contexts, by which people, on which occasions? Is the structure widely used in a range of contexts and situations or does it have a more restricted use? For example, compare *Would you like to come to the cinema on Saturday?* (an invitation) and *Would you come with me?* (an instruction).

1. **Potential problems**
	* Are there any special difficulties related to the structure’s form or meaning? An example of a difficult *form* is *should not have had*, as in *I shouldn’t have had that third piece of cake* – with its number of ‘parts’ and the double name. There may be difficulties of pronunciation, depending on the first language of your students. Structures which contain problematic sounds such as /ə/ or /θ/ will need special attention. An example of a difficulty of *meaning* is *needn’t have* + past participle, especially when confused with *didn’t need to*: or *I used to do* … and *I was used to doing*…
	* Can the language structure be confused with any other item in English, or with an item in the students’ mother tongue?

***How do you decide what approach to take?***

Once you have decided what structure to teach, the way you aid the students’ understanding and practice the language can depend on a number of factors:

* Whether the structure is completely new, is familiar to at least some of the students but has not been focused on before, or has been presented before and is now being revised. Generally, the less familiar the language item the more controlled practice you need;
* the nature of the language: for example, whether it is the meaning and use or the form which is complex. The *use* of the present perfect is difficult to grasp for man students (*I’ve been here since 3 o‘clock* – where in many languages it would be *I am here since 3 o’clock*). On the other hand, it is the complexity of the form rather than the meaning of the third conditional, with its many ‘parts’, which generally causes difficulty (*If my alarm clock hadn’t been broken I wouldn’t have been late for the lecture*);
* Whether the structure is more likely to be written or spoken. Some structures are mainly found in the written form and do not lend themselves to spoken practice activities – for example, this sentence from a formal letter: *I enclose ((the invoice/brochure/estimate*). On the other hand, the students need practice in saying such utterances as *It’s a great (party/day/show), isn’t it?*
* the student:
* their level;
* their age;
* whether you can or want to use their mother tongue for explanation;
* the attitude of the group – how confident the students are, whether they feel they already ‘know’ the language item, etc;
* their language-learning background and expectations of how language is presented – whether, for example, they expect ‘traditional’ teacher-centered approach;
* Their preferred language-learning style – for example, some students like to study grammar in an overt way while others (particularly children) are not interested in talking about the language and using such labels as *gerund* or *demonstrative adjective*.

***What approaches can be used to present or revise language structure?***

There are a number of different approaches. The factors mentioned in the previous section will help you decide what kind of approach to take – different ways may be suitable, depending on the students and the language being dealt with. One of the ways in which the approaches differ is in the amount and type of practice activities used: for certain language items and with certain students much more controlled practice is required, whereas on other occasions the practice can be freer. It’s also important to remember that a variety of approach is interesting and motivating for students – so it’s a good idea to try to vary the ways you present and practise language.

**Visual/oral contexts**

Pictures, mime and realia can be used to illustrate the meaning and to establish a context in which the target structure is set. Often the context is built up orally by the teacher with the help of visual aids and elicitation from the students.

**Example**

To present:

*Structure*: past simple – some irregular verbs: *went, had, fell, broke, took, was/were*

*Function/use*: telling a story/anecdote (about a skiing accident)

*Visual aids*: a postcard of a ski resort and a series of hand-drawn pictures showing ‘me’, the teacher (*I went skiing/I fell/ I broke my leg/ They took me to hospital/ I was in hospital for Christmas*) and the scar on the teacher’s leg!

The teacher can introduce the topic by showing the postcard and asking if any of the students know the resort, etc, and by establishing that this happened in the past *– last year, just before Christmas.*

By showing the pictures and by mime the teacher elicits any words the students know, tells the story and introduces the target language (i.e. the past simple of irregular verbs). After the context has been established the verbs are highlighted and practised. (For a further example of this type of lesson, see *What are the possible stages in a lesson using he inductive approach?* on p. 136.)

***When is it useful to present language through a visual/oral context?***

The introduction of structures in this way is often used:

* if the students are at a low level and the teacher wants to keep extraneous language to a minimum;
* if the students are young and would not be so interested in an overt focus on the grammar rules of the language item;
* if the meaning and use of the language is complex and so clear, simple, but generative context is needed: you can create a context which provides a number of examples of the target language, which allows students to have plenty of controlled practice;
* if a single language item is being introduced;
* if you want to create a context that the students can relate to: if the situation is personalized in some way it will be more interesting and memorable to the students;
* if you want the situation to be unambiguous (unless there is a good reason to be ambiguous).

***What are the disadvantages of this approach?***

* + The language can be contrived and artificial.
	+ It can be time-consuming to set up a new context for *each* new language item (although often ‘mini-contexts’ can be set up to illustrate the meaning of two or three words – see Section 2: *Vocabulary*).
	+ It is quite teacher-centered, as the teacher is ‘up-front’ at the beginning of the lesson.
	+ It demands a lot from the teacher by way of a ‘performance’.
	+ Higher level and/or older students may feel this approach is ‘less serious’ than one which explains the ‘rule’ at the start, as described below.

**Texts**

As was pointed out in Chapter 5, as well as providing a means of practising listening and reading skills, texts can provide a natural context for language exploration and a pool from which particular language items and structures can be drawn, analyzed and practised. The texts can be very varied: reading texts such as newspaper and magazine articles, stories, biographies, information leaflets and booklets, letters, reports, notices, etc; listening texts such as conversations, interviews, short talks, radio or television programmes, songs, etc. Texts which are intrinsically interesting and which give the students something to communicate about are especially useful as a vehicle for introducing and practising language.

Clearly, written texts provide a more suitable context for language which is mostly found in the written form: for example, *I look forward to … (your reply/our meeting/ receiving your estimate*) – as in a formal letter. And listening texts are more useful for introducing language which is generally spoken, for example: *See you …(later, soon, tomorrow, net week*, etc).

***When is it useful to present language through texts?***

The presentation of language in this way is often used:

* when students are of intermediate level and above. Because the texts from which the language is taken are often authentic or adapted from authentic material, this way is especially suitable for students who already have some language.Authentic texts give exposure to language as a whole and not just grammatical structures in isolation, providing opportunities for natural acquisition of less familiar language as well as learning/studying of the focus language area;
* if the meaning and use of the structure is complex and the meaning of the new item is clearly illustrated by the context present in the text;
* if the new structure is being introduced in contrast with language which is already familiar and which is also present in the text;
* if a number of items are being introduced – perhaps several exponents of a function (for example, several ways of giving advice in a conversation between friends);
* if the structure has been encountered before. A way of revising language is to take it from a new and interesting context. Texts can always contain new vocabulary, even if the structures have been met before. This helps get over the ‘not the past simple again!’. Problem – i. e. when students need revision of areas that they have practised before and feel they are not making progress;
* if you want the presentation and practice of a particular structure to be integrated naturally into skills work. The language item can be drawn from a reading or listening text, isolated and focused upon, and then practised naturally in, for example, a speaking or writing tasks where the structure can get used more freely;
* when you use the students’ coursebook. Many modern coursebooks contain texts chosen (or adapted) from authentic material to illustrate particular structures which fit into the structural syllabus of the course.

***Are there any problems in using texts for presenting language?***

If they are not available in the coursebook it isn’t always easy to find authentic texts or to create texts which contain natural examples of the structure you want to introduce, particularly if the surrounding language is to be of the ‘right’ level, i. e. ‘comprehensible’. For this reason it’s not so easy to introduce language through texts to lower level students. Texts which are specially written to illustrate the target language and which are simple enough for the students to cope with are often very contrived and unnatural.

However, this approach should not be ruled out. If they are well chosen, there is no reason why short authentic, or at least ‘semi-authentic’ or simplified texts. Should not be used with low-level students. You may have to adapt a reading text or construct a semi-authentic listening text by getting someone (perhaps another trainee or a teacher) to record a monologue using the structures you want to illustrate. If you give the person some notes to work with but let him or her speak spontaneously, you can get a more authentic – sounding listening text.

It does take a relatively long time to use this kind of material. The overall meaning of the text must be within the grasp of the students before individual language items are picked out; the text may contain language which has to be dealt with *before* you can concentrate on the target language. This is only all right if the lesson is seen as consisting of skills work leading on to a focus on particular language items, and time is allowed for these stages.

If you choose a text for skills work the structures it illustrates well may not be the ones that fit into the structural syllabus of the course the students are following. Bear in mind that particular text-types lend themselves to the presentation of particular structures: for example, simple stories contain the simple past, and a text of someone talking about his or her personal experiences will usually contain natural instances of the present perfect.

Another disadvantage with authentic texts is that they often don’t give you enough examples of the target structure.

**Short dialogues**

Dialogues are a type of text – a spoken text which we listen to, although for teaching and learning purposes we also look at them in their written or transcribed form. Although they are a type of text, it is worth considering them separately from reading and other listening texts as they are often used as a model for speaking practice of structures.

Dialogues are often used as an alternative, or in addition, to introducing language through visual means, especially with lower level students.

**Example**

This dialogue could be used with low-level students to introduce the question form and the short answer of the verb to be in the present simple. It also revises *Sorry*? as a way of asking for repetition.

At the airport Customs

**Customs officer**:Is this our bag?

**Woman traveler:** Sorry?

**Customs officer:**Is this our bag?

**Woman traveler:**Yes, it is.

Usually the teacher introduces the characters and the situation through pictures/board drawings and elicitation – *Who’s this? Where are they?* etc. The understanding of the new language is checked (see p. 138). The students repeat the lines of the dialogue after the teacher and then take turns to play the roles, perhaps in open pairs first, then in closed pairs. It is a generative situation in that new vocabulary items can then be introduced (in this dialogue, for example, *suitcase, camera, handbag*, etc) and more sentences containing the same structures can be elicited and practised: *Is this your suitcase?* etc.

***When are dialogues useful?***

Dialogues are useful from time to time, particularly at elementary level, mainly for the following reasons:

* You can write the dialogue so that it focuses on the language you want to introduce and doesn’t include distractions such as unknown vocabulary.
* You can make the language vivid and memorable, with a clear situation and location, and sharply distinguished characters, often aided by pictures and props.
* Dialogues provide a controlled setting for language items and conversational features.
* They are very useful for introducing language functions. For example, asking the way, at lower levels.
* Dialogues can be used to generate a number of practice sentences. For example, with the dialogue above, the teacher, by using picture prompts, can elicit these questions from students: *Is this your suitcase? Is this your camera?* and get the same replies from ‘the woman’.
* It is easy to introduce pairwork practice, as the dialogues naturally have two parts. Pairwork practice often begins with repetition/imitation of the ‘model’ dialogue, but often this controlled practice can be followed by freer, more ‘meaningful’ communication. Dialogues lend themselves to information gap activities in which each student in the pair has access to different information which he or she can feed into the dialogue.
* They can be a springboard for more improvised language practice. If the practice tasks can be made more creative and open-ended the students have some degree of choice over what they say. For example, the last sentence of a dialogue can be left open.

**Example**

This dialogue practises language for making suggestions:

*It’s Rosie’s birthday next week. What shall we get her?/What about*… (the students choose). *That’s a good idea because*… or *No, because*…

A dialogue can often lead into a cued roleplay, such as the one in Task 3 on p. 43. See also Setting up activities on p. 44. Dialogues can also be used to illustrate the different social identity and the relationship between the speakers, and the kind of language they would use. For example, the way you ask a close friend to lend you enough money to buy a cup of coffee would be different from the way you ask a bank manager for a large loan.

***What are the disadvantages of using dialogues?***

* If dialogues are uncommunicative, predictable and not mixed in with other approaches to presentation they can be boring.
* They are rarely useful of students above elementary level, who benefit from seeing language within a wider context, no in isolated chunks.
* Because they are idealized, they don’t prepare students for the unexpected – in real life people don’t always play their part as set down in the dialogue practised in class! For example, the Customs Officer in the dialogue on p. 132 is just as likely to say *Your bag, is it?* as he is to say *Is this your bag?*
* It is not always easy to find or create a dialogue which is naturally generative, and in order to make them generative the dialogues can often be rather artificial and repetitive.

**Giving or working out the ‘rule’**

In this way of presenting a structure, the teacher explains the rules or patterns of form and use and maybe, in a monolingual group, translates the structure into the students’ mother tongue. You can start the lesson by telling them explicitly what language you are going to deal with: for example*, Today we are going to look at how we use the third conditional: of example – If you’d woken me on time I wouldn’t have been late*. Then you can go on to give the rules of grammar and use then set up some practice.

Alternatively, you can give some example sentences containing the structure and encourage the students to work out or suggest the rules for themselves. For example, a number of paired sentences can be given and the students encouraged to say when *for* and when *since* is used with the present perfect:

**a**I’ve been here of six hours.**b**I’ve been here since 3 o’clock.

**a**They’ve lived in this country for ten months.**b**They’ve lived in this country since October.

The ‘rule’ can be elicited and then practice can be given. This approach is sometimes referred to as *guided discovery* and is particularly useful if you think the students have some familiarity with the target structure or if you want to revise the structure.

***When is it useful to give or to elicit the ‘rule’?***

Giving or eliciting the ‘rule’ is useful:

* if the meaning of the item is easy to understand (perhaps it is very similar to the students’ first language) but the structure is complex from a ‘form’ point of view: for example, the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives: *difficult, more* *difficult, the most difficult compared with easy, easier, the easiest*;
* if different aspect of, say, a verb form is being presented after a stage in which the tense has already been introduced, perhaps via a text or a visual/oral context. For example, if you have introduced the affirmative and question forms of the regular past simple it is quicker, and often more efficient, simply to elicit or give the rules for the formation and use of the negative before going on to practise using it;
* if the students come from a very traditional educational background and expect a grammar/translation approach;
* if the students are at a higher level and can more easily cope with a discussion about language.

***Are there any problems with this approach?***

* It can seem dry and uninteresting, especially to younger learners.
* It is not so suitable for low-level multilingual groups where the students may not have enough language to understand the explanation, or the language to express it themselves.
* It isn’t so suitable for language which is complex in meaning and use: it may be that there is no clear ‘rule’ to discover! For example, it is difficult to explain why such nouns as *fruit, money, information* and *news* are uncountable in English but countable in man other languages.

**Test-teach-test**

In this approach the teacher sets a communicative activity for the students which is designed to find out how well the can understand and use a particular area of language; it can be a creative activity in a role-play or writing a story. The teacher monitors and evaluates the activity in order to assess whether the language structure he or she wants to focus on is being used correctly and appropriately or not. It is also important to note if the students seem to be avoiding the structure. If the students have no problem with the structure the teacher can then go on to something else. If they are having problems or avoiding it altogether then the teacher can revise the target language. Practice activities which consolidate the students’ ability to use the language can follow until the teacher is happy with the students’ performance.

The first phase is the ‘test’ where the teacher finds out what the students can and cannot already do; ‘teach’ is the second phase when the language is revised, and the second ‘test’ is when practice activities are done to see if the students can use the language better than in the first phase.

***What are the advantages of this approach?***

This approach is particularly useful:

* at higher levels where very few, if any, language structures are new to the students:
* with confident (over-confident?) students who claim to ‘know’ the target language;
* with classes when you are not sure what the students have done previously and what they already know;
* when you want to focus on more than one structure – perhaps a number of exponents of a function, or the different forms of a tense;
* if you want to compare and contrast structures.

***What are the disadvantages?***

This type of approach, if it is done in one lesson, requires a considerable degree of flexibility on the part of the teacher. He or she has to respond instantly and appropriately to the first stage – giving feedback and picking out aspects of language to revise and consolidate. However, it may be possible to do the first phase on one day and the revision and practice activities, if it is thought necessary, on another day. In this way the teacher has time to evaluate what the students need and can plan accordingly.

If, during the first phase, the students show that they can use the target language competently, then the teacher has to have alternative activities and materials planned to replace the revision and consolidation phase.

**Student-based research**

Here the students are encouraged to do their own research into language areas using grammar reference books; they then report back to the class. The research can be done in or out of class time, individually or in groups. The report can take a number of forms: an oral presentation, a written report, a poster, etc. The students may also teach the structure to their fellow students and/or provide practice activities; in other words, the students ‘present’ the language. This approach puts much more of the responsibility for their own learning on the shoulders of the students.

***When is student-based research useful?***

This approach is particularly useful:

* if the students are at a high level where few, if any, structures are new;
* if they have been encouraged to be independent learners – capable of using reference books for their own research (see Chapter 5 Section 6: *Learner development and study skills*);
* if individual students have difficulty with particular structures. In this way the teacher need on focus in class on language most of the students in the class have on trouble with.

***What are the disadvantages?***

* This approach depends on having students of a high enough level, with good reference skills and a strong motivation and interest.
* The students have to have access to reference materials.
* You also need to have the class over a period of time.

For these reasons this approach is not always practicable in the TP situation.

**‘Inductive’ and ‘deductive’ approaches**

Two of the basic approaches to the presentation of language items are sometimes referred to as *inductive* and *deductive*.

When an *inductive* approach is used, a context is established first from which the target structure is drawn. So, the approaches described under *Visual/oral contexts* (p. 129), Texts (p. 130) and *Short dialogues* (p. 131) could be called inductive. When a *deductive* approach is used an example of a structure and the grammatical rule is given first and then the language is practised, as described under *Giving or working out the ‘rule’* on p. 133.

***What are the possible stages in a lesson using the inductive approach?***

As noted above there are a number of variations on a theme, but this is an example of one way to proceed:

1. Create the context – with a text which has already been used for skills practice, with a dialogue, or with a short visual/oral context.

**Example**

This is an extract from a lesson introducing comparative adjectives via a visual context (pictures or drawings) to a class of low-level students:

The teacher shows a picture of a tall, thin man labelled *Sam*, and indicates by hand gesture that Sam is tall and elicits *Sam’s tall*. The teacher shows a second picture of an even taller, even thinner man labeled *Tom* and elicits *Tom’s tall*. The teacher then puts the two pictures side by side and says *Sam’s tall and Tom’s tall, but Tom’s taller than Sam*. The teacher can do the same for *thin* and introduce more pictures and adjectives – *fat, short*, etc.

If you set up the context through a picture or short dialogue, rather than using a text, you may want to ask some simple questions to make sure than the students have a general understanding of the context. In the example dialogue given on p. 132, for example, the teacher would need to check that the students understand that the people are at an airport, that one is the Customs Officer and the other is a traveler.

1. The situation should lead naturally to a sentence using the language to be taught – the *model* or *target* sentence.

**Example**

In the lesson presenting comparative adjectives above, the target sentence is *Tom’s taller than Sam* and other sentences can be generated using the pattern *X’s …er than Y*. You can then say the target language and/or write it on the board.

1. Check that the students have grasped the meaning of the structure. (See *How can you check students have understood what is being presented?* on p. 138.)
2. Practice saying the target language. Concentrate on the pronunciation. (See Section 3: *Pronunciation*.) Let the students repeat after you or from a model provided on cassette. They can do this together and then individually. (If the structure is one that is usually written but not spoken, this stage can be omitted.)
3. Give further practice. This is usually less controlled than the repetition practice and can involve pair work or group work.
4. Then write up[[1]](#footnote-1)\* the language structure. At this stage a clear record of what has gone on before is given. Try to make the record the students copy from the board as memorable and integrated as possible (not just a list of unrelated sentences). Whenever possible elicit from the students the language you write on the board. This serves as a further check that they understand and remember what you have presented. Name the structure/function using clear headings, and give information about the form and/or use where appropriate.

For example:

* + note whether the words in the structure are nouns, adjectives, pronouns, etc;
	+ mark the sentence stress and intonation and note any contractions (see Section 3: *Pronunciation*);
	+ give the grammar rule (in this lesson: *to make comparative adjectives of words of one syllable, add –er);*
	+ note any special features of the spelling (if the word ends in a single consonant letter, double it: for example, *fat* 🡪 *fatter*, *thin* 🡪 *thinner*).

If you are using translation with a monolingual group you can also write up the translation, if appropriate. Give examples of the language item in sentences, perhaps in the form of a *substitution table*. If possible, try to make the examples personal and memorable for the students.

**Example**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| I am (I’m) |  | Sonja. |
| You are (You’re) |  | Tomas. |
| Rick is (He’s) | taller than | his brother |
| We are (We’re) |  | our parents |
| On average Americans are (They’re) |  | Mexicans |

Other means of helping to understanding to understand and remember the meaning can be added - by using ‘time-lines’, for example (see p. 138). Give the students time to copy the information in their note books or to make a note of where the information is recorded in their course book.

Whether you want to do more than this depends on the language item and the class. Further practice may be needed in the form of guided and/or freer practice, integrated into skills work – as part of the same lesson or on another day. You may also want to set some homework to practice the new language. In the lessons that follow you can try to build in activities that will re-activate the language item. Often students need a little time for the new item to ‘sink in’ – they may recognize it, but often delay putting it into active use.

***What are the possible stages in a lesson using the deductive approach?***

Again, there is no one way of presenting a structure using a deductive approach. However, one possible way of staging such a lesson is as follows:

* 1. Present the structure and explain the ‘rule’ in a way that involves the students.

**Examples**

In order to compare ways of talking about the future you could put two sentences on the board: *I’m seeing her tomorrow* and *OK, I’ll see her tomorrow* and ask the students to discuss the difference in the situation and the meaning.

With a function you could give the students a number of exponents and ask them to group them – perhaps according to degree of formality – and then discuss when and with which people you would use such expressions. For example, with requests – *Open the window. Can you open the window? Open the window, would you? Do you think you could open the window? Would you like to open the window? I don’t suppose you could open the window for me, could you?* etc.

* 1. Write up the language structure(s). (See Stage 6 in the inductive lesson above.)
	2. Set up some activities so that the students can practice using the language in a meaningful context – perhaps in a role-play, a discussion or in a piece of writing. The practice can often be integrated into skills work.

**How can you check students have understood what is being presented?**

There are a number of ways you can check that the students have understood the meaning of a language item and the way it is used. It makes sense to check their understanding *before* any controlled practice – otherwise they may just be repeating parrot-fashion!

**Visuals**

In addition to *illustrating* meaning, visuals can be used to *check* understanding.

**Examples**

Students can be asked to choose the picture that best illustrates the meaning of a particular word or sentence; to put pictures in order to show a sequence of events; or to match pictures and sentences, as in his example which compares the past simple and the past perfect.

Which sentence goes with which picture?

*They started the meeting when she arrived.*

*They’d started the meeting when she arrived*.

**Time-lines** are graphic ways of illustrating the use of tenses. For example:

for six months

now

OctoberApril

We arrived

for a period of time

*We’ve been here for six months.*

sincenow

OctoberApril

We arrived

since a point in time

*We’ve been here since October.*

now

pastI rememberedI sent

then

*I remembered to send him a birthday card.*

now

pastI sentI remember

then

*I remember sending him a birthday card.*

You can check students’ understanding by asking them to select the correct time-line, to label or even draw time-lines.

**Concept questions**

Concept questions are questions you ask students to check whether they understand the meaning of a language item. If you consider the concept questions when thinking about the language you’re going to teach this should help you get the meaning clear in your own mind. Until you have had considerable experience you will need to write the questions in your lesson plan and have them to hand at the appropriate stage of the lesson.

They should be:

* simple and short. The language level should be below that of the students and certainly simpler than the language item you are focusing on. Try to design questions which only require a *yes/no* or a one-word answer from the students. One-word questions, for example – *Past*? and gestures such as a thumb over the shoulder to indicate the past together with a questioning expression are not only acceptable, they are preferable;
* in language that does not include the language being checked in either the question or in the answer. If students don’t understand what you are checking, then your question will be meaningless and will not guide the students towards understanding;
* varied and numerous. Often more than one question is needed for each aspect so that more than one student can be asked without the others picking up the ‘right’ answer from the first student. However, concept checking must be done efficiently – you’ve got to find a balance between asking too many questions and asking enough to satisfy yourself that the meaning has been grasped;
* asked often and spread around the class. It is not usually possible to ask all the students in the class, but if you make sure you ask at least one of the slower students, their answers should give you a good indication of how well you have managed to get the meaning across.

**Examples**

1. Past perfect to indicate an action that took place before another action in the past:

*They had started the meeting when she arrived.*

*Was she there at the beginning of the meeting?* (No*)*

*Did they start the meeting before or after she arrived? (*Before*)*

*Did she miss the start of the meeting? (*Yes*)*

*Did she miss the meeting?* (No, not all of it, just the beginning*)*

*Was she late for the meeting? (*Yes*)*

1. A polite request – a young man to a woman who is sitting near him in a restaurant:

*Would you mind if I smoked?*

*Does the man want a cigarette? (*Yes*)*

*Does the man know the woman very well?* (No*)*

*Why does he ask her? (*He is polite. He doesn’t want to upset her*)*

*Does everyone like smoking? (*No*)*

*Is he asking before or after he has the cigarette? (*Before*)*

*How would you ask a friend the same question? (*Is it OK if I smoke? *etc)*

(See also Section 2: *Vocabulary* for examples of ‘concept’ questions used to check the understanding of vocabulary items.)

**Translation**

This is only possible with monolingual groups but it can cut down on lengthy, laborious explanations – particularly at lower levels. You can check the students’ understanding by asking them to translate words or sentences. However, it is dangerous for students to assume that a word-for–word translation is always available. Often the connotation of a word which is looked up in a dictionary is not fully appreciated and consequently the word is used inappropriately. Also, you may not want students to get into the habit of translating every language item they meet.

Task 1.

***Aim***

To give practice in drawing ‘time-lines’ to illustrate the meaning of structures.

***Procedures***

1. Draw time-lines to illustrate the meaning of the following structures:
2. I’ve been here since four o’clock.
3. He was going round the corner when he lost control of the car.
4. This time next week we’ll be lying on the beach in Florida.
5. I’m using this office while mine is being decorated.
6. If possible, show your time-lines to a colleague, a high-level student, your supervisor, someone not in EFL for their comments.

***Comment***

Of the people who were shown your time-lines, who understood them easily, who had the most difficulty/ Why do you think this was?

Task 2

***Aim***

To give practice in writing questions to check that students understand new language.

***Procedure A***

**1**Write concept questions to check the understanding of particular language items. For example:

**a**I wish they’d come.

**b**He used to go fishing every week.

**c**She must have gone out.

**2**Swap questions around and get each set modified or developed by others in your group.

**3**Discuss.

***Procedure B***

* 1. Write concept questions for a particular structure.
	2. Ask colleagues to try to guess what is being checked.

***Procedure C***

1. Get each person in your group to prepare concept questions for different items.
2. Shuffle the items and questions.
3. Get the whole group to match them.

Task 3

***Aim***

To consider the most suitable approach to use when presenting and practising a structure.

***Procedure***

1. Think about a class you are familiar with – perhaps your TP group or a class you are observing.
2. Which approach would you use – inductive or deductive – to present or revise the following structures? How would you illustrate and check the students’ understanding of the meaning of the structures?

**a**The present perfect to talk about experience of events before ‘now’: for example, *I’ve seen ‘Cats’ six times*.

**b**Ways of expressing likes and dislikes: for example, *I really like…, I hate …, I absolutely adore …, I can’t stand* …, etc.

**c**A comparison of the uses of *so* and *such*: for example, *He’s such a good dancer. He’s so good. We had such good weather. The weather was so good. That’s such good news.*

**3**Compare your ideas with a colleague.

***Comment***

1. You may, of course, consider that these structures are not suitable for your class or that you would choose different examples to illustrate the language.
2. You may be able to try out your ideas in a lesson with the class.
1. \* *When* you write the language up on the board depends to some extent on the students – some feel more secure if they can see the target language written up as soon as it is focused on. You can put the target or model sentence on the board (in Step 2 above) and then add to it after oral practice (in Step 6). Or you can write up the sentence but rub it off before oral practice. In this way the students are listening to, rather than reading, the sentence and their own pronunciation is likely to be better as a result. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)