

MR/SJG/46

28 January 1991

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P.E.T.

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LONDON
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Dear Janet,

A major learning on PET language improvement courses last summer was using the Co-Build Grammar. At last I was covered, not by grammarians' intuition but by their clear analyses of examples retrieved from a vast data-base.

I enclose an article that says this while at the same time offering practical grammar exercises that can be done with advanced classes. the article is about the methodology of grammar teaching as well as being an introduction to Co-build.

The visual side

I have broken the text up with sub-headings. There are three functional diagrams. One could perhaps have a sketch done of students in the two concentric circles working with the books on the floor. One could head the article with a photo of the Co-Build computer (maybe Gwyneth Fox has a picture) with a caption like: THE GRAMMAR MACHINE. Collins might want to place an ad for the grammar somewhere nearby.

If you decide to use the piece I am not sure whether it fits best in the methodology or the language part of the magazine?

Yours,

Mario

P.S. To further break up the sea of print, I'd suggest photographing the preposition list from Co-Build, Page 298. It could go in a box, maybe.

Inserts to MR article

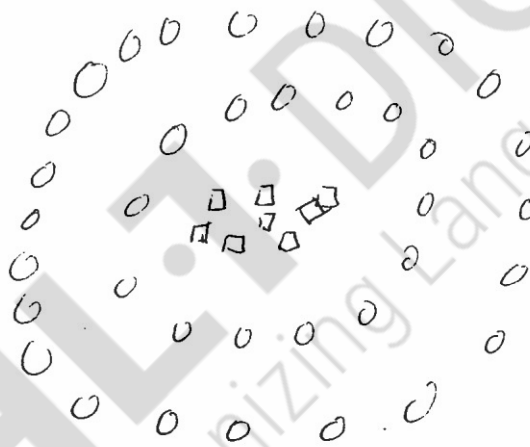
in sent 1

6.65 The following prepositions are used to specify position:

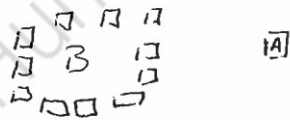
aboard	among	between	near	through
about	around	beyond	near to	under
above	astride	by	next to	undereath
across	at	close by	off	up
against	away from	close to	on	upon
ahead of	before	down	on top of	with
all over	behind	in	opposite	within
along	below	in between	out of	
alongside	beneath	in front of	outside	
amidst	beside	inside	past	

Co-Build Grammar

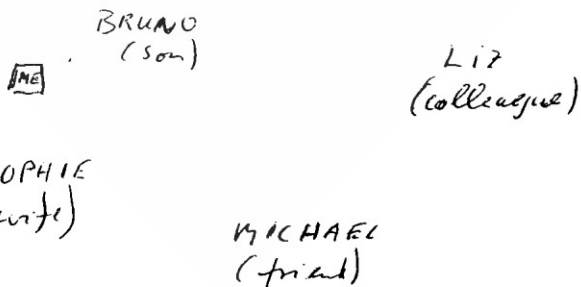
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MAU 17 10
(old enemy)

Feeling sure about teaching grammar

By Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims.

If I teach a language I do not speak as a native, I am inevitably heavily dependent on source books to give me an accurate mapping of how the language is today. I can't afford to spend two months every summer re-absorbing the language – I need reliable books.

Last year saw the publication of the Collins Co-build English Grammar, a major, up-to-date description of how English works. (No, not the Co-Build Dictionary which came out over two years ago). The aim of this article is to offer you practical language exercises that you can do with 17-18 year old students, exercises that draw on the accurate information available in the Co-Build Grammar.

Spatial prepositions

The aim of this lesson is to revise the prepositions the students already know and help them to learn a few more. Anyway, which are the spatial prepositions one needs to know at Abitur/Baccalauréat/Maturità Level? Co-Build proposes this list sucked out of a computer database that contains over 20 million words of modern spoken and written text. These, then, are the

prepositions an educated native speaker may well use:

Insert 1 ->

To help with the word abroad, the grammar gives a list of words it collocates with in the 20+ million word corpus – here are six examples:

aboard an aircraft carrier
aboard that flight
aboard the bus
aboard the rocket
aboard a sledge
aboard a truck

To help with the word before it suggests that the preposition's object is usually a person or group of people as in this example taken from the computer corpus: "he appeared before a disciplinary committee".

To help with the phrase all over, this example is given from the entrails of the computer:

"There were pieces of ship all over the place"

The lesson plan

- If possible arrange the students in a 'fishbowl' configuration with seven or eight in the inner circle and the rest in the outer group, like this:

Insert 2 ->

If the people in the inner circle can sit on the floor the outer people will be able to see better.

- Place twenty to thirty books or other small, regular objects in the middle of the inner circle.
- Ask the inner students to use the books to illustrate the meaning of prepositions you call out. Suppose you give them OUTSIDE they might make a square of books and have one outside:

Insert 3 ->

"A is outside B"

Tell them they can create whatever they want with the books: boats, tunnels, trees, walls, rivers, etc

- You may well unearth lots of confusions in the students' minds, eg: in the corner = on the corner (rincón/esquina)

among = between

You may well need to teach the meanings of prepositions they don't know, e.g.: astride: ask them to make a horse out of the books and the meaning will mostly be correctly guessed at.

The beauty of this exercise is that students are remembering for themselves and finding out for themselves - they are making vague notions a lot clearer.

The teacher can feel secure that the words being presented are a genuine, relevant sample of the English language as it is. The Co-Build list is firmly based on language fact.

Just feels natural

As a native-speaking EFL teacher I am delighted with the new grammar because it seems to accurately reflect the language I speak. When I look through this list of compound qualitative adjectives for describing people I see and hear my own vocabulary largely echoed:

absent-minded	accident-prone
big-headed	cold-blooded
easy-going	good-looking
good-tempered	hard-up
kind-hearted	laid-back
light-hearted	long-suffering
low-paid	muddle-headed
narrow-minded	nice-looking
off-putting	old-fashioned
open-minded	second-class
short-sighted	short-tempered
slow-witted	smooth-talking
soft-hearted	starry-eyed
strong-minded	stuck-up
sun-tanned	swollen-headed
tender-hearted	thick-skinned
tongue-tied	two-faced
warm-hearted	well-balanced
well-behaved	well-dressed
well-known	well-off
worldly-wise	wrong-headed

What can you do with a list like this in class? Here's a possible lesson plan:

- Take part of the list above (depending on the students' level) and ask them to check through it, working in pairs, seeing that they understand all the words. If they don't they ask you or ply their dictionaries. Randomly check that people have understood the trickier words, as not all the compounds are transparent. You can't guess the meaning of hard-up from the meanings of its parts.

- Then ask each student to draw a sociogram with herself at the centre and half a dozen people placed at various distances from her, denoting their emotional closeness to her or distance from her. I might draw one like this:

Insert 4 ->

- Now ask each student to pick one of the people in their sociogram and run through the list of adjectives choosing six or seven that apply to that person. To give you an example, if I choose my friend Michael I'd say he is very absent-minded in ordinary social life but not in his job as a doctor. He is easy-going with his family and at all cold-blooded, though maybe as a doctor he has had to learn to be a bit cold-blooded.
- Once each student has picked six adjectives for each of their people they work in threes and describe the people on their sociograms to their classmates.

The idea of the exercise is to help the students to internalise the new vocabulary in personal, meaningful contexts they control and create. From the language point of view I can feel secure in the knowledge that I have presented my students with some of the most frequent and useful compound qualitative adjectives in English – the list is the result of a computer search through a large data-base.

A grammar of language creativity

A very interesting feature of the Co-Build Grammar is that it frequently identifies the ways that natives go about coining new bits of language. So in the section we have just dipped into it suggests that natives come up with new compound adjectives following among others, this construction rule:

adjective or number + noun + ed,
e.g. 'grey-haired' or 'one-sided'.

Let's try and generate phrases using
the rule. Do you accept these
compounds of mine?

- The postman delivered a green-enveloped document?
- It was so beautiful, a thousand-carnationed garden.
- It must be leaking - that wooden salad bowl is oily-bottomed.

Why not try and come up with some new
compounds yourself and then set your
advanced students the same task as a
bit of creativity homework? Inventing
new phrases makes students feel
powerful in the foreign language.

Co-Build as a learning grammar for you
and me

Clearly Co-Build is a powerful
reference tool for all of us who teach
EFL, natives and non-natives alike. It
is particularly good on the vast area
of collocation, or which words nestle
happily with which.

Let me finish this article with a brief
quiz for you. Here is a list of
emphasising adjectives used in spoken
English to express disapproval or
contempt:

blithering
crashing
raving

thundering
freezing
scalding
piddling
whopping

These adjectives tend to collocate with particular words so we talk about a whopping great lie.

Can you add the words in question? You will find the answers on Page 00.

Answers to collocation quiz

(These all come from the Co-Build corpus)

blithering idiot
crashing bore
raving lunatic
thundering nuisance
freezing cold
scalding hot
piddling little cars