

Person-Centred Grammar


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sponsored by Pergamon and representing IATEFL

Pro
Tana

Vicenza

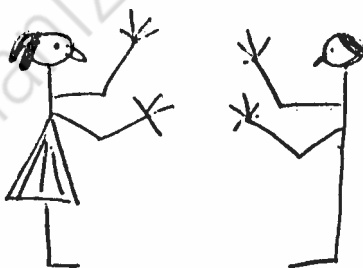
Bologna Conference

+ Pallasler
Days

Giorgio  appears on the big screen in the Sala Europa - he has just passed his maturità which means that he has been in a sitting position for at least 15,000 hours between the ages of 6 and 18, and maybe longer if he had to repeat a year. The sitting position is the classical learning position in school - it is odd that this should be the case in a language class, since we speak in all sorts of body positions.

The audience were asked how many of them had headaches. About 10% of the hands in the vast auditorium went up. Lack of movement and passivity can easily bring on either a headache or somnolence.

The colleagues in the Sala Europa got up and stretched. They then took a partner and began to mirror their partner's slow hand-movements like this:



At a request from the animator they changed partners and continued the exercise.

This form of mirroring can be used for the following purposes:

- a) to help people to meet each other in a new and different way: a kind of non-touching dance without the morphological effect of music.
- b) to wake up a sleepy class at the end of a long, draggy morning.
- c) as a preparation for language exercises in which the students have to closely imitate another person, be it the teacher or a person on audio or video tape.
- d) in teacher training groups as an introduction to a variety of role-reversal activities that help to sensitize the teacher to student feelings.

Drama activities should always be used with a clear teaching aim - as tools they are too powerful to be used haphazardly. My aim in using this exercise here was a mixture of b) and d) above. I also wanted to implicitly illustrate Schiller's brilliant statement that:

"A man is only fully human when he plays, and a man only plays when he is fully human."

Sadly, about 20% of the people in the Sala Europa were too shy/dignified to get up and join in the mirroring exercise. The institution of the university has much to answer for!

Grammar Dictation

The next activity was a dictation that aims to help students to absorb one of the uses of the present simple. Each sentence was dictated and the individual writer then wrote a subjective numerical value next to the sentence:

eg:	<u>Sentence dictated</u>	<u>numerical value</u>
	- she lives a long way from her work place	25 kms
	- he drinks rather a lot of wine each day	2 litres

Each person in the room assigned their own numerical value to each sentence.

Here are the rest of the sentences used:

- she has a big house
- they go to bed late
- she spends a lot of time in the bathroom
- he often goes to the barber's
- she is late for work
- he smokes a lot
- they have a lot of children
- she spends a long time on the phone
- he's gone to Africa for a long stay

Colleagues were asked to work in threes and to compare their subjective ideas of size, lateness, length of time, number of cigarettes etc..... As you would expect there were plenty of different opinions, or an 'opinion gap' as the experts sometimes say. In this exercise you absorb the present simple and learn about yourself and your neighbours as people.

Expanding a sentence

The animator gave the group this sentence:

BOLOGNA WAS LAST WEEK

Colleagues were asked to work on their own and to expand the sentence by adding one word or two. Their expansions were never to contain more than a total of six words: the original four + two new ones. The original words had to stay in the same order vis à vis each other, so a sentence like this breaks the rules:

Was good old Bologna last week?

It breaks the rules because WAS comes before BOLOGNA.

I looked over one colleague's shoulder and these were his expansions:

- Bologna was held last week
- Bologna was bombed last week
- Bologna was last week-end
- Bologna was not last week-end
- Bologna was goalless last week
- Bologna's goalkeeper was sold last week
(this sentence breaks the rules if you consider 's to be a word!)
- Bologna last week - not true!
- Perhaps Bologna was always last week.

Once colleagues had written between eight and twelve sentences they were asked to compare with their neighbours. It is amazing how working within a strict rule frame sharpens one's thinking and calls on the grammar resources of the language one is working in.

Try these sentences with your students:

TELL THE DUSTMAN
I AM A HOTEL

Have a trial run at home with your nearest and dearest in Italian:

SONO UN ALBERGO

Workshop versus lecture

Running a mass-workshop is rather daunting and I am aware that in doing so I was not fulfilling the expectations of those who:

- a) wanted to fill their ears with a stream of native English
- b) were shy of talking to strangers
- c) were shy of talking in English
- d) felt that at that moment they really wanted to be left in peace.

When an animator runs a normal-sized workshop she can see who is abreacting - this is clearly impossible to do comprehensively in a huge hall.

I am willing to take the risk because, as a profession, we have got to break with the schizophrenogenic habit of one-way lecturing about the beauties of two-way communication. A trainer's behaviour with her group must never be discordant with the target behaviour she hopes to elicit/stimulate/facilitate in her trainees. I can no longer psychically or physically bear to listen to an applied linguist lecture for 50 minutes on the fact that a normal listener's attention span rarely lasts more than 10 minutes. And yet such mad behaviour is common in universities and training colleges all over Europe. I would like to reiterate Rod Bolitho's warning at the Convegno in 1984: For the moment training in Italy is in the hands of the responsible classroom teachers - there is a real danger that the applied linguists will try and horn in on the act. For heavens sake keep them out. Some of you heard Professor Candlin's lecture at this year's Convegno. The conclusions are there to be drawn.