

Grammar and Movement:

The Kinaesthetic Kid

Have you ever noticed anybody in your class at all like the boy whose description follows:

It is rare for this lad to sit still. He leans forwards, he leans back, he leans sideways. He distracts the people round him with his perpetual fidgeting. You might well think of him as badly behaved. He asks to go to the toilet two or three times a lesson. Nothing to do with his bladder needs; everything to do with his need to move. He will be delighted if you ask him to wipe the blackboard for you and will do it with willing energy. He tends to touch you and others more than is normal in the culture. When he writes, this boy digs into the paper. His voice tends to be loud and deep, he speaks slowly. If you want him to really read something make sure it is action-packed: a gory death on page 1 may really get him involved.

I say " he" because extreme kinaesthetics are more often boys than girls. The only way this kind of learner takes things on board is by **doing**. He needs to protagonise in order to realise, to register and to learn.

The exercises I am now going to outline feel really right to this kind of learner and are fun for everybody else as well, except perhaps for very sour-puss, highly logical-mathematical learners.

Be a Sentence

Tell ten people in your class that they are going become parts of a sentence; Give them these words, morphemes and punctuation marks to become, one each:

Brisbane
full stop
in
s
live
she
do
comma
question mark
not

Ask the sentence-parts to come to the front of the class a line up as the sentence you read out, eg:

She lives in Brisbane.

Now ask the sentence people to say who they are. Get **live** and **s** to cuddle up against each other as they form one word. Help them to time their speaking so that **lives** sounds like one word, with each saying their own part.

Try a new sentence:

She does live in Brisbane, doesn't she?

Make sure that **do** and **s** and **not** hold on tight to one another and get them to notice that, in this combination, **do** and **not** have to modify considerably.

etc.....

Be a sentence is a perfect exercise for the kinaesthetic kid. If he becomes the third person ending he suddenly sees that there must be an **s** there since he is that **s**. The activity is also great fun for most of the other learners who need this mode of work less than the "k" kid.

Back Writing

Pair the students and ask them to give each other a short back massage. (with some cultural groups the pair needs to be same-sex) Tell the students they are going to revise irregular plurals. Person A is to write, say, **mouse** on Person B's back in large clear letters. Person B says nothing but turns Person A round and writes **mice** on their back. In this way they work through a dozen irregular nouns.

Back-writing is a frequent primary school exercise, with kids practising the times table and many other binary linkages.

In working with EFL learners of any age you get them back-writing in areas like these:

L1 word L2 word

Picture word

US word Australian word

irregular infinitive irregular simple past

first half of a proverb second half of same proverb

irregular adjective its comparative

a word its opposite

a word its synonym (if you believe there are such things)

Latin verb eg: *postpone* phrasal verb: *put off*

written word/ phrase eg: *grandmother* spoken word: *Granny/Gran/ Nan*
Are you coming? *Coming?*

The Reduction Exercise

This, like the one before, comes from Gattegno's Silent Way and encourages the student to explore the grammar system, noticing what they can and cannot do within the rules of the target language.

Using a syntactical structure you want the students to practice, write up a long, embedded sentence on the board, and include plenty of adjectives and adverbs.

Tell the students that it is their task to reduce this sentence, if possible, to one word. They do this by telling you to rub out one word

two consecutive words or
three consecutive words.

After each deletion the person who proposed it reads out the remaining sentence aloud to check that it is still grammatically correct and that it makes sense, though the meaning will gradually, and sometimes abruptly, change.

When you are asked to delete one word, or a group of two or three words, do it without thought. Make your judgement about correctness during the student reading. In this way you avoid interfering with the students' discovery learning process.

The amount of language learning that goes on during this exercise is phenomenal, providing you hang back enough not to destroy it.

It is not always possible to reduce a thirty word sentence to one, but it feels good when it does happen.

When I look back at the one hour we had in Brisbane to work on grammar activities I feel we did what time allowed but that there is so much more to be explored. Why not have a look at these books:

Creative Grammar Practice, Guenter Gerngross and Herbert Puchta, Pilgrims-Longman, 1993

Grammar Practice Activities, Penny Ur, Cambridge,

Grammar in Action Again, Christine Frank and Mario Rinvoluceri, Prentice Hall, 1999

Grammar Games, Mario Rinvoluceri, Cambridge, 1985

More Grammar Games Davis and Rinvoluceri, 1996

Story-Telling

Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims, UK

The central theme of this workshop can be summed up with an anecdote told about Umberto Eco. When his first novel, **The Name of the Rose**, came out, he granted an interview to an Italian magazine. After five minutes small talk with the journalist, Eco looked at her and said:

" May I ask you an embarrassing question? I know that my book is rather long and that you have many things to do..... so have you been able to read parts of it?"

The journalist changed colour and replied:

" Not only have I read the whole text, but there are some parts I have read twice."

Eco sighed deeply: " Yes, I see, well then we do have a problem. Are we going to discuss the book you read or the one I wrote?"

This anecdote sums up what I have to say about story-telling and story-listening. One person tells a story and this sets in motion an incredible, transformative process in the heads of the listeners.

As the story finishes some minutes later the teller's text vanishes, dies, to be replaced the diverse, amazing, elaborated texts in the minds of the listeners.

To illustrate this claim I told the group a traditional Japanese ghost story that illustrates the power of a mother's love for her child.

Once the story was over I asked for a volunteer to tell me about the pictures created during the listening in her head. I asked other members of the group to write down the battery of questions I used. Here they are:

Did you see pictures?

Were they black and white or colour?

Were they still or moving?

What size were they and how far away from you?

Were you actually in the same space as the action, or were you looking at a picture external to you?

If the picture was external to you, did it have a border or frame?

Were there dominant colours?

What was the light like?

Were things clear and focused or blurred?

Was perspective important in your pictures?

Did the way your pictures were change in the course of the story?

I interviewed a couple of people and then the whole group paired off and explored each other's visualisation of the story. (This was rough on the few people who had not seen any pictures, but who had lived through a series of sensations and feelings.)

There were people who saw small, black and white, still pictures that were quite far away from them. There were people who got large, cinema screen-like pictures that went off into space without edges. There were people who felt themselves to be " in the space " of the action: for them there was no question of an " external picture."

There were one or two people who found themselves almost shadowing the main characters in the story and moving with them. One person became fully identified with one of the protagonists. This person was the chemist in the story. What a range of response! And yet we had only briefly explored the area of listener visualisation and "spatialisation" of the story!

In the presence of these discoveries, some of the things some language teachers do after students have listened to a story do not seem too relevant. Some teachers ask comprehension questions about the teller's text and the students have to put their own creations on ice and try and remember what the teller actually said some ten minutes before. The original text, in its textuality, can seem and feel very remote and is anyway superceded by the student's own elaborated text.

If you are interested in what you could do with students after they have listened to a story, have a look at:

Creating Stories with Children, Andrew Wright, Oxford 1997
Once Upon a Time, Morgan and Rinvoluceri, Cambridge, 1986

Teaching Vocabulary so it sticks
Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims, UK

To find agreement about what words are is a hard task.

Is de Saussure right in saying that they are "signifiers" that simply stand for "signifieds" out there in the world, and that the link between the two is arbitrary.

Are the followers of Rudolf Steiner right in thinking that the sound of a word is mysteriously linked to its meaning, within the sound symphony of a particular language?

Is it true that the way a language "names" the world deeply influences the ways in which the speakers of that language think?

How much does a word current in our everyday speech carry its history with it?
Do we think about 1900-1910 cars when we use the word "windscreen" even though nowadays a "windscreen" is a front window, except in open sports cars.

I have no definitive answers to these questions except that I have long been struck by the way learners of an L2 strike up strong relationships with the words they come across. If I were to ask you which of these words for "house" you prefer, I expect you could give me a clear, emotionally rational answer:

maison (French)
ev (Turkish)

stepi (Albanian)
casa (Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, though pronounced differently in each)
spiti (Modern Greek)
ty (Welsh)
ikos (Ancient Greek)
hus (Swedish)
dom (Russian)
Haus (German)

One of the most powerful follow-up exercises to reading a passage in the coursebook that I know is to ask the students to each individually underline three words, collocations or phrases in the passage that they like, for whatever reason. You then ask students to read out what they have chosen and explain their reasons. This activity shows you clearly how emotionally powerful the form of a word can be for a given student.

A variation is to ask the students to underline three words or collocations in the text that they don't like. This gives you the other side of the emotional coin.

A second variation is to ask the learners to underscore any words and phrases that seem to them to be "very English". This is a semi-consciously contrastive exercise with mother tongue.

All three variations are effective in helping words to stick in your students' minds.

Have you ever used Caleb Gattegno's **Categorisation Exercise** as part of your revision work with students?

Give them 20 words you think need bringing back to mind. Check that people remember most of them. Ask students to help each other.

Ask the students to work on their own and to group the words in categories to which they give headings. There must be at least two categories and less categories than the number of words.

Group the students in fours to sixes and ask them to compare their categorisations.

All types of categories are acceptable: semantic, phonological, grammatical, relational etc...

You see a new side to your students' brilliance in this exercise.

The last revision exercise we had time for in the workshop was one that allows students to explore their sensory representation of words, to realise part of how they "make sense" of words they hear or read. On the one hand this is a neat vocabulary revision exercise and on the other it quietly introduces you to the thrilling world of Neuro-Linguistic Programming and one of its applications to language.

Ask the students to rule four columns on the page in front of them and to write in these headings:

I see I hear I feel through my body I smell/taste

Explain that you are going to give them words that need revising and that they are to notice what happens first when they hear the word. Do they first see, first hear, first feel through the body or first taste or smell? So, for example, if I give you the word

ship your initial representation of it might be a picture, sounds, a feeling, a taste or a smell. The students write the word down in the column in which they get their first representation.

When the dictation phase is over students work in small groups and can often be amazed at how hugely differently they internally represent the world of words. This is a marvellously intimate, exploratory exercise, but without any feeling of indiscretion or over-stepping boundaries.

If you are after more techniques for teaching words and word chunks you could do worse than have a look at **Vocabulary**, John Morgan and Mario Rinvolucri, Oxford, 1986.

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Country Its capital/ nationality/ longest river/ highest mountain

I am pretty sure you will think up plenty more binary linkages yourself..... eg
date.....battle 1916..... Gallipoli (let Churchill's bones rot)

Group Mirror

Gather the students into a big standing circle and tell them to imitate your movement and action and tell them to echo your words, imitating as closely as they can. You work from your place in the circle, so that all can see you. Now forget about the students and mentally give yourself 100% to this scene.

You check for your car key (pocket or handbag- mime this)
You try to open the car door- it will not open
You check again for your keys
My keys... my car keys....
Where are my keys?
Shit!
You rattle the car door,
You look up towards the first floor of the house:
Mary!
pause
Mary!
Listen, Mary!
Cup your hand round your ear, miming listening to her reply
My keys, Mary.
Yes, my car keys.....
Where are they?
pause
again mime listening
Probably in the kitchen.....
mime listening
No?
Maybe in the bedroom.....
listen
Maybe in the loo.....
listen
You found them!
My keys!
catch the keys thrown down from the window
Thanks Mary!
open car door.

This activity is described at greater length in Bernard Dufeu's book **Teaching Myself**, OUP, 94, which is full of marvellous movement exercises.

The **Group Mirror** activity allows students to forget themselves in choral movement