

Aspects of language

In this article I discuss different aspects of language. Besides teaching language skills, it is important to teach young learners pronunciation, new vocabulary and grammar. Taking into account the needs of young learners, I show some useful ways and activities of teaching these aspects.

1 Teaching the pronunciation of English

Watkins (2005) defines pronunciation as the sounds of language. 'The sounds may occur in isolation, or as part of a longer stream of sounds' (Watkins 2005: 49). Moreover, pronunciation is about stress. Children should know which part of a word is stressed. Intonation is also very important owing to the fact that it effects meaning of an utterance. Children should understand the pronunciation used by others. Teaching them to recognize and understand the pronunciation of others is in order to improve their ability to listen effectively and give them the model of pronunciation. According to Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992), children are good at imitating and imitate your model of pronunciation, for this reason it is important to provide a good model of pronunciation.

There are some consonant sounds which occur in English but not present in the mother tongue. 'In cases like this, it will be useful to demonstrate how these sounds are made by showing what should be happening to the lips, tongue, and teeth' (Brewster, Ellis, Girard 1992:85). The teacher should demonstrate the way in which vowels are made. You have to make children aware of the differences between /I/ and /I:/ by using the technique of 'ear-training'. Pupils learn to hear these differences by listening exercises and games or listening for the same and different sounds. Phonetic Bingo is a useful game to practise sounds.

It is important that teaching pronunciation does not concentrate only on the production of individual sounds. 'One of the pronunciation features present in English is *linking* where certain sounds are run on together to avoid a jerky, staccato effect. This happens most commonly where a word ending in a consonant or a vowel is followed by

a word with a vowel' (Brewster, Ellis, Girard 1992:86).

Watkins (2005) maintains that in English we stress the words that are important to the message. Many words have both a strong and weak form. According to Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992), stressed beats occur in English at roughly equal intervals of time, regardless of how many syllables there are between each beat. You can demonstrate this by asking pupils to clap to the strong beats and adding more syllables between the claps. Stressed words include nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. The stressed word sounds louder than the other words, the vowel in the stressed word is clearly pronounced and sounds longer. The words which do not have stress must be said rather quickly to fit them in. They are shorter and the vowels are not pronounced clearly. Words which do not receive strong stress are referred as weak forms. They occur with articles, auxiliary, pronouns and prepositions.

'Intonation refers to the patterns of pitch movement, or the *melody* of the language' (Watkins 2005:54). You can teach intonation by using a natural model of intonation. Pupils can copy from you. Children should understand that intonation can affect the meaning of sentences. Pupils must practise new intonation pattern. According to (Brewster, Ellis, Girard 1992), the most usual intonation pattern in English uses a falling tone to make short statements, questions with words such as who, why, what, commands and exclamations to show anger, surprise or give a warning. The rising tone is used to make requests, questions from statements, Yes/No questions, clauses or phrases that come before the main clause in the sentence.

You can improve pronunciation by carefully listening to recorded material and authentic English on radio broadcasts and television. You can practise repeating particular phrases using the model provided by the cassette or CD. Watkins (2005) points same useful tips on teaching pronunciation: help pupils to hear differences, make the teaching of pronunciation visual as much as possible, give a lot of opportunities to practice and correct mistakes in a sensitive way. The teacher should provide natural models and encourage children to copy them. Besides this, the process of pronunciation teaching should be integrated into most lessons.

2 Teaching vocabulary

Philips (1993) thinks that the best way of learning vocabulary is by illustrate the

meaning by a picture, an action or a real object. Then the pupils should use the words in relevant contexts in order to establish their relationship to other words.

2.1 Introduction of new vocabulary

According to Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992), new vocabulary should be presented in a familiar context. Harmer (2001) divides it into three main areas: the classroom, situations and formulated information. Formulated information is presented in the form of charts, graphs, maps, and so on. Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992) claim that visual support helps to convey meaning and memorize new words. They are often remembered in groups which have something in common. You can introduce new words in lexical sets, rhyming sets, colour sets or grammatical sets. Grouping words together help children associate new words with words they know. Pupils can use their senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching to understand meanings and memorize words. There some techniques used to introduce new vocabulary:

- Using objects

You can introduce a new word by showing the real object in the classroom or real things brought to the classroom. This way helps children memorize the word through visualisation.

- Drawing

You can use objects drawn on the blackboard or on flash cards.

- Using illustrations and pictures

A large number of vocabulary may be introduced by illustrations or pictures found in the language learning materials or from magazines.

- Mime, expressions and gestures

Many adjectives and nouns can be introduced through mime, expressions, and gestures.

➤ Using opposites

Children associate words with a concept and learn two words instead of one.

➤ Eliciting

This technique is motivating and memorable. 'Once a context is established, you can ask pupils (you may need to do this in the mother tongue) what words they would expect to find or what they would expect someone to say or do in a particular situation' (Brewster, Ellis, Girard 1992:91).

➤ Guessing from context

Children take risks and guess the meaning of unknown words.

➤ Translation

There are some words which need to be translated.

2.2 Practising and checking vocabulary

After introducing new words, you provide opportunities for children to practise new vocabulary and check their understanding. You can do it using different activities.

➤ What's missing

In this game you stuck illustrations on the board. Then ask children to close their eyes and remove these illustrations. Pupils open their eyes and tell you what is missing. This game may be played as a team game. In the same way works Kim's Game using objects on a table or a tray.

➤ Memory games

In Chinese Whispers you give one child a list of words. The child have to remember these words and whispers to the next pupil and so on. The last pupil compare the list with the first list.

➤ Guessing games

You can play Hide and Seek or Mime. In Hide and Seek one child goes outside the classroom and other children hide an object. The pupil comes back and guess where this object is. This game can be played to practise nouns and prepositions. In Mime a child mimes a profession or an animal while the others guess what it is.

➤ Classifying/Sorting

Children sort words into different categories.

➤ Labelling

Children label a picture to practise nouns from lexical sets.

➤ Dominoes

This activity practise reading and matching words which rhyme.

➤ Word Machines

In these exercises pupils develop a working knowledge of possible letter combinations. 'The machine changes a word by performing one (or more) operations on it to form a new word' (Brewster 1992:94).

There are many other activities in order to practise vocabulary, for example word stars, sequencing, matching words to pictures, picture dictation, crosswords, and so on. Because young learners like playing games you can follow Feunteun (2000) and choose different games, for example bingo, add-a-word, spider's web, Simon says, pelmanism, and so on.

2.3 Consolidating vocabulary

New vocabulary should be introduced and practised and then should be consolidated and revised. According to Brewster (1992), here are some consolidating techniques:

➤ Word families/sets

Children can build up their own word sets. They can have labelled envelopes with

labelled pictures by topic.

➤ Vocabulary cards

Pupils make their own vocabulary cards for self-testing. On one side of the card they can draw a picture and on the other they write the English word.

➤ Researching

Learners look for similarities between English and Polish words and build up a wall display or collage.

There is a large number of other activities than can be used to consolidate and revise the words, for example picture dictionaries, vocabulary books, class dictionary, collages, and so on.

3 Teaching grammar

'Grammar is sometimes defined as *the way words are put together to make correct sentence*' (Ur 1991:75). This is an easy way to explain the term to young children.

3.1 The ways of teaching grammar

A specific instance of grammar is called a grammatical structure. There is for example: past tense, noun plurals, the comparison of adjectives, and so on. Grammar also affects meaning of words and sentences. You can explain to pupils that the addition of plural -s to the noun indicates that you talk about more than one item.

If you teach grammar you may use grammatical terms. Units of language can be called text, sentence, clause, phrase, word, morpheme. You can analyse the sentence according to the relationship between component phrases called parts of the sentence. The most known parts of the sentence are subject, verb and object. What is more, different parts of the sentence are called parts of speech. There are nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, modal verbs, determiners, prepositions.

A grammatical structure should be presented and explained in clear, simple,

accurate and helpful way. You have to present the structure in both speech and writing form. A good presentation should include both form and meaning. You must provide enough examples of the structure in meaningful context. Visual materials contribute to understanding. After presentation there are grammar practice activities. 'The aim of grammar practice is to get students to learn the structures so thoroughly that they will be able to produce them correctly on their own' (Ur 1991:83). Pupils should do different practice activities that familiarize them with structures in context. Children have to practice both in form and meaning. Lastly, they come from controlled and accuracy-oriented activities to fluency activities. Here they have opportunities for the free use of the grammar in context.

With reference to Phillips (1993), young learners fast learn words but slowly learn structures. Words have immediate meanings whereas grammatical structures are useful after them. Pupils learn phrases holistically. You must repeat these structures very often in varied meaningful contexts using different vocabulary. Older children can make new sentences from elements they have learned. 'You may find that they mix their own language with English to make hybrid sentences to express their meaning: for example, My cat is gris (grey)' (Phillips 1993:68). Grammar should be taught in context. You must give pupils a lot of opportunities to put rules into practice in order to communicate. According to Brewster (1992), young learners should be provided with opportunities to use grammatical structures for communicative purposes. You can teach grammar by using topics or themes as your starting point. You can use stories, which introduce children to the grammatical patterns in natural way. Games, rhymes and songs may be used to practise specific language patterns. Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992) claim that there is a procedure for presenting a structure to young learners. The structure should be presented, practised and produced in a controlled frameworks.

3.2 Grammar activities

Phillips (1993) points same activities, which can be used in teaching grammar to young children:

➤ Flashcard ideas

The aim of this activity is to drill structures. You can use flashcards as cues for structures. 'For example, a swimming pool could be the cue for *She's swimming*, *She*

can swim or Let's go swimming' (Philips 1993:70). You can practice comparatives by using pairs of cards, for instance: *'This car is bigger than that car*, or to find something that both cards have in common, for example: *They are both red*, or a difference: *This car has four doors and that car has two doors'* (Philips 1993:70).

➤ The lost pet

You can use this exercise to present a structure in context or to involve pupils in a situation, or story. You may use interactive storytelling to present a structure. This activity is based on toy animal or puppet. You hide the puppet or toy in the classroom. Then you introduce the situation by showing a picture of an empty cage and saying of the escaped pet. Next, you point to different furniture and use various prepositions to practise the question and answer, for example: *'Is it under the chair? No, it isn't'* (Philips 1993:75).

➤ Keeping the rules

The purpose of this tape is to practice the language of permission. The pupils match sentences to places. They can work in pairs to solve the puzzle and check the answers. Then they find sentences that express obligation, prohibition and permission. Finally, they may write some sentences for another situation.

➤ Colour parsing

This activity can be used in order to learn how a sentence is constructed. Children underline words in showing colours. The teacher writes model sentence and asks pupils to underline the words in the appropriate colours. Finally, pupils make sentences, individually or in groups.

Obok kształcenia umiejętności słuchania, mówienia, czytania i pisania nauczanie wymowy, słownictwa i gramatyki jest integralną częścią procesu nauczania języka angielskiego. Dzieci powinny trenować wymowę w takim stopniu, który umożliwi im komunikatywne wypowiedzianie się. Należy uczyć rozpoznawania i rozróżniania dźwięków, akcentu wyrazowego i zdaniowego oraz intonacji. Nauka prawidłowej wymowy jest ściśle uzależniona od kontaktu z dobrym wzorcem dostarczanym przez nauczyciela i nagrania rodzimych użytkowników języka angielskiego. Nowe

słownictwo powinno być wprowadzone poprzez ilustrację jego znaczenia przy użyciu na przykład obrazków, ruchu, maskotek klasowych. Uczeń powinien mieć możliwość częstego i regularnego utrwalenia oraz powtórzenia poznanego słownictwa w różnych nowych sytuacjach. Zadaniem nauczyciela jest dbanie nie tylko o płynność i zrozumiałość wypowiedzi uczniów ale także o poprawność gramatyczną. Małe dzieci uczą się prostych struktur gramatycznych poprzez słuchanie opowiadań, powtarzanie rymowanek i śpiewanie piosenek. Nauczanie gramatyki odbywa się poprzez prezentację nowej struktury, praktykę a następnie produkcję językową.

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Opracowała

Rnata Dufaj

