

Teaching grammar at Primary Schools.

Learning a foreign language is a difficult task and requires a long period of time. To achieve the ability to speak fluently takes place in stages. Interpretative skills (listening, reading) are developed much more quickly than expressive skills (speaking, writing). Communicative ability is nowadays considered to be the most important. Although, grammar errors are thought to be less misleading, it is certain that to be clearly understood a solid background of grammar should be given. *“Let schoolmasters puzzle their brains with grammar and nonsense and learning...”* as Olivier Goldsmith, a British poet and playwright said. Teaching dull grammar rules in an interesting way is a great challenge.

Grammar is central and also one of the most difficult aspects of learning and teaching a foreign language. It is defined in several ways e.g. The Oxford American Dictionary defines grammar as *“the study of words and the rule for their formation and their relationships to each other sentences; the rules themselves; speech or writing judged as good or bad according to the rules”*. Many teachers of young learners find grammar teaching as a boring set of forms and rules that they have to explain and drill students on them. Some of the teachers tend not to teach grammar at all believing that the second language should be acquired without overt instruction like the first, mother tongue. These two contrasting views are joined together in the communicative competence model of teaching that recognizes that overt grammar instruction helps students to acquire knowledge more effectively.

According to Noam Chomsky all children are born with some kind of language processor – a ‘black box’ or ‘language acquisition device’ – which allowed them to formulate rules of language based on the input they received. *“The mind, in other words, contains ‘blueprints for grammatical rules’”*. Once these rules have been activated, the potential for creativity follows. It is not enough just to teach students ‘good’ habits: they also need to be given input which will allow their ‘processor’ to work.”. There are two main models of classroom management: **the teacher – centered model**, where the teacher is active and transmits all the information to the students who are passive – they listen, absorb and repeat following the instructions and **the learner – centered model**, where both a teacher and students are active, they work together creating ‘real’ communication situations. The second type requires more preparation time because the material presented in the textbook must be completed with appropriate real – world details. At primary school the second type of learning

should be mainly used in order to arouse interest of children. The major factor in learning-teaching process is *motivation* and how to keep it during teaching practice periods. To be engrossed in the subject children should be supplied with basic inner needs - like food, drink, warmth, shelter and emotional needs such as love, self – esteem, desire for recognition etc. All these are underpinned by the fundamental desire to learn. If children are involved with class activities, they are motivated by using senses – sight, smell, touch, sound etc. The level of involving depends on the ‘environment’, which is created by the teacher in the classroom. There are all kinds of decorations, lighting, room arrangement, tools and props which are used for building a problem – solving situation in which the students have opportunities to work out their own ideas.

It is vital to teach grammar in a way that students find interesting, worthwhile and enjoyable. The subject should be taught in an interesting and effective way. Children at the age of 9 -10 learn in a special way, which is different from older ones, adolescent or adults’ way of learning. They take in information indirectly from everything around them. They have a need for individual attention from the teacher, they like to talk about themselves, their lives, families and interests. An enthusiasm for acquiring a knowledge and curiosity about the world around them helps the teacher in the education process. Thus, very important for this kind of learners is their ‘environment’ in the classroom. The surrounding should be bright and colorful with enough space for a wide range of activities to be taking place. Because of having a limited attention span, the children between nine to eleven should be extremely engaged with the tasks which needed to be changed after every ten minutes or so.

Therefore, classroom organization plays a vital role in a teaching – learning process. It must be related to the school’s philosophy, curricular aims, methods, differences between learners and their interpersonal relations. For that reason it is important to use various ways to achieve the success.

Differences in the ability to acquire a new language are related to age, motivation, individual features and even to sex.. All of them should be taken into account, especially age of learners. According to psychological research, children between 10 and 11 years old are considered to be upper group of the younger learners. Children at that age rapidly develop their social and educational skills. They are naturally lively and they have a limited span of concentration.

According to Komorowska factual thinking and automatic memory characterizes children at that age. Abstract thinking and logic memory are not created completely. Thus, teaching ought to be combined with real objects and situations. Simple expressions,

vocabulary and instructions are necessary to draw and keep children's attention during the lesson. Students can memorize as fast as forget, so they learn more successively material which is associated with their surrounding e.g. classroom, experience and feelings. Therefore the teacher should frequently change forms of activity, avail different impulses which keep up attention (pictures, sounds, movement), and revise material quite often. 10 – 11 years old students have a constant need to play and move. Providing them with a wide range of teaching activities like games, puzzles, drawing, singing etc. seems to be essential. They react spontaneously and achieve aims if they feel they are ready to do so. In conclusion the teacher should not encourage children to speak if they do not want to. Choral repeating or "short – scenes" are better solutions. Lacking of direct mistakes' correction plays also a vital role in successful learning- teaching process. A friendly and warm-hearted atmosphere is an important motivating factor as well.

Maria Przetacznikowa calls this period of life 'stage of category and conformity'. Interest of a real world, ability of making comparison of objects and their classification according to different criteria, giving definitions and generalization stand up for a learning process.

Developing social cooperation among the children at that age supports the idea of working with students not only individually, but in groups as well. That kind of working develops communicative skills and good relations among the children.

Methodology

One of the most important problem is **methodology** - a 'model' of teaching that includes methods, procedures, techniques and approaches using by the teacher in their work.

An approach describes how to acquire the knowledge and how to use it successfully.

Methods are the practical realization of an approach. They include teacher's and children's roles, the types of activities, material, a model of syllabus organization, various procedures and techniques.

A procedure is an order of techniques from the beginning to the end of one task.

A technique is a single activity used during one task. Methods which are used are appropriate and effective for the classroom situation described earlier.

These terms describe typical procedures or sets of procedures which are used in different ways of teaching. Some of them are:

- **The Audio – Lingual Method** is based on the Behaviourist model of learning. According to this theory conditioning is the result of a three – stage procedure: *stimulus*,

response and *reinforcement*. In this point of view while learning mother tongue this stimulus – response – reinforcement pattern occurs. The same way can be used when learning a foreign language. The teacher is a ‘model’ of using a target language and a conductor of students’ behaviour. This method relied on drills to form good habits in a target language. In the first place the language is ‘de-contextualized’ to reduce possible mistakes, in the second – repetition is very important to prevent students from making errors developing positive habits. The main goal of the method is “overlearning” i.e. learning to use answers automatically. Although, this method seems to banish students sort out new language information in their minds, it is useful in improving the communicating process.

- **The Communicative Learning Teaching methods (CLT)** are focused on the significance of language functions. They involve students in a realistic communication which is the most important in those methods. The vital purpose in these activities is that students should have a desire to communicate something. The teacher creates and stimulates the situation, gives supporting materials and does not intervene to stop the activity. But students have to be given a clear aim of the activity. It is essential to include snatches of drilling and focused language work into activities which are provided. A great value of CLT is that children work in pairs or in groups which helps to improve speaking skills and builds correct relationships among them.

- **The Grammar – Translation Method** is one of the oldest. It is also called the Classical Method as it was used in teaching of Latin and Greek. It was thought that learning a foreign language would improve students intellectually. A main purpose of this method is translating one language to another. Students should learn grammar patterns by heart and then use them in the target language. In spite of criticizing this way of learning some elements of it can be used in particular grammar exercises.

- **Suggestopaedia** sees the physical surroundings and atmosphere of the classroom as of vital importance. It causes students to feel comfortable, confident and relaxed, thus they are able to intensify their acquisition of knowledge. Very important is removing psychological barriers between a teacher and students and activating their imagination. The subject should be familiar to students and equivalent in a native language ought to be done. What is interesting in this method is that students listen to relaxing music while the teacher reads the new material, there are also ‘*several minutes of solemn silence*’ before leaving the classroom silently.

• **Brain-Storm Method** is one of problematic methods. It is used to solve ideas connected with a problem which has been formulated by the teacher. It is very useful at the beginning of the lesson when students are given a problem and try to find the best solution. This method is based on children's background knowledge not only language skills, but also their past experience and tends towards encouraging brave ideas according to a principle that "*the first idea is the best*". All didactic games include a brain storm as one of the elements of them. It gets children really involved, improves their language competence and develops such abilities as searching information, creating new ideas and solving problems.

Choosing between methods is extremely important. On one hand, we have consideration of students' needs, aims of teaching, age of learners and their personal features. On the other hand - a teacher's approach to the methods and a possibility of using modern and attractive materials and appropriate equipment.

Methods of teaching and learning.

Methodology is a large number of different ways the teaching is carried out. In teaching languages there are a wide variety of methods which have transformed because of changeable approaches to teaching. In this project methods are used according to the needs of the learners and aims which are planned to achieve. The kind of task, individual features of the children, available materials and general conditions in the classroom are always taken into account.

The **direct method** which is very fashionable and is concerned as the best result is applied to teach new vocabulary - the names of the school subjects and the verbs which can be presented as real objects or in the pictures etc. The process of teaching starts from what is familiar to the learners and continues of what is possible to show. The direct method is used for "miming games", describing what people are doing in the pictures and giving commands or instructions during the lesson. Generally speaking it is used as much as possible. For some students support using their mother tongue is necessary, because they are not able to do anything if they do not understand the instruction.

Memorization is also used e.g. to memorize facts like the names of the subjects or new words. According to NPL theory there are three main types of perception by using senses in learning process.

- most of people use sight
- the lower group of people use hear
- the lowest group of people use touch

Thus, to present new words the teacher should use variety of ways of perception (speak, write and draw, and let touch). All types of learners ought to have an opportunity to assimilate and memorize them. Therefore additional materials consist of flashcards, pictures, types, labels to the pictures and props connected with school subjects and school activities.

Discovering rules by the children is a type of “brain storm” method because it puts children’s creativity and background knowledge to good account. Some examples are given to the learners who afterwards have to find the correct structure. This kind of activity can be carried out individually or in groups. It depends on of the task’s difficulty and children’s abilities. In this project pupils have to find the rule of making gerunds from verbs (they are given correct examples) and to guess the correct answers to the general questions in the Present Continuous Tense (they are given a correct answer and two incorrect ones).

Most issues in learning- teaching process are conducted by **learning by doing** as it is one of the favorite methods among children. The range of exercises is very wide: the role-playing and demonstrations are applied in this project. The children demonstrate their work to the class – present short speeches about their activities, play different roles in “miming games” and also put puzzled sentences in the correct order.

“To be able to operate effectively in the real world, students need plenty of opportunity to practice language in situations which encourage them to communicate their needs, ideas and opinions.” .The ability to communicate effectively is a main goal in ELT. At primary school it is sensible to build basic potential for this. Therefore, ‘real life’ situations should be created which let students develop their ‘communicative competence’

Communicative methods are used nearly throughout the entire lesson. According to Tricia Hedge they consist of:

- linguistic competence
- pragmatic competence
- discourse competence
- strategic competence
- fluency

All of these competences are developed during one session. All of them are important and most appropriate balance of them should be determined by the age and the level of the learners. Children between 10 and 11 years old like information – gap activities (they complete the missing words in the text). They also correct their schoolmates’ mistakes while working in groups or in pairs. Group tasks let them collaborate, emend errors and improve language skills.

The teacher's role is not only to present and provide with new language forms, but also to set up activities, organize material resources, (guide, encourage), monitor and diagnose the further needs of students.

Bibliography

1. Abbs Brian and Freebairn Ingrid, "*Blueprint Intermediate*", Pearson Education Longman, Harlow 1997
2. Duff Alan, "*Translation. Resource Books for Teachers*" Oxford University Press 1996
3. Encyclopedia Britannica CD 2000, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000
4. Fontana Dawid, "*Psychologia dla nauczycieli*" Zysk i Spółka Wydawnicza, Poznań, 1998
5. Harmer Jeremy "*The Practice of English Language Teaching*", Pearson Education Limited, Edinburgh Gate Harlow Longman 2001
6. Hedge Tricia, "*Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*", Oxford University Press 2000
7. Komorowska Hanna, "*Metodyka nauczania języków obcych*", Fraszka Edukacyjna, Warszawa, 2004
8. Lozanov Georgi "*Suggestology and Outlines of Suggestopody*", Gordon and Breach 1978
9. Okoń Wincenty "*Zarys dydaktyki ogólnej*", PWN, Warszawa 1970
10. Pinker, Steven "*The Language Instinkt*, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow Penquin 1994
11. Przetacznikowa Maria, "*Psychologia wychowawcza, społeczna i kliniczna*", Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warszawa 1979
12. Sesnan, Barry "*How to teach English*" Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003
13. Żebrowska Maria „*Psychologia rozwojowa dzieci i młodzieży*”, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1982
14. The Oxford American Dictionary