

The background of the slide is a spiral-bound notebook with a brown cover and a light beige, textured paper. The spiral binding is on the left side.

Modernising grammar: terminology
and priorities for teaching.

A study in brain activity.

John Bald

Presentation Copyright © John Bald 2012

johnbald.typepad.com

Understanding Language: Some Key Dates

1492 Antonio de Nebrija: Grammar of Spanish

1534 Luther's translation of the Bible

1583-1776 Indo-European Language Tree

1822 Champollion, hieroglyphs

1916 Saussure, Cours de Linguistique Générale

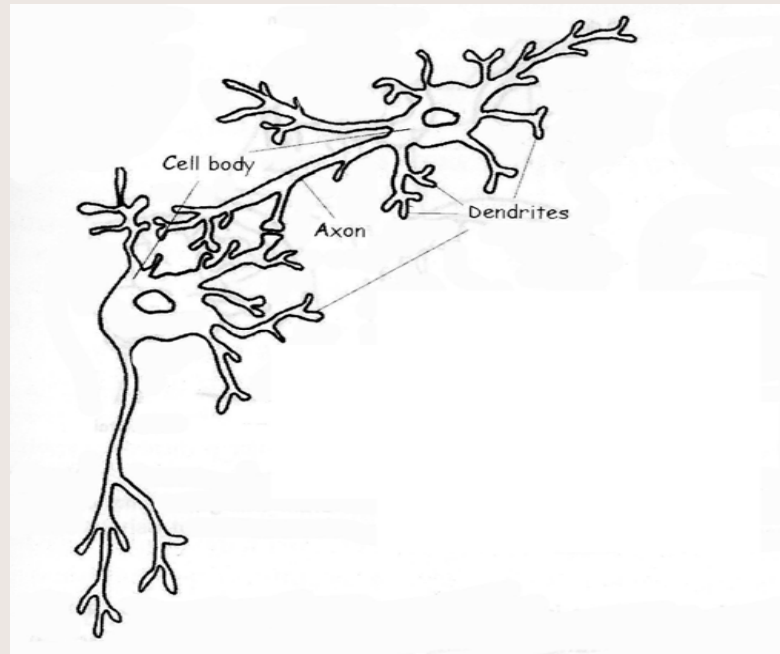
1936 Grevisse, Le Bon Usage

1962 (1934) Vygotsky, Thought and Language

c1970 - present. Brain scanning (PET, MRI, MEG)

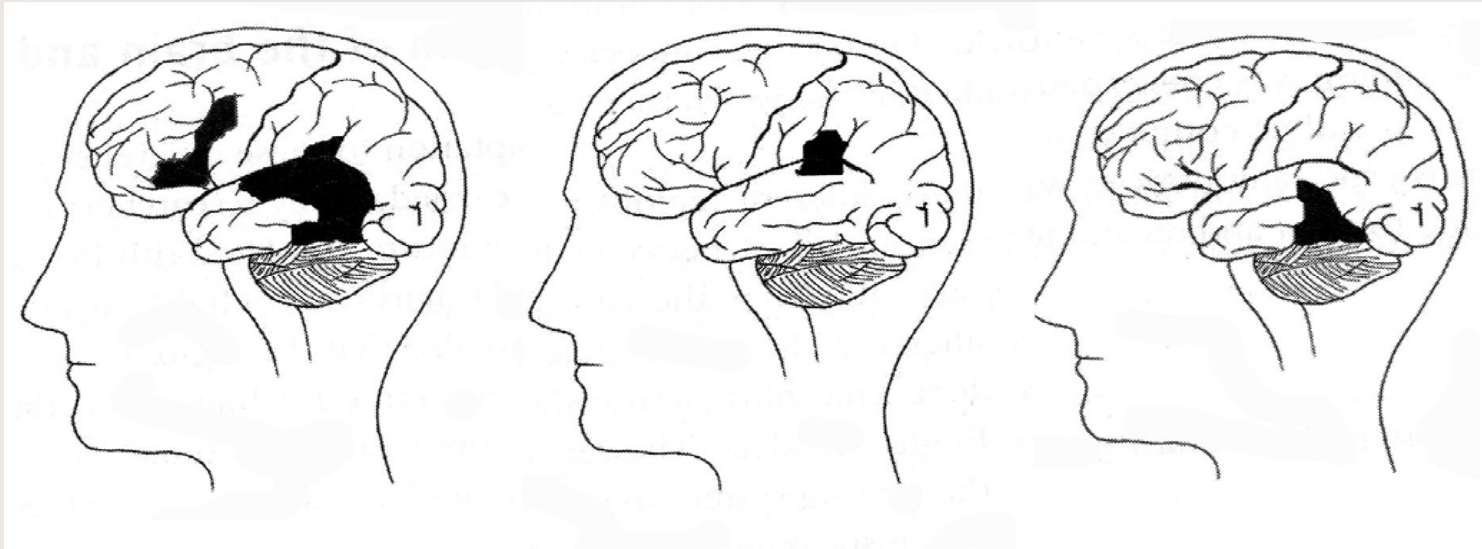
Brain cells and connections

(from *The Learning Brain*, Blakemore and Frith, 2005)



As we learn, brain cells form connections with each other that build into **chunks** and **networks**. These connections are strengthened with practice. Our understanding of grammar provides a framework for the development of networks.

The brain adapts itself to different languages



Reading Aloud in English and Italian, evidence from brain scans (active areas in black)

- Left: reading system of English and Italian combined
- Centre: sound processing more active in Italian
- Right: word form area more active in English

(from *The Learning Brain*, Blakemore and Frith, 2005)

As we learn a new language...

- We add to and adapt the structures formed in our brain as we learned our first language.
- These structures influence the way we learn the new language, both the parts we find easy, and the errors we make. (Swan and Smith, *Learner English*.)
- We learn that each new language is a human construct, and has human inconsistencies.

English speakers need to adapt to:

- New relationships between written and spoken language
- Gender in nouns that have no physical gender, and in associated pronouns and adjectives.
- Greater variation in verb forms than in English (except for Mandarin!)
- New ways of phrasing and of constructing sentences.

Where there is structure, there is grammar.

- Saussure's *Capacité de Langage* is adapted in ways that suit human societies.
- Mandarin often omits the verb *to be*.
- Genders are retained in languages because their users choose to do so.
- Languages order words as they choose - eg negatives, German verb placements.
- Idiom and usage are part of grammar.

A graphic of a spiral-bound notebook with a brown cover and a light beige page. The spiral binding is on the left side. The text is written on the page in blue and black. A horizontal line is drawn across the page, separating the title from the questions.

As we teach grammar, we teach
children to use new structures.

What structures do they need?

How do we ensure that children
understand them?

How do we enable children to use them
confidently and fluently?

We hinder understanding by

- Using terminology that obscures structures rather than making them clear -eg *tense*.
- Presenting too much new material at once.
- Going faster than children can understand.
- Copying, which requires children to switch their attention continually between the master version and their own. These jerky movements hinder the formation of neural connections.

Some errors from a Year 7 mixed-ability class

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------|
| • | <i>Quel as âge tu.</i> | <i>Quel âge as-tu?</i> |
| • | <i>O habite tu Ou j'habites-tu</i> | <i>Où habites-tu?</i> |
| • | <i>Où habite a Londres.</i> | <i>J'habite à Londres.</i> |
| • | <i>Common t'appelle tú_</i> | <i>Comment t'appelles-tu?</i> |
| • | <i>Je onzo age</i> | <i>J'ai onze ans</i> |
| • | <i>Ja un douze</i> | <i>J'ai douze ans</i> |

(experienced teacher, pupils had models of the sentences they were trying to write, from which they could copy.)

Some key priorities for French...

- The French like their spoken language to flow, and their written language to be precise.
- All nouns have a gender. (Very occasionally, two - le or la professeur)
- The form of verbs varies more than in English, and the negative is tricky.


...and how to explain the first of them


- Explain that vowels are voice sounds, and that two together can be jerky - say *je ai*. Can they hear the jerk?
- Demonstrate the technique of dropping the first vowel and replacing it with an apostrophe. Write apostrophe on the board. Who thinks it's an English word? Explain that apostrophe comes from the Greek word for gap, and that we have a gap when we take out a letter. So, we have *j'ai*.
- Have children study *j'ai*, then clean it off/minimise it, and have them trace it with their finger on their sleeve or desk. Nearly all will get it right. Praise.
- Write and explain the sentence *J'ai un chat*, noting the letter at the end of the word that is not pronounced. Repeat the tracing.

With Clicker...

Clicker 5 - Document Untitled





File Edit View Insert Format Grid Options Help





J'ai un chat.

Back Explorer AZ

je ai un  chat  chien  chaton  perroquet

abc

Run Mode File: Frintro Done

Extensions suggested by Y4 pupils

Clicker 5 - Document Untitled

File Edit View Insert Format Grid Options Help

The interface shows four sentences, each with a cat illustration. The first sentence is 'J'ai un chat.' with a blue cat. The second is 'J'ai un chaton.' with an orange cat. The third is 'J'ai un tout petit chaton.' with a small orange cat. The fourth is 'J'ai un chaton minuscule.' with a very small orange cat.

J'ai un chat. J'ai un chaton. J'ai un tout petit chaton. J'ai un chaton minuscule.

Back Explorer AZ

je ai un chat chien chaton perroquet

tout petit minuscule .

Run Mode File: Frintrominuscule Done

Boys' and Girls' Words

- Discuss the issue - who thinks the idea of boys' and girls' words is strange? Explain that we're not sure exactly how it came about, but look at analogy with moves from multiple gods and goddesses in ancient world to mostly one god in the modern. English has dropped this - other languages have decided to keep it, probably because they prefer it. 50 million Frenchmen can't be wrong - about this at least.
- Explain how boys' and girls' words are marked, primarily by articles. In Spanish and French, there is often more accent on the feminine.
- Say words masculine and feminine words with articles and have pupils pick them out - typically 95+ success rate after a term and a half of this.
- Revisit often, and relate gender to pupils by having them make simple sentences about themselves./family. This does not duplicate the personal experience of children growing up in a language that uses gender, but it does provide at least 4 years of practice before joining Y7.
- Once the principle is established, pupils have made good progress in identifying gender in written as well as spoken language. Typically, a sound idea of gender is established by Y4.

French Verb song

(song copyright ©Joe Biswell and John Bald)

French verb song

Joseph Biswell, John Bald



Je (point to self, whole hand -finger pointing is rude)
Tu (point to a friend, whole hand - they can't help smiling !)
Il (point to a boy, not your tu friend)
Elle (ditto a girl)


Nous Big circular sweep with both hands
Vous Point to teacher with both hands - explain that vous is a mark of respect to a grown up.
Ils Point to two boys both hands
Elles Point to two girls both hands

A possible order for verbs

- Pronouns only with actions
- Etre (negative with shaking of head)
- Etre positive (might try with nodding head)
- Some regular verbs - eg regarder, écouter, jouer, penser, manger (these bring out regular patterns)
- Any other verb the children would need to use to say something.

Some key priorities for Spanish...

- We mostly write as we say. There are very few silent letters - *¡Hola!*, and double letters have a clear sound - *amarillo*.
- Some letters do not represent the same sounds as in English - *rojo, azul*
- Gender
- Spanish speakers usually take a shortcut with verbs, omitting the pronoun. Spanish verbs can be sung to *10 Green Bottles*.
- Spanish words have one pulse. If they have an accent, it tells us where it is.
- Negatives are easy.



Then we extend, as we wish, adding new grammar as it is needed to say what we want to say...

- Familiar books in the new language (eg *Pas Maintenant, Bernard*)
- ICT - *Zim Zam Zoum* 1 and 2, *Vale Venga Vamos, Little Tails, Mon Ane, Education City, Languagenut*
- Class routines/instructions, class/school rules in new language
- Making lists of things children like and dislike, and practising
- Shared words
- Physical activities - Take 10 series (Devon)
- Cultural activities - generic internet, BBC Being Spanish, Being French (with mediation, as both can be a bit quick), Take Mali
- Contact/partnership with foreign schools - email exchange, skype, direct contact

Year 7, girl, assessed as dyslexic, before sentence building work

1. Ques guard that Watkins has so
 2. many large gondole hergen the eng
 3. the gondole her engens the eng
 4. work back end the eng
 5. the eng the eng the eng
 6. the eng the eng the eng
 7. the eng the eng the eng
 8. the eng the eng the eng
 9. the eng the eng the eng
 10. the eng the eng the eng

① these ~~blend~~ ^{blend} ~~and so French~~ ^{French} ~~and to~~ ^{and to}

the word ~~change~~
the change.

② ~~Som~~ andere 'hangende'
hangende gemeen

③ ^{very} long ^{gemeens} into ^{wereld} world his
Best ^{Tacht} Tacht more grammer
than an

I could write morning

Year 7, girl, assessed as dyslexic, after six weeks' sentence building work

le FLEUR Vrai

Je m'appelle Vickie

J'ai deux fleurs

J'ai un chien

J'ai onze ans

J'ai un petit Oiseau jeune qui s'appelle

Copier

J'habite à Colchester en Angleterre

Year 7, boy assessed as dyslexic



tengo un Perro Blanco y Negro. c

NO tengo un Pez.

tengo once años.

~~tengo~~ NO tengo doce años.

Year 4, higher-attaining girl

- | | |
|----|--------------------------|
| | 11 |
| 1 | J'ai un stylo. |
| 2 | Je n'ai pas de stylo. |
| 3 | J'ai un gomme. |
| 4 | Je n'ai pas de gomme. |
| 5 | J'ai un chat. |
| 6 | Je n'ai pas de chat. |
| 7 | J'ai un chien. |
| 8 | Je n'ai pas de chien. |
| 9 | J'ai un portable. |
| 10 | Je n'ai pas de portable. |

Some patterns in French verbs

- Tu ends in s
- ils/elles end in nt
- Nous ends in -ons (not nous sommes)
- Vous ends in -ez (not vous êtes and vous faites)
- These patterns recur in almost all tenses, including those made with auxiliary (helping) verbs, conditionals and subjunctives.