

Joined-up

How do we talk about grammar and texts?
Teachers of English, linguistics and languages share
their views and approaches

The latest version of the National Curriculum for England creates an ideal moment for teachers with a focus on language to come together and exchange experiences and views on common issues in our programmes of study. Ideally this will result in a shared, joined-up understanding for teachers, and positive outcomes for learners and users of language, whatever that language might be.

Terminology

The teaching of grammar figures in the Programmes of Study (PoS) for both foreign languages and English.

For languages at KS2, the PoS requires pupils to use their knowledge of grammar to “explore the patterns and sounds of language”, to “understand basic grammar” and to understand “how these [languages] differ from or are similar to English”. For English, the grammatical requirements for KS1-2 are defined in much more detail, with an appendix and a glossary devoted to grammar. The appendix lists 40 technical grammatical

terms which pupils are expected to know and be tested on in the KS2 Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar tests. Secondary language teachers will be especially interested to observe those in bold.

The English PoS for Key Stages 3 and 4 puts emphasis on understanding, studying, analysing and discussing grammar, while in languages KS3 pupils are expected to “use accurate grammar” even when they “write creatively”.

Common ground

The similarities between the curriculum demands on students of languages and English are striking.

Both subjects give equal value to spoken and written language and to formal and informal language; and the English PoS even suggests that non-standard varieties are worth studying. Both subjects give pupils authentic texts to study, including literary texts; and both present grammar as a tool for studying, analysing and understanding the different grammatical patterns in these texts. And although both set somewhat higher expectations than in the past for grammatical accuracy, they also respect teachers’ concern that grammar teaching should focus on growth rather than on avoiding errors.

In both subjects, teachers are aware of research that favours explicit teaching of grammar, but are also wary of a wholesale return to the grammar-translation method in languages and to parsing and analysis in English. Moreover, in both subjects many teachers had very little formal training in grammar either at school or at university.

Similarly, teachers in both curriculum areas try to find authentic texts that are likely to motivate pupils, to provide relevant linguistic experience and to be worth

KS1-2 English

Terminology for pupils to know and understand

- **noun, adjective, verb, modal verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction, determiner, pronoun, possessive pronoun, relative pronoun**
- compound (word), suffix, prefix
- **singular/plural; tense (past/present); active/passive; statement/question/exclamation/command**
- **word family, ambiguity, synonym, antonym**
- **word, noun phrase, clause, sentence**
- **subordinate clause, relative clause, direct speech**
- **subject, object, adverbial cohesion.**

teaching



Right Pupils can use their knowledge and understanding of English to assist with learning another language

KS3-4 English

Students are expected to consolidate and build on their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary through:

- studying their effectiveness and impact in the texts they read;
- drawing on new vocabulary and grammatical constructions from their reading and listening, and using these consciously in their writing and speech to achieve particular effects;
- analysing some of the differences between spoken and written language, including differences associated with formal and informal registers, and between Standard English and other varieties of English;
- using linguistic and literary terminology accurately and confidently in discussing reading, writing and spoken language

analysing. Even teachers' methods for exploring texts in class are similar. For example, both language and English teachers use a method (called 'transposition', 'textual analysis' or 'textual intervention') in which pupils explore linguistic differences between genres as a preparation for converting a text from one genre to another (e.g. from a spoken interview to a written one).

In both subjects the analysis of texts is combined with active engagement through manipulation and production of new texts.

Different approaches

But of course there are also fundamental differences in a typical student's knowledge of English and of any other language, as well as in the amount of classroom time available. A KS2 class teacher may be able to build language teaching on what they know of pupils' developing understanding of literacy, but at KS3 joined-up teaching is harder, English has



World of language



Teachers can find different ways to build both vocabulary and grammar

▶ more curriculum time and language learners may have a change of language.

These differences call for different approaches. For example, language teachers need to build vocabulary at the same time as grammar and so may encourage 'personalisation', where learners adapt a text such as a letter to their personal needs, or 'performance' where learners recite a short text from memory. In both cases, the learner's production stays close to the model. In contrast, English focuses on higher-level skills; for example, the study of 'authorial craft', applies a 'linguistic lens' in the close reading of a text with a view to learning more general strategies.

The similarities, however, are certainly worth discussing, and could lead to collaborative planning and teaching, in which English and foreign language colleagues guide the same class through similarities and differences between their respective languages; for instance, teaching could consider how the languages distinguish subjects and objects (using word order or case) or statements and questions (using word order, intonation or other devices); or it could focus on the linguistic characteristics of some genres, such as formal and informal letters.



Joining together

This is a joint article written by representatives of the Association for Language Learning (ALL: www.all-languages.org.uk) and National Association of Teachers of English (NATE: www.nate.org.uk) together with the Committee for Linguistics in Education (CLiE: www.clie.org.uk).

Joint planning

Joint planning could benefit the language teaching by linking to the pupil's rich knowledge and understanding of English; and the benefit for English teaching would lie in the discovery that some of the linguistic conventions that we take for granted are in fact arbitrary, and that increased awareness of the conventions in another language can enrich the understanding and appreciation of our own. We are sure there must be others thinking along these lines.

Please share with us any examples of good practice that you know of where teachers of English and languages are collaborating, by contacting Emma Marsden at the University of York: emma.marsden@york.ac.uk.

Further information

ALL is managing a CPD project, ALL Connect, looking into aspects of the new curriculum in Key Stages 2 and 3, including Grammar, Writing and Literature – you can find the ALL Connect Grammar materials online at www.allconnectblog.wordpress.com. Alongside the training modules included on the site, ALL is creating wikis where teachers can upload their suggestions of activities, strategies, approaches and resources. All teachers of language are welcome to contribute to the wikis and to read the contributions, as these are open access. The ALL Grammar Wiki can be found at <http://all-grammar.wikidot.com>.

- Members of ALL can find a longer version of this article in our Language Zones: <http://tiny.cc/LangZones>.
- FLAME cross-curricular activities can be found at: www.flameplus.net.
- Languages Programmes of Study: <http://tinyurl.com/LangPoS>
- English Programmes of Study: <http://tinyurl.com/EngPoS>