

**Knowledge About Language:
(bridging) the gaps in the Primary National Curriculum for English
*A view from the Committee for Linguistics in Education (CLiE)***

Take this sentence: *Teachers do enormously important work and need to be properly supported.* English speakers will generally understand the sentence easily, using their knowledge of language. However, not everyone will be able to identify *enormously* and *properly* as adverbs, or *enormously important work* as the direct object of the verb *do*. That's because this analysis would rely on technical "Knowledge **About** Language" (KAL). Many people have not learnt much KAL or forgotten most of it. KAL covers the sounds of a language, its grammatical structures, its levels of formality, and so on. It also includes ways in which the language changes across space (with different accents and dialects), and across time (as languages evolve).

The 2014 Primary National Curriculum (NC) specifies the KAL that teachers are required to teach. The amount of required KAL may be surprising to some people, given its lower status in earlier years. For instance, here is a list of the grammar terms to be learnt in Years 1 to 6, when all children take the well-known KS2 Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling (GPS or SPaG) test:

Year	Grammar terms to be learnt	Total
1	word, singular, plural, sentence	4
2	noun, noun phrase; statement, question, exclamation, command; compound, suffix; adjective, adverb, verb; tense (past, present)	14
3	preposition, conjunction; word family, prefix; clause, subordinate clause; direct speech	7
4	determiner; pronoun, possessive pronoun; adverbial	4
5	modal verb, relative pronoun; relative clause	3
6	subject, object; active, passive	4

However, teachers need to know more than these terms and what they mean. The NC also contains implicit expectations. For example, it lists correspondences between written letters and spoken sounds. The standard used for these correspondences (in the International Phonetic Alphabet) is Received Pronunciation (RP). Yet this is just one accent among many. In order to relate the NC effectively to the diversity in their classrooms, teachers need to take account of how their pupils speak.

Teachers may also need additional KAL to be able to field questions from children. The concepts and terms in the NC may well not be enough for this.

Unfortunately, there are no large-scale studies into teachers' actual KAL. The studies we have only tend to focus on knowledge about grammar, as opposed to KAL more broadly. Unsurprisingly, given that most teachers have been taught very little about grammar themselves, the authors of these studies are typically led to conclude that knowledge and confidence are unsatisfactory.

That is not the teachers' fault: the support available to them has been patchy. Some academics have written books and provided professional development for teachers. Teachers also support each other, e.g. via the UK Literacy Association (UKLA) and its publications. In addition, following the introduction of the SPaG tests in 2013, publishers commissioned some books about grammar. From CLiE's perspective, it is unfortunate that these books have generally not been produced by or at least had input from grammarians. As a result, they do not draw on exciting new research on standard and non-standard varieties of English and other languages, and in a number of cases even contain non-trivial numbers of errors.

Equally regrettable is the lack of government support in the past 20 years or so: the glossary of grammatical terms in the NC was a positive step, but teachers need much more. The question of exactly *how* much more needs government attention. CLiE would suggest that in order to make real progress in achievement against the NC standards, the government needs to commission research into what gaps exist in teachers' KAL, and then to invest in developing appropriate high-quality support materials. Educationalists and teachers, who typically produce such materials, have a great deal of valuable knowledge of the curriculum and how to present it in an engaging manner. However, we see significant opportunity for collaboration with academic linguistics. Input from these academics will enhance the quality of the linguistic analyses and help ensure that discussions are linked, where possible and useful, to relevant current research on grammar and language more broadly.

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