Transcript: **PVG revisited: Grammar**

Length of Talk: 44 minutes

Presenter: Victoria Hobson

# Slide 1:

# Hello, I’m Victoria Hobson, and this is part three of CPD 8/TRG 4 of 2020: Revisiting PVG and meaningful practice.

# Slide 2:

The session has these three core objectives. In this third part of the session, we are going to focus on grammar, with a view to revisiting the grammar rationale, developing knowledge of task design principles andincreasing the familiarity with the NCELP Y7 grammar resources for French, German and Spanish.

# Slide 3:

Let’s take a closer look now, beginning with the key elements of teaching grammar from the ‘Principles for teaching grammar in a foreign language’ rationale document.

# Slide 4:

This slide summarises the key elements of teaching grammar from the ‘Principles for teaching grammar in a foreign language’ rationale document. If you wish to refer to the document in full, especially if you are new to NCELP, you will find it with the Rationales, research and guidance collection, here:

[Grammar teaching: rationale - ‘Principles for teaching grammar in a foreign language’ (link to Resource Portal)](about:blank)

The slides that follow in this session are taken from lesson resources that are all on the NCELP portal. Examples are taken from across the three languages and showcase these key principles in action. These activity types may be copied and adapted to add variety to created resources.

To note, the slides in this presentation are often annotated to explain particular features. These annotations would be removed before using the activities with students.

Take a minute or two to read the slide then we’ll move on to the resources.

# Slide 5:

Here we can see the new grammar feature being very briefly described ahead of plenty of practice. This is taken from a French resource on introducing first and second person plural forms of “avoir”.

Providing a succinct, explicit descriptionof the grammar feature, beforepractice, can help learners to understand the meaning of the feature. We can see how importance has been given to describing the meaning (or function) of the grammar by explaining, ‘to say **‘we’**…’ and ‘to say **‘you’** (more than one person)…’ rather than just giving information about forming the grammar structure.

There is a substantial amount of empirical evidence, so studies of language learning, that have shown that for most learners, for most of the time, and across a variety of different grammar features, providing an explanation upfront, before practice, is more beneficial than waiting for or asking learners to spot patterns.

# Slide 6:

This slide from a German resource is an example of how to develop learners’ awareness of the relationship between English and the L2. This is particularly beneficial for grammar features where the relationship is complex e.g., when the L2 grammar feature exists in English but works differently in some way. The brief explanation can include pointers. In this example, the useful pointer ‘Adverbs of time tell us which English tense to use’ is included.

# Slide 7:

In the previous slide we saw an example of how we can develop learners’ awareness of the relationship between English and the L2, with an explanation and examples. This time, to achieve the same aim, a task in the L1 is used. Here, students Pppp asked to choose the correct adverb within a sentence in English, which serves to reinforce the pointer given in the previous slide.

# Slide 8:

Research suggests that regardless of the timing or length of grammar explanations, they don’t, in and of themselves, lead to successful learning. Ultimately it is the amount and quality of practice that have the greatest impact on learning (e.g., Marsden, 2006; Sanz & Morgan-Short, 2004). And so this slide gives an example of embedding grammar in reading. Here, learners benefit from practising paying attention to the grammar features and making the correct connection between a grammar feature and its meaning (or function) in the L2 (VanPatten, 2002, 2004).

Initially, learners need plenty of practice to reinforce knowledge of the grammatical form and its meaning or function in the ‘input’ (i.e. when reading and listening). Input practice should make the grammar feature *task-essential* (Marsden & Chen, 2011; VanPatten, 2002). That is, in order to complete the activity correctly, the learner needs to connect the grammar feature to its meaning (or function). We make the grammar feature *task-essential,* during practice, by removing as many other cues from the sentence as possible. In this case, by hiding the subject to make the verb ending for number *task-essential,* where the learning focus is consolidation of present tense weak verbs in 1st person singular and 1st person plural.

Other ways include removing the temporal adverb to make the grammar that communicates ‘tense’ *task-essential* or by removing intonation cues if we want to really focus attention on just the word order in questions.

# Slide 9:

In this French example, again we are embedding grammar in reading, making the grammar feature *task-essential* this time by hiding the subject to make the verb ending for person *task-essential* where the learning focus is introducing first and second person plural forms of “avoir”.

# Slide 10:

In this second of a series of scaffolded activities based on this text taken from a term 2 French resource, students are asked to identify all examples of verbs. All these verbs are recycled from previous contexts. It is an example of a resource which varies the lexicon around the grammar, specifically, seeing verb endings on a wide range of frequent verbs. All verbs included are regular in the present tense, with the exception of “être” and “avoir”.The teacher is asked to remind students of the “–ent” ending on regular verbs in the third person plural, and that forms of “être” and “avoir”are also verbs.

Other examples of varying the lexicon around the grammar includes: producing adjectival agreement on a wide range of adjectives; hearing questions with a wide range of subject-verb combinations. In doing so, grammar practice is not confined to one or two topics that seem to ‘lend themselves’ to one particular grammar feature, but is practised across a wide range of (preferably, high-frequency) vocabulary. This ‘diversity’ helps learners consolidate their knowledge of a grammatical system that works across multiple contexts.

# Slide 11:

The answer slide to the previous activity is included here for reference, with the verbs highlighted. This is a resource from Year 7 Term 2.1 week 3. The varied lexicon is as follows: “organiser” (cognate); “être” Term 1.1 week 1; “avoir” Term 1.1 week 3; “chanter” Term 1.2 week 6; “parler” Term 1.2 week 4; “porter” Term 1.2 week 3.

# Slide 12:

As we know, initially, learners need plenty of practice to reinforce knowledge of the grammatical form and its meaning or function in the ‘input’ i.e. when reading and also when listening.

Having seen examples of reading activities, now we move onto seeing examples of embedding grammar in listening.

Here, students have to listen and decide whether the city Toledo is being described, or the two cities of Oviedo and Léon. Again, necessary to this input based practice task, in order to complete the activity correctly, the learner needs to connect the grammar feature to its meaning (or function). We make the grammar feature *task-essential* here by removing the city names from the sentence so that students are compelled to attend to the verb i.e. listen for “es” to indicate *it is* and therefore Toledo or “son” (*they are*) to indicate Oviedo and Léon.

To note, adjective number agreement -s (as complement to verb) has not yet been covered at this point in year 7, therefore, it is unlikely that students would use the form of the adjective to arrive at the answer here.

# Slide 13:

Here we can see an example of an activity which varies the lexicon around the grammar, this time in a listening. Verbs were the focus in the reading activity, here, it is adjectives. In addition to the adjectives from the vocabulary set for Term1.2 week 5, additional adjectives are incorporated from Term 1.1 week 3 and Term 1.2 week 4.

# Slide 14:

Slides 14-17 are examples of activities from lessons one and two in a sequence where singular persons of the verb “aller” are being learnt. This allows for pairs of meanings to be juxtaposed in different combinations, ensuring that features are revisited and reinforced by being contrasted with different grammar features (e.g. comparing the previously taught 1st person singular with the new 2nd person singular verb form).

# Slide 15:

In lesson one, first and third persons of the verb “aller” are the target features. In this listening we see “elle va” as the third person singular form. To note, if you are wondering – “il va” is also practised alongside “je vais” – in a reading activity within the lesson sequence.

# Slide 16:

In lesson two, first and second persons of the verb “aller” are the target features.

# Slide 17:

Across the two activities, consistent with the principle of making the grammar feature *task-essential* during practice, the subject has been removed from the sentence, to make the verb form for person *task-essential.* Particularly in French it’s important to select with care the two juxtaposed features for listening practice, as not all verb forms sound different, even when they are written differently i.e. vas and va.

# Slide 18:

It is likely to be most helpful for most learners to use activities that introduce and practise pairs of grammar featureswhich have different meanings (or functions) as we have seen in all of the examples up to now.

Slides 18-23 present an example of an activity which, after extensive initial practiceof pairs of features, very gradually, incorporates more than two features: specifically first, second and third persons singular of the verb “finden”.

Take a closer look at this activity at your own pace. I particularly like the images on this one. The context is continued from the previous week and develops a storyline between the German characters Mehmet and Mia. Mehmet is a new arrival at Mia and Wolfgang’s school. Mia and Mehmet are getting to know each other and talking about their views of school, and referring also to Wolfgang’s views.

# Slide 19:

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# Slide 20:

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# Slide 22:

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# Slide 23:

No audio

# Slide 24:

Now we move on to look at examples of embedding grammar in writing and speaking.

Grammatical knowledge can be *skill-specific* (or modality- and mode-specific) (DeKeyser, 2015). When we teach a grammar feature, we need to establish these different types of knowledge, via multiple routes (not just one route). For example, for some learners, practice in hearing the feature will probably have less benefit on written production than on listening; written production practice may have little observable benefit on speaking.

So, once a learner can connect a grammar feature to its meaning (or function) when reading and listening, they then need to establish and practise accessing knowledge they can use when writing and speaking.

Initially, writing and speaking practice can be through controlled, scaffolded, phrase- or sentence-level activities and that is what we have in this German example from Term 1.2 week 6 (using first person singular and plural).

This is an activity which combines both speaking and writing. The teacher uses this slide to model questions, answers and sentences for the spoken and written exercise to come, which brings together the “ich”, “er/sie” and “wir” forms of all verbs studied so far. We have seen examples of input activities wheregrammar is encountered with a varied lexicon, to consolidate learners’ knowledge of a grammatical system that works across multiple contexts. Here we can see this same principle applied to a production activity.

# Slide 25:

This shows the set of eight questions that the students would ask each other and then write their responses.

# Slide 26:

Now a Spanish example (slides 26-29). Here learners are establishing and practising their knowledge again in a combined task of both speaking and writing.

Wherever possible, such activities should make the grammar *task-essential*, i.e. the grammar is essential for communicating meaning and, critically, this meaning is a requirement of the way the task is set-up (e.g., someone else needs to understand the meaning being conveyed). This Spanish task has been set up to focus on comprehension and production of the definite article “el” or “la” with a noun of the same gender.

Person A reads the sentence on the prompt card, says it in Spanish to his/her partner, but does not say the word that is crossed out. Person B listens to his/her partner. The sentence will be missing a noun. He/she needs to look at the picture card and decide which noun must be missing.

Upon hearing the “el” or “la” the listener must process the gender of the definite article and the genders of the nouns to arrive at the correct answer, as there is always a choice between a masculine and feminine noun.

Take a moment to have a look at the example slide and the student prompt cards.

# Slide 27:

No audio

# Slide 28:

No audio

# Slide 29:

No audio

# Slide 30:

Now let’s take a look at a French resource where both speaking and writing are combined. Again students work in pairs. This is the fourth week in a series of learning on “–er” verbs in the present tense. In terms of the varied lexicon here, along with the “–er” verbs from this week’s vocabulary set, this activity incorporates the “–er” verbs from the three previous weeks and incrementally builds on their knowledge of the paradigm, allowing students the opportunity to practise using a variety of verb endings on a wide range of frequent verbs.

This sequence culminates at week 7 in Term 1.2, at which point all six persons of regular “–er” verbs will have been seen in a variety of different combinations across the five weeks and used on a wide range of frequent verbs.

# Slide 31:

This and the next slide are the students’ response sheets.

# Slide 32:

No audio

# Slide 33:

Teachers would use this slide and the next to model the task requirements, firstly using an example in third person singular and then in third person plural.

# Slide 34:

No audio

# Slide 35:

Both this slide and the next show the correct version of students’ responses.

# Slide 36:

No audio

# Slide 37:

This slide is for use as a plenary to the activity. It may prove useful at the end of the activity to show the written answers to the class to address any errors students may have made during the course of the activity. They could ‘mark’ their written responses and give themselves a score out of 16, one point each for the first eight (their own translations) then one point each for the eight verbs that they heard.

# Slide 38:

In this Spanish example of a writing task, we can see again how thought has been given to varying the lexicon around the grammar. “Es” was first learnt in week 3 of Term 1.1 to describe what someone was like. Here it is being revisited to describe what something is like, with a different selection of adjectives.

The nature of this activity is controlled, it is a scaffolded sentence level production activity designed specifically to focus on the correct use of “es/son” and the meaning of the new adjectives. Let’s move to the next slide to see an example of how we can begin to move towards freer grammar practice.

# Slide 39:

This free production exercise allows for dictionary practice so that learners can vary the lexicon around the grammar. Here’s how the teacher notes suggest conducting the task:

First, ask students to use the dictionary to find the meaning of the example sentences given.

Then encourage students to find German translations for things they do alone and with friends. Students know that if they are using the “wir” form, verbs may be used as they are found in the dictionary. If they are using the “ich” form, they must change the ending appropriately.

**To note**: Students are safe to use the vast majority of verbs that they find in the dictionary, as strong verbs don’t change their stems in the “ich” or “wir” forms. They learn about strong verbs in the 2nd half of the spring term (Term 2.2 Week 3). Whilst students should be encouraged to use a dictionary for the verbs, teachers will probably want to insist that they draw on their own, known vocabulary for the remainder of the sentence.

Let’s continue to look at how we can extend knowledge of a grammar feature.

# Slide 40:

Knowledge is often thought to be context-specific. That is, learners might be able to access their knowledge in one kind of task or test, but not in another situation (DeKeyser, 2015; Lightbown, 2008). They need the opportunity to ‘proceduralise’ their knowledge in different contexts. Students will need lots of practice comprehending and producing grammar features, in different kinds of activities, in oral and written modalities.

There now follow three examples, one for each language, of grammar tasks which aim to extend knowledge of grammar features. The teacher notes for each of the examples are very thorough. Take a few minutes to look through these resources for yourself by reading the teacher notes under each slide.

# Slide 41:

No audio

# Slide 42:

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# Slide 43:

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# Slide 44:

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# Slide 45:

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# Slide 46:

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# Slide 47:

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# Slide 48:

We have now come to the end of the three examples which show ways of extending knowledge of grammar features.

# Slide 49:

So, after having seen examples of the principles for teaching grammar in action across a range of Year 7 resources, let’s take a few minutes to recap five important factors. Make sure you are back on slide show mode and now click to slowly reveal the image. Have you got it yet?

Number 1)

Explain one grammar point really simply and briefly first (just in English is fine!) before doing any practice. This makes sure *all* learners understand the *right* pattern (not just the pupils who are naturally good at picking out patterns). Don’t do whole paradigms all at once the first time you are introducing something – it’s just too much. Choose a pair of features that contrast with each other – like “je fais” and “j’ai fait” – see how just the one little sound makes all the difference: now or in the past.

# Slide 50:

Number 2)

Make sure that the learner really notices the grammar in the ‘input’ and understands what meaning it conveys. This is done in listening and reading activities, in the target language. They can’t guess, they can’t rely on words – JUST the grammar!

# Slide 51:

Number 3)

Practise using the grammar in activities that really force the learners to use that feature to express meaning – the grammar has to be essential to communicate a meaning! They have to use the grammar so that other people understand exactly what was being said.

# Slide 52:

Number 4)

Revisit the grammar a lot. They have to see the same grammar but using lots of different words – not always the same grammar for the same context. Past tense isn’t always about holidays! Reflexives are not just for the morning routine! Vary those contexts to make them quirky and fun.

And remember – compare one form with another to emphasise the meaning: “Je me lave” versus “je lave le chien” what a difference that “me” makes!

# Slide 53:

Number 5)

Don’t be shy about comparing the language to English – there is lots of evidence that knowing about how English works helps. Students will want to translate from English – that’s natural. We all do. And English and the new language will be mixed in their minds – so, we teachers don’t need to worry! We can do some comparing and contrasting. “Do you...?” just doesn’t exist in other languages to make questions!

This is a really important point – let’s break that taboo – we can compare! It’s useful and in line with evidence.

# Slide 54:

Now over to you.

Over the next sequence of slides (that’s up to slide 66), you can take part in some activities – completing the tasks in real time as if you were students. There is one example per language. Depending on time and mix of languages known, do one, two or all three of the activities.

Each time consider how the creative, independent production that students are compelled to do really traps the forms.

Activity instructions

1. Work in pairs.
2. Person A and person B have a different set of pictures.
3. Person A describes one of their pictures (Tante Laura….).
4. Person B finds the corresponding picture for Mia and describes it from Mia’s perspective (Ich…).
5. Then person A starts with the next picture.
6. Repeat until all pictures have been described.
7. The activity could be repeated in different order with roles swapped, i.e. Person A has Mia’s pictures but describes Mia in 3rd person (Mia…) and Person B becomes Tante Laura (ich).

# Slide 55:

Here are Person B’s picture prompts.

# Slide 56:

Activity instructions:

After her stay with Tante Laura, Mia is inspired to make some changes in her life.

1. Take current Mia’s perspective
2. For each pair of pictures write a sentence about the current Mia (ich) and the perfect Mia (sie).

The first sentence will be first person singular, the second will be third person singular, as Mia imagines her perfect self!

# Slide 57:

These are the picture prompts for the five sentences for you to have a go at writing.

# Slide 58:

In this speaking activity students, in turns, will ask each other what they must do on different days of the week. Students will read a prompt in English and will have to deliver the message in Spanish to their partner. Then, the partner will circle the correct activity on their worksheet.

Note that higher ability students could write the task in English, rather than choosing between two options. The speaking cards could be adapted to facilitate this.

# Slide 59:

This is Student A’s prompt card.

# Slide 60:

This is Student B’s prompt card.

# Slide 61:

Here are the answers for Student A.

# Slide 62:

Here are the answers for Student B.

# Slide 63:

This activity brings together students’ prior learning on forming questions with subject-verb inversion with raised intonation plus the question words: “Comment?”

“Combien?”

“Quel?”

“Que?”

“Pourquoi?”

Activity instructions:

You are going to be constructing questions that either:

require a yes/no answer i.e. subject-verb inversion

or:

require a question word+subject-verb inversion.

It is the answer that indicates which question type is required.   
The bold “**Oui**” indicates that a yes/no question type is required (i.e. subject-verb inversions). Where there is not the word “oui” – a question word plus subject-verb inversion will be needed.

Clicking on the answer text box reveals the question.

# Slide 64:

Here are all sixteen for you to have a go at. In class, teachers would either run this as a whole class activity or set this up as a pair work. The teacher would pick a name (e.g. Faiza) and partners would take it in turns to say the question. The teacher would give the students time to form their questions and then reveal the answer before picking the next name.

# Slide 65:

In the differentiated version, students are challenged to put the answer into French as well as the question.

# Slide 66:

Have a go now at forming both the question and the answer!

# Slide 67:

Often grammar is practised in written grammar exercises, and usually students have a model to follow and refer to. Sometimes the practice is oral, led by the class teacher, with moment-by-moment feedback.  
  
Do these sorts of activities meet our criteria / expectations for meaningful practice?

make the grammar meaningful? (i.e., meaning- *and* form-focused?)

involve an element of struggle? (i.e., ‘desirable difficulty’)

are they multi-modal?

1. Do we need to know the meaning of any of the words to do the task?  
2. Do we *need* to remember that ‘a’ for masculine words = ‘un’ and for feminine words = ‘una’ and think about that link each time? (or can we just do this by looking at the f and m and matching patterns at a very surface level)  
3. Do we have to listen and understand, read and understand, speak and understand or write and understand the meaning in these 6 sentences?

What are the chances that this is the best way, in a time-poor classroom context, to:

1. practise the knowledge of indefinite articles
2. develop noun gender sensitivity/awareness
3. remember that every noun has gender in Spanish
4. know that the vast majority of nouns ending in ‘o’ are masculine and in ‘a’ are feminine (Consider: if the selection of nouns had only focused on those ending in -o/-a, then the gender information in brackets could have been omitted, making students really connect the form of nouns to their gender, a highly frequent and regular cue in Spanish)

So, it’s quite likely that we might say, ‘yes, I don’t tend to do those sorts of mechanical practice tasks anyway. Instead, I…. do a lot of oral work to embed the grammar’  
  
That might look like this…

# Slide 68:

So, how could we improve the task on the previous slide.  
Obviously, it’s always a bit false working in a vacuum, creating a one-off task, but it’s also helpful to go a step further than critiquing an existing task. So…  
  
Our context is that this is the introduction to gender of nouns and the indefinite article… We have to assume that students have already met at least two parts of the verb “tener”, too.

Improvements could include:

1] Remove the gender information (m) / (f) from the task – to make the students have to notice the form of the noun.  
2] Ensure that the nouns we use consolidate the pattern of a lot of nouns in Spanish (ends in “o” = (m), ends in “a” = (f)  
so, leave out “pez” and “serpiente” and instead use….  
“libro” / “casa”  
3) Consider the usefulness (i.e. frequency) of the words we include – “cobaya” clearly fits the pattern for gender, but is it a useful word? Why not use grammar tasks to work with useful vocabulary, too?  
[This is a prompt again to think outside ‘topic’ lines – the original version of the task is topic-based – pets/family – we could keep the broad theme, potentially, but still include higher-frequency words]  
4] Three parts of “tener” are used but are completely superfluous to the task. If we’re not going to focus on them, we might as well get rid of them. OR, we make them a focus. It’s trickier to make a focus of three persons at once, so suggest we contrast I and s/he, and add a comprehension step.

# Slide 69:

And if we turn to “tener” …  
We haven’t been able to find a published resource that has listening, reading, speaking and writing practice tasks that focus on understanding and using “tener”.  
It’s straightforward to find texts that *feature* “tener” (alongside other features - e.g. reflexive verbs, “-er” regular verbs, plural and singular nouns, definite and indefinite articles).

There are six examples of the verb “tener” in these texts. How many of them are really ***task essential***? Which questions ***require*** students to know that “tengo” means ‘I have’?  
And what do we do about the fact that in three of these six examples, “tengo” actually translates as ‘I am’. So, here, the texts are actually providing ***potentially confusing input***, sending *mixed messages* at a very early stage of trying to work out the meaning of this new language.

In these texts we have a number of grammar features represented but none of them is task essential.

To what extent do reading (and listening) comprehension tasks like this support students’ learning of grammar – of the system they need to be able to create their own meaning later?  
In this typical reading comprehension task, it is very easy to avoid any engagement beyond the lexis, i.e., avoid processing, therefore avoid learning, the grammar.  
We could make more efficient use of limited lesson time (i.e. get more learning for our time!) if we could include listening and reading tasks that make the grammar essential.  
How might they look?

The issue is that these texts aren’t ideal as they are, for the reasons highlighted. The questions asked can be answered without noticing specific language features. The texts have been written to contrast place names, ages, family members, so those are the variables. We need the variables to be parts of a verb, or genders, etc.., something that pupils find hard to notice in the language.

So, instead of these texts, we need rather differently designed reading comprehension tasks, as on slides 18-23 (German) example, where the gaps can only be filled if you pay attention to the verb form, or the same idea in slide 9 (French).

# Slide 70:

Spend a few moments considering the two activities on the previous two slides in light of this summary list of the grammar teaching principles, and think about how you might change the activities (or design new ones!) to deliver better on the key principles for teaching grammar that we have just revisited.

# Slide 71:

This is a summary of the objectives from the whole of CPD 8, which had three parts: phonics, vocabulary and grammar.  
We hope that you have found it useful to see a sample of NCELP resources created so far for Year 7 and reflect on the principles in action.