Transcript: NCELP Grammar TRG

Length of Talk: 33 minutes

Presenter: Rowena Kasprowicz

# Title Slide/Slide 1 (0.41)

Hello, my name is Rowena Kasprowicz and I’m one of the research specialists working with NCELP. One of the key areas I research is the teaching and learning of grammar in a foreign language and so in this presentation I want to outline some of the research that underpins the NCELP approach to teaching grammar in French, German and Spanish, and also to explore some of the resources that NCELP has been creating for teaching grammar.

This presentation is aimed at teachers from Lead and Hub schools who either are new to the TRGs or who may have missed the original presentation.

# Slide 2 (0.52):

The aim of this session, then, is to develop an understanding of the research evidence related to grammar teaching and learning. To develop more concrete ideas for teaching grammar, including ways in which we can introduce, embed, and consolidate, and extend grammar knowledge. To explore some of the NCELP resources and approaches for grammar learning and to consider the ways in which Hub and Lead schools can work together to develop practice in this area.

It’s worth noting that there are a wide range of grammar teaching resources available for French, German and Spanish via the [NCELP Resource Portal](https://resources.ncelp.org/) on the NCELP website. There are also parallel presentations available on Phonics, Vocabulary and Meaningful Practice for those who may have missed those previous sessions.

# Slide 3 (0.16):

So here we have an outline of the content of this session. In the first part, I’ll talk through some of the research underpinning NCELP’s approach to teaching grammar and in the second half we will then have a look at some example resources that NCELP have been creating for grammar teaching and learning.

# Slide 4 (0.43):

Firstly then, we are going to explore two key issues to grammar teaching and learning and what research says about these issues. So the first key issue is what order should grammar be taught in and this really relates to the notion of progression. What should be taught? What can we expect learners to learn? And when? And in addition, can we determine the difficulty of grammar in order to put it into a sensible order for teaching.

The second key issue relates to what are the best ways to teach grammar, so how can we effectively and efficiently introduce, embed, and consolidate, and extend grammar knowledge.

# Slide 5 (2.33)

Before exploring these key issues in detail then, I want to first address the overarching question: “is grammar teaching even useful?” And the answer is: “yes”. There is a wealth of research evidence demonstrating the importance of explicitly teaching grammar and it is important to point this out because whether or not to teach grammar has been under debate for several decades in foreign language education and, as a result, messages have not always been clear in policy documents, in textbooks, or across different school and classrooms context. But the evidence from research suggests that explicitly teaching grammar can be beneficial for learners.

So how do we know this? Well, we know from research studies with learners in immersion contexts that even after hundreds of hours of exposure to a second or foreign language learners can still struggle with certain bits of grammar. Such studies therefore suggest that exposure to the language alone is not always sufficient for learners to develop reliable and accurate grammatical knowledge.

In addition, there is lots of evidence from a wide range of research studies with different learners, different languages, and different grammar features, which have demonstrated that explicit grammar teaching can be beneficial, both for learners’ comprehension of difficult grammar features and also for their accuracy in producing those bits of grammar.

Such studies have also shown that explicit grammar teaching (so explaining the grammatical rule and providing the opportunity for focused practice using the new bit of grammar), this type of instruction does tends to be more effective and more reliable that waiting for learners to spot grammatical patterns themselves.

Further, providing that brief description of the grammar before practice can help learners to pick up that new bit of grammar much more quickly.

At the bottom of the slide here, we have references to a number of research studies which support these observations and the 4 references in bold are all included in the one-page [OASIS](https://oasis-database.org/) summaries that accompany this presentation. These are a good place to start, if you would like to know more about the research evidence relating to these points about grammar teaching and learning.

# Slide 6 (2.14)

Let’s turn now then to the first key issue which is what order should grammar be taught in?

There is actually little strong evidence to support one particular prescribed order for teaching grammar.

However, there are many factors which we know of that can affect what can be effectively learnt and taught and when. For example, characteristics of the grammar feature itself, characteristics of individual learners, the task modality, and the context in which the grammar feature is introduced and practiced and used. So by considering these factors we can make informed decisions about the order in which grammar features should be introduced.

In addition, although the research evidence does not support one single order for teaching grammar, there are a number of observations we can make, based on the existing research.

Firstly, we do know that whole paradigms at one time has little support from research, for example introducing all of the present tense verb endings for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person, in both singular and plurals at one time. There is little evidence to support introducing all of these features together. This is because we know learners can only pay attention to a limited number of features at any one time when they are listening or reading in the foreign language. Rather than introducing whole paradigms together, there is a large body of research demonstrating that introducing and practicing pairs of grammar features which have contrasting meanings, this can actually lead to more accurate understanding and production of the grammar feature. For example, introducing the 1st person singular versus plural present tense verb endings and practicing those together. And of course, regularly practicing and revisiting previously taught grammar features is also very important for the long-term consolidation of that grammatical knowledge.

Again, we have references there to research articles that demonstrate some of these observations.

# Slide 7 (1.46)

Although, there is not one prescribed order for teaching grammar what expectations can we have about what the grammar learners will be able to use and when?

Firstly, we know that learners need to understand the meaning or the function of grammar before they can begin producing it. This means that there needs to be evidence a learner can recognise a grammar feature and understand its meaning when reading or listening before we can expect them to begin producing it accurately when writing or speaking.

So, there is often a difference between what grammar learners can understand and the grammar that they are able to produce accurately.

Similarly, there will often be a difference between what the grammar learners can accurately produce in writing and the grammar they are able to accurately produce when speaking, when they are of course are under greater time pressure and have less time to think about the language that they are using.

In addition, we know from research that once knowledge has been practiced, it can become “skill-specific”. So this means that it can be less useful for other skills. If a particular grammar feature has been practiced and proceduralised for one purpose, such as reading, then that knowledge is less transferable to other purpose, such as writing or speaking. This means that learners need to have the opportunity to practice with a particular grammar feature in both modalities (oral and written) and in both modes (comprehension and production) to ensure that they have the breadth and depth of knowledge of that particular grammatical feature.

# Slide 8 (0.40)

In order to summarize the points raised on the last two slides, I would suggest having a look at the [first handout](https://resources.ncelp.org/concern/resources/h702q637s?locale=en) which accompanies this presentation: “what determines the difficulty of grammar in a second language.” Once you have had a look through that handout, to consider the following questions based on your own learning and teaching context.

Firstly, which grammar features do your pupils particularly find difficult? How do you know that they find those features difficult? And does this difficulty occur across all modes and modalities? And finally, based on the factors mentioned in the handout to consider why do you think those grammar features cause particular difficulty for your learners?

**Slide 9 (2.39)**

We now turn to the second key issue: “what are the best ways to teach grammar?”

NCELP’s approach to this question is summarized in the [second handout](https://resources.ncelp.org/concern/resources/08612n54w?locale=en) accompanying this presentation: “Principles of teaching grammar”. On the screen you can see a summary of those key recommendations that NCELP has put forward.

Firstly, it is important to provide learners with a short description of the grammar before asking them to practice it in the input. So here, we suggest briefly but clearly explaining the grammatical feature, i.e. both its form and its meaning or function, to the learner before asking them to practice with that grammar feature in different activities.

Secondly, it is important to regularly strip-out all other cues so that the learner has to pay attention to the grammar and its meaning in the input i.e. when reading and listening. For example, in an activity that is practicing the past tense this means removing all time phrases like ‘yesterday’ or ‘last weekend’ so that the learner has to pay attention to the grammatical forms indicating tense in order to work out when the activities happened. There is a lot a research that has demonstrated that learners will prefer to pay attention to words like ‘yesterday’ or ‘last weekend’ rather than pay attention to the bits of grammar that also indicate the same meaning. When those words such as ‘yesterday’ are present in the sentence the learner is likely to pay attention to those and to ignore the bits of grammar that also indicate the tense.

Thirdly, it is important to establish grammatical knowledge in reading and listening before expecting learners to produce the grammar in writing and speaking.

In relation to production, it is important to gradually move from more scaffolded, perhaps phrase or sentence-level production practice, to more meaningful and freer production practice.

Finally, it is important to provide regular opportunities to revisit the grammar feature in different contexts and with different vocabulary in order to ensure that the learner has really consolidated knowledge of that particular grammatical feature.

On the screen are two questions to consider in relation to these key recommendations: the first is which elements do you think align with practice in your school? Secondly, are there any elements that you think may be more challenging to establish in your schools?

**Slide 10 (3.12)**

We now turn to briefly consider some of the key concerns with the ways in which grammar is often presented and practiced particularly in textbooks.

In handouts 3 to 5 that accompany this presentation we have included excerpts from three textbooks to teach French, German and Spanish. These highlight five potential problems with the way in which grammar is introduced and the way in which it is often practiced within these sorts of resources.

Firstly, very often whole paradigms are introduced at once. Often, there are very limited opportunities for learners to practice the individual grammatical elements in meaningful ways.

Secondly, there is often no, or very little, active practice which forces the learner to link the grammar with its meaning in input, so in reading and in listening. Often the activities will allow the learners to answer them without really having to attend to the grammatical feature. For example, in reading activity that practices past tense and talks about holiday experiences the previous year, the activities might present a short text with lots of examples of past tense but then the questions will ask the learners to consider, for example, “who did you go on holiday with?”, “where did you go on holiday?” So, the learners can answer these sorts of questions by paying attention to the content words within the activity rather than paying any attention to the grammatical features for past tense.

In addition, very often there is a tendency to jump straight from an explanation of the grammatical feature or the grammatical rule to production practice activities.

The production practice activities that are included can be described as mechanical. In these sorts of mechanical activities, often the learner does not need to actively choose between different grammatical features, for example the activity might ask the learner to describe what you did last weekend or describe your friend’s appearance, but the activities don’t ensure that different features need to be actively chosen. Instead, very often learners can complete the activities by simply copying from a writing frame or mechanically repeating a pattern that they have just been told about without having to actually connect that pattern to a particular meaning or function each time they use it.

In addition, the production practice is based around a small set of vocabulary within one topic. For example, practicing the past tense with three or four verbs related to holiday activities and often there are very limited opportunities to revisit those grammar features with a wider range of verbs and indeed a wider range of vocabulary.

In the following three slides, you can see the three excerpts from the textbooks and examples are highlighted to demonstrate some of these potential problems.

# Slides 11-13

No audio.

# Slide 14 (0.30)

On the screen here, you can see a summary of NCELP’s key principles for teaching grammar and the ways in which we suggest you can help learners to connect grammatical features to their meaning or their function in order to develop accurate use across modalities (oral and written) and across modes (comprehension and production). Over the next few slides I will show you some examples of NCELP resources that have been developed in order to achieve these steps.

# Slide 15 (0.48)

On the [NCELP Resource Portal](https://resources.ncelp.org/) you can find a large selection of grammar teaching resources for French, German and Spanish, covering a wide range of grammar features. Each sequence of activities begins with a short explanation of the grammatical feature in focus and then follows a series of activities which begin initially with input-based listening and reading activities, before moving onto the production-based activities for practice in writing and speaking. The production activities are initially fairly controlled activities based on using the target grammatical feature in short phrases or sentences, before moving onto more meaningful challenging activities which allow for freer use of the grammatical feature.

# Slide 16 (0.11)

Now we are going to have a look at an example sequence of activities for teaching the perfect tense in German to illustrate how NCELP’s recommendations for grammar teaching work in practice.

**Slide 17 (0.55)**

Here and on the next slide, you can see the explanation provided to the students about how to form the past tense in German. It is important to acknowledge, of course, that short grammar explanations can never be fully complete. For example, of course, some verbs don’t follow this pattern for forming the past participle as they are irregular. But the aim here with this explanation is to give pupils the opportunity to learn a ‘default’, the main pattern, and then introduce the complexities and exceptions to the rule later. In any case, evidence from research suggests that it is the practice activities that are most helpful for learning (rather than these grammar explanations themselves). Nevertheless, these short grammar explanations at the start of practice do seem to help learners to speed up in becoming accurate in the practice activities that follow.

**Slide 18 (0.27)**

Here, on this second explanation slide, we are conveying to the learners the key message that the past participle, alone, is not a cue to pastness; it is the co-existence of the “haben” auxiliary and the past participle at the end of the sentence, which tells you the action has been completed. The next two tasks focus on helping learners to notice the co-existence of “haben” and the part participle as indicators of past meaning.

# Slide 19 (1.20)

The first activity we are going to look at is a reading-based activity. Before the activity itself, we have provided a bit of context to set the scene for the students and remind them of the connection between the grammatical form and its meaning and this helps to reinforce to the students why it is important to pay attention to those bits of grammar to understand the meaning when they are reading or when they are listening.

So, in this activity the students are reading about what this character—Susi Sorglos—does on her summer holidays and what she has done so far.

The students are asked to read what Susi has written and decide whether she is describing what she has done or what she is doing. In this activity, the students have two choices each turn. They have to choose whether to circle “ich habe” or only “ich” and this decision will be based on whether they think the activity is describing something in the past or something happening in the present. They will be able to work that out by paying attention to the verb and whether they see the past participle at the end of the sentence or not. On this introductory slide, we have also included a brief reminder of that grammatical feature that we are practicing.

# Slide 20 (0.54)

On this slide, you can see the reading activity itself and as mentioned previously in this activity the students are making a decision about what should appear at the start of the sentence, should it be "ich habe" if it is talking about the past tense or should it just be "ich" if it is talking about the present tense. Crucially here, there are no time phrases, no words like "yesterday" or "last weekend" so the only clue the students have about whether this sentence is talking about the past or not is the form of the verb, whether or not they can see the past participle at the end of the sentence or not. It is worth saying also that all of these resources are available as printable handouts via the NCELP Resource Portal or you could simply ask pupils to write down then numbers one to twelve within their workbooks and then to write down their answer "ich habe" or "ich" for each sentence.

# Slide 21

No audio.

# Slide 22 (0.39)

We now have the listening based activity, again we have provided a brief context to set the scene for this activity and to explain to the pupils what they need to do. This time they will be listening to the sentences and they will need to listen out for the form of the verb that they hear, pay attention to whether or not they hear the past participle so that they can decide what was missing from the start of the sentence, was it "ich habe" if the sentence was about the past tense or was it "ich" if the sentence was about the present. Again, we have provided a brief reminder of the grammatical feature that we are practicing.

# Slide 23 (0.41)

The listening activity follows a similar format to the reading activity so they will hear a sentence and then the pupil has to decide what was missing from the start of the sentence, was it “ich" or "ich habe". Importantly, as with the reading activity, no temporal or time phrases have been included, so no phrases like "yesterday" or "today" or "last weekend" so the students have to listen out for the verb itself and pay attention to whether or not they hear the past participle in order to decide what should appear at the start of the sentence. The transcripts for all of the sentence included in the listening activity can be seen in the notes section of the slides.

# Slides 24-28

No audio.

# Slide 29 (0.59)

Now we move onto the writing activity. Here the students have to write 10 sentences based on the pictures displayed. Importantly, the pupils are instructed to write 5 sentences about activities they did last year and also 5 sentences about activities they are doing this year.

This means therefore, that rather than just asking the pupils to mechanically produce the perfect tense structures, the pupils have to produce some sentences in the past tense but also some in the present tense. This means that they are actively having to choose when to use the past tense, which reinforces their understanding of the meaning it conveys.

In the notes section of the slide, you can see the target vocabulary this activity is based upon. Depending on the ability of your students, you may wish to include some brief vocabulary revision of the verbs, in their infinitive form, before asking the pupils to complete this activity.

# Slide 30 (0.14)

We are now going to have a look at an extending phase activity which is a speaking and listening combined activity which will ask the learners to apply the grammatical feature they have been learning about, the perfect tense, but with a new set of vocabulary.

# Slide 31 (0.41)

The speaking activity is a pair work activity where two pupils work together and take on the characters of two friends, Sam and Chloe, who are talking on the phone about their holidays. Each person will have a set of picture cards which will give them the cue about which activities they are describing and they take it in turns to tell each other what they did on holiday last year and what they are doing now. Again, within this production activity, the pupils have to actively choose whether they should be using the present tense or the perfect tense, we are contrasting again those two grammatical forms of the verb and the use of the auxiliary "haben".

# Slide 32 (0.56)

Before completing the speaking activity, we have included a short vocabulary revision exercise to go through with the pupils just to remind them of the core vocabulary they will need during the speaking task. It is anticipated that pupils will know most or all of these high-frequency verbs so the aim of this short activity is to re-activate their knowledge of the infinitive verbs before undertaking the speaking activity itself. On the screen, there is a 60-second timer that can be triggered by clicking "Anfang" and then clicking on each cloud will reveal the infinitive verb that corresponds to the English meaning on the left. Depending on the level or ability of the pupils within your particular class you can decide how much time is necessary to spend on the vocabulary revision before moving into the speaking activity.

# Slide 33 (1.09)

The speaking task is a pair based activity and it is specifically designed so that each person has something meaningful to do during the course of the task itself. On the screen here, you can see the six images that one person within the pair has to describe, in this case the person who has taken on the character of Sam. They have six activities to describe and they are given a hint in English of what the picture represents and importantly they have also been given an indication in the brackets of whether this is an activity that happened last year or something that happened this year. It is important to instruct the pupil who has this set of pictures not to actually say "last year" or "this year". They simply have to produce the sentence to correspond to “I visited the museum” for example. But they shouldn’t say the time phrase "last year" or "this year" because whilst they are producing sentences to describe what they did, whether last year on holiday or this year, the other person in the pair is going to be listening and trying to work out what they did and when they did it based on the grammatical cues present in the sentence.

# Slide 34 (0.31)

On this slide, you’ll see the table that the other half of the pair has to complete whilst the person who took on Sam’s character describes their set of pictures. The second person has to listen out for what did Sam do and when did he do it. On the following slides, there is a second set of pictures and a second table, so at this point the two people involved would switch roles so they both get the opportunity to practice speaking and also get additional opportunity to practice listening.

# Slides 35-38

No audio.

# Slide 39 (0.14)

Now we are going to briefly look at two activities to practice the 2nd person singular and plural verb endings, this time in French, just to give another illustration of how these grammar principles work in practice.

# Slide 40 (0.08)

We start then once again with a brief explanation of the grammatical features that will be practiced within the following activities.

# Slide 41 (0.45)

Firstly, then we have an example of a reading activity to practice the 2nd person singular and plural verb endings. The focus here is really on getting the learners to pay attention to and notice the -ez ending for the 2nd person plural “vous”*.* Ordinarily, when the learner is listening to a sentence they would be able to use the pronoun itself, the “tu” or the “vous”, to work out who the sentence is about, whether it is about one person or whether it is about more than one person. Within this activity, we have removed the pronoun from the sentence so that the learner has to look at the end of the verb to work out is this a question to one person, “tu”, or is it a question to more than one person.

# Slide 42 (0.32)

Here we have a listening activity to practice these grammatical features, the 2nd person singular and plural verb endings, and again at the top of the screen we have a bit of context to set the scene for the activity. The pupil must decide when the teacher must be talking to several pupils, “vous”, or just to one pupil “tu”. As with the reading activity, the pronoun at the start of the sentence has been obscured so that the learner has to pay attention to the end of the verb to work out who the teacher is talking to.

# Slide 43 (1.05)

At this point I wanted to just briefly mention question words. Question words cross over the vocabulary and grammar strands. To teach the formation of wh-questions learners first need secure knowledge of the question words themselves. However, the common chunks (or formulae) in which learners will initially encounter question words very often can give misleading evidence about the meaning of question words, such as the following two examples.

If such chunks of language are to be taught then learners will need help breaking down such chunks to identify their constituent parts. It is important that learners know the most reliable words and reliable meanings of frequently encountered question words and therefore on the [NCELP Resource Portal](https://resources.ncelp.org/) there are a variety of resources for French, German and Spanish in which to introduce and to practice recognizing the common meanings of question words.

# Slide 44 (1.38)

On the screen here, we can see screenshots of the [grammar teaching observation and discussion sheet](https://resources.ncelp.org/concern/resources/z316q156s?locale=en) and this sheet is to be used by specialist teachers and by hub teachers in the course of observing lessons which focus particularly on grammar teaching. On the left-hand part of the sheet there is a series of tick boxes to check off examples of pedagogy that are observed in the lesson. There is also space in the comments box to add additional information, for example noting down things that went particularly well or suggestions for how things could have been done slightly differently and it also useful to include a very brief timeline of the activities and what happened during the grammar-focused part of the lesson. On the right-hand side is the second page of the discussion and observation sheet and there are a number of questions there to guide some follow up discussion between the teacher and the person observing the lesson. We think this is a really important part of the process, to reflect on what happened and to make plans for next steps in developing the grammar teaching pedagogy. Of course, it is important to emphasize that this is very much a collaborative and a formative process, it is in no way meant to be about performance management or some kind of formal evaluation. It is a collaborative formative process focused on developing approaches to teaching and assessing grammatical knowledge.

# Slide 45 (0.49)

This slide takes the statements from the [grammar teaching discussion document](https://resources.ncelp.org/concern/resources/z316q156s?locale=en) and puts them into phases of grammar learning so beginning with introducing the grammar knowledge, moving onto embedding and consolidating that knowledge through practice, and finally onto extending the grammatical knowledge. The different phases are not clear cut and they definitely merge into one another, for example you practice when you are establishing knowledge for the first time and consolidating knowledge is often also extending it. Many activities can be repeated for different purposes depending on how well the grammar is already embedded. However, these ways of working with grammar and highlighting them in these phases is intended to broaden thinking about the range of opportunities we give learners in and outside of the classroom.

# Slide 46 (0.45)

That brings us to the end of this presentation. On the screen. you can see a summary of what was covered within this session. The following slide includes some final concluding remarks and suggestions of next steps. If you have any questions about anything that was raised during this presentation relating to grammar teaching and learning then I would encourage you in the first instance to talk to other colleagues within your Hub and within your Lead schools and if you have any further questions to please contact NCELP and we will try to respond to your questions as best we can. So, all that is left for me to do is to thank you very much for listening and I hope you found the content useful and interesting for your own teaching and learning contexts.

# Slides 47-8

# No audio.