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HOW TO KEEP YOUNG LEARNERS OF ENGLISH HAPPY AND FOCUSSED. GRAMMAR THROUGH STORIES

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Abstract

Teaching through stories is a method as old as the language itself, but it is rarely (if ever) used in teaching school subjects, including languages. Although numerous teachers grew up with stories and used this accessible instrument in order to discover the world around them, to learn new things and to stimulate their imagination, once become adults they seem to have forgotten how much stories influenced their lives and their personal development. Nowadays, children may learn new things by using far more attractive sources of information and that is why stories tend to be replaced by television shows for children or by animated movies which help children of all ages learn and better understand various science-related aspects, facts of life and facts of nature. Nevertheless, since most knowledge is acquired by students from textbooks, shouldn't this teaching tool be adapted to their needs and abilities? To be more specific, shouldn't textbooks be structured so as to allow the teachers working with young learners, in particular, to teach new and abstract notions through stories? The present paper will demonstrate that young learners of English may be kept happy and focussed if they are given the chance to learn grammar through stories. Teachers play a very important role as they have to use their imagination in order to create plausible stories and appropriate materials for further practice.

Keywords: teaching; grammar for young learners; grammar stories; home-made handouts; tenses;

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching, in general, is a complex and challenging activity which is conditioned by a series of factors such as the learners' age, their personality and learning styles, the subject and the topic to be approached and the teaching materials available, among others. When it comes to teaching young learners to communicate correctly in a foreign language, the challenge is even greater. Many might think that teaching English to young learners (aged 6 to 9) means, basically, teaching words and simple sentences and the most popular songs and nursery rhymes come to confirm this opinion (e.g. *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* teaching parts of the body, *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* teaching numbers from 0 to 20 and some verbs, *Old McDonald Had a Farm* teaching farm animals etc.)



There are also songs teaching colours, or words related to time, food, wild animals, weather and even songs teaching grammar (e.g. Past Simple : *Hey, Diddle, Diddle* see <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46952/hey-diddle-diddle>, last visited on March 25th 2019, at 11:06), but there are not any songs teaching the difference between Present Simple and Present Continuous, for example, or problematic aspects regarding the interrogative and negative verb forms for Present Simple and Past Simple.

Even though there are numerous handouts, lesson plans, presentations, poems and other didactic materials meant to help students understand and correctly use verbs in English, none of them tells them why verbs have more than one form and how these verb forms should be used correctly (see https://en.islcollective.com/resources/search_result?Tags=simple%20past%20song&searchworksheet=G O&type=Printables, a wide collection of handouts including well-known songs of famous artists processed so as to allow teachers to work on specific verbs with their students).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is a tendency among the various editors of English textbooks for children to promise new and attractive ways of presenting the English grammar to the young learners to whom the respective books address. Although most of them promise to make learning English an enjoyable and fun activity, the only means of achieving their aims is by strictly adding colourful, somehow cheerful drawings to impress their readers. Sometimes jokes and funny dialogues are introduced, but they are far from making grammar notions enjoyable indeed. It goes without saying that children may be easily amused, but making them laugh or entertaining them with drawings which teach the truly relevant aspects does not mean teaching them grammar.

Thus, the real challenge when teaching English grammar is teaching it so as to make it accessible to the young learners who have no grammar notions in their native language and lack the mental power of understanding abstract notions, irrespective of the domain envisaged.

The result, far too often visible throughout our over thirty-five years of teaching activity, is that numerous young learners of English are practically unable to communicate in this foreign language after studying it for two years. Reference is not made to mass education, where the teacher is sometimes overwhelmed by the number of students, but to private classes or, the so called one-on-one English classes where teachers work with small groups of students. How is this even possible?

Why do teachers fail in transmitting their knowledge to their young learners and in making them communicate effectively in English and why do young learners refuse to acquire certain knowledge from their teachers? Is it entirely the teachers' fault, or there are other factors conditioning such an attitude on the part of young learners, as well? Can English be taught outside its specific grammar rules? Definitely not. The only exception is the case when native speakers of English teach their children English as their mother language. As regards the rest of the world, the English grammar seems to be a gate through which a student has to go in order to speak it correctly.

The importance of grammar in English language teaching is made obvious if we consider the fact that "[w]hen the TESOL Quarterly first began publication in 1967, the teaching of grammar (i.e. the teaching of morphological inflections, function words, and syntactic word order) was a central concern in English language teaching." (Celce-Murcia 1991:459) Actually, "the teaching of grammar had often been synonymous with foreign language teaching" for 2,500 years. (Rutherford 1987, qtd. in id. *ibid*)

Considering the aspects mentioned above, the present paper will demonstrate how young learners of English can be happy and focused while learning otherwise difficult grammar notions in this foreign language.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are many voices saying that teaching English to young learners is not a good idea, being counterproductive, or, to put it differently, a waste of time. Other voices say that starting to learn English very early in life gives the individuals an advantage when they grow up. Of course, children who are constantly exposed to English will have a better pronunciation, will recognize the words faster than the others and will find learning English easier. Is this valid for grammar, too?

4. RESEARCH METHODS

In 2001, an experiment showed that six and seven-year old children, unaware of grammar rules in their native language, can be taught English grammar. The experiment took place in a Chinese-speaking country, which made it even more revealing, since there are no formal tenses in Chinese. Verbs have only one form, regardless of the physical time the speaker wants to refer to. How was teaching English tenses possible to those children? Was there a way to make them understand tenses instead of memorizing a set of rules and applying them mechanically? How about the second and the third forms of the verb? What were they good for? What about the interrogative and the negative for Present Simple and Past Simple, where the verb *to do* changes the rules of the game? As the title of this article clearly states, the answer is: through stories.

Before presenting some of the stories used in this Chinese experiment, mention should be made that the stories may be applied in any country where English is taught as the second language or as a foreign language. Romanian speaking students, for example, have a hard time remembering to use the auxiliary verb *to be* and of the *ing* ending to form the present participle of the main verb for various tenses in the continuous aspect. Another problematic aspect is related to dropping the ending *-s* used for the third person singular in the interrogative and negative sentences formed with the Present Simple Tense. Similarly, Romanian learners of English tend to use the second form of the verb after the auxiliary verb *did* in negative and interrogative sentences as a result of memorizing the 2nd form of most irregular verbs. The stories and handouts below are only a few examples of how English grammar notions may be taught through stories and anecdotes. In many cases, the stories were doubled by funny, on-the-spot explanations which made an impression on the young learners and helped them remember grammar rules for a longer period of time. However, these explanations will not be included in the present paper, as they may vary according to each teaching situation and to the teacher's ability to improvise.

TEACHING PAST TENSE SIMPLE: THE OLDER BROTHERS OF VERBS

Children's world is populated with fantastic beings, heroes with superpowers and old people who speak words of wisdom. In the experiment mentioned above, the verbs were not just simple words denominating actions, but heroes, characters in a story. They became the inhabitants of a country where all the words were alive. Thus, the verbs were young or old people doing exactly what their names suggested: Mr. Play played all day long, Mr. Sing sang all day long, Mr. Eat was a chubby little boy who ate all day long, Mr. Sleep was an old man who used to sleep in a long chair on a veranda and so on. There was only a little problem: they could not speak about their past. They were aware of the fact that days passed by and they would have liked to talk about what they did in the past, but they were not able to do that. On the other hand, their **Older Brothers**, who had been born before those times could not talk about what they did every day. They could talk only about their past lives. Being curious by nature, the little children wanted to know who the Older Brothers were. Anticipating this situation, a list with the most common irregular verbs was prepared in advance and given to the students:

Verb	Older Brother	Verb	Older Brother
Mr. Drink	Mr. Drank	Mr. Give	Mr. Gave
Mr. Eat	Mr. Ate	Mr. Sit	Mr. Sat
Mr. Run	Mr. Ran	Mr. Go	Mr. Went
Mr. Write	Mr. Wrote	Mr. See	Mr. Saw
Mr. Read	Mr. Read	Mr. Do	Mr. Did
Mr. Sleep	Mr. Slept	Mr. Put	Mr. Put
Mr. Fly	Mr. Flew	Mr. Say	Mr. Said
Mr. Draw	Mr. Drew	Mr. Get	Mr. Got
Mr. Take	Mr. Took		

Table 1. The list of some irregular verbs, with their second form.

The story says that, little by little, the verbs and their Older Brothers realized that they could help each other expressing things which they would not normally be able to. Thus, Mr. Eat could tell his friends what he had eaten by asking his older brother, Mr. Ate to speak for him. In exchange, Mr. Ate was able to tell everybody what he ate every day or usually by asking his little brother, Mr. Eat, to speak for

him. All the Verbs and their Older Brothers always helped each other, as brothers should always do and they lived happily for days. Then, one day, they heard someone crying. At the beginning, there was only one voice, but soon the crying could be heard on many voices. When they looked around, they saw that verbs such as Mr. Like, Mr. Wash, Mr. Stop, Mr. Jump, Mr. Walk and so on were crying their eyes out. The reason was soon to be found out: they did not have older brothers. They were, each and every verb taken separately, an only child. Mr. Make, who can do many things, came with a brilliant idea: he made a mask for the verbs who did not have older brothers, to wear it and look like their older brothers, if they had had any. The mask was named 'the ED mask'. The story says that Mr. Make was a good maker, but his spelling was not very good. In fact he wanted the mask to be called END because the mask had to be placed at the **end** of the verb but he misspelled its name and called it the ED mask. And so, since those times, the mask has been known as 'the ED mask'.

Once students understood what they had to do in order to express actions in the past, they were given a short story in which only the verbs in the table were used and they were asked to change *every day* with *yesterday* and the verbs with their *Older Brothers*. When they realized how easy it was to narrate events from the past, they were instantly able to write a story about things which happened in the past and most students could not wait to write another one. Here is an example of such a text which can be easily converted from present to past:

I wake up at 7 a.m. every day. I go to the bathroom and I wash my face. I also brush my teeth. Then I go to the kitchen. I sit at the table and I eat a sandwich. After I eat the sandwich, I drink a glass of fresh orange juice. Next, I go back to my room, I put on my school uniform, I take my schoolbag and I go to school. I get to school at 7:50. After I say hello to my classmates, I take my book and my notebook out of the schoolbag and I get ready for the class.

Using the table with which the students had been provided, and the ED mask, the students had no problems turning all the sentences in the text from present to past.

When confronted with Older Brothers who were identical with their younger verbs, the students were told that these verbs were twins, but one of them had been born some minutes before the other, becoming thus the Older Brother. Many parents call them by the same name (because verbs have parents, too), but Mr. Read asked everybody to call his older brother as they called colour red because, for some reason, that was his favourite colour. Mr. Put's older brother had nothing against being called just like his little brother because, as he used to tell everybody, he liked the idea of not being older than his twin brother. Not even by one second!

TEACHING PRESENT TENSE SIMPLE: MR. DO TO THE RESCUE

The negative and the interrogative of Present Simple are usually taught before Past Simple, but this work is not about the right order of teaching grammar items. Many teachers change the order in which they teach certain notions every year for different reasons. Some do this because they are still trying to find the magic formula which can make learning English the most pleasant experience in the life of a student, others because they follow trends found in new books or because they need a change in their teaching strategy in order to avoid boredom. The teaching methods and the order in which new notions are taught may be changed, but, regardless of the order, the fact remains that young students enjoy learning grammar through stories and retain facts more easily in this way.

Using the auxiliary verb *to do* in order to form negative and interrogative sentences is an important issue for the students whose native languages do not imply the use of auxiliary verbs for this purpose. If we consider Romanian, interrogative sentences are formally identical with their affirmative counterparts, the only aspect distinguishing these two types of sentences being the rising intonation and the question mark used at the end of questions: *Tu ai un măr. Tu ai un măr?* ↗ (You have an apple. Do you have an apple?) Young learners of English find it difficult to understand what an auxiliary verb is, most of them being unable to make the difference between the concepts of *tomorrow* and *yesterday*. Such young learners may be explained that *to do* is a verb which helps them form interrogative sentences, but what if things were presented in a different manner? Instead of calling *do* an auxiliary, we could call it *Mr. Do, the hero who saved the other verbs*. The result of such a story-based approach resulted, in our case, in having the students all ears, interested and captivated by the new notions to be taught. The story of the amazing DO is presented in the paragraphs below.

Long, long time ago, there were no people on our planet. Only trees, flowers, lakes, butterflies and... words. Words did happily whatever their names suggested, just like in the story about the Older Brothers. But, one day, Mr. Be, a mean verb, discovered that he was the only one able to ask a question by simply changing his place with the word which named the entity the verb *to be* talked about (i.e. the subject of the sentence): "I am a teacher. *Am I* a teacher? He is a pilot. *Is he* a pilot?" and so on. The mean Mr. Be constantly teased the other verbs, asking them to ask questions, but all the other verbs could do was to embarrass themselves by saying things such as: "Eat I? Fly you?" and so on. Mr. Be would laugh at their misfortune until one day, when verbs decided that they had to do something about it. They had a meeting and they all started repeating the same thing: "We have to *do* something. We must *do* something. We need to *do* something. What can we *do*? Is there anything we can *do*? There must be something we can *do*!" After a while, they noticed that the name of Mr. Do was in each of their sentences. Since Mr. Do was not at the meeting because he was busy doing things, the other verbs decided to pay Mr. Do a visit, because he was the only one who could help them by doing something about it. After all, his name was Mr. Do, wasn't it? "Please, Mr. Do, you have to do something and help us make questions!" the verbs asked him as soon as he opened the door of his house.

"First of all, you have to say *hello*", Mr. Do replied.

"Yes, hello, Mr. Do! Can you help us?" they asked him again.

"Yes, there is something I can do, because that is my name", Mr. Do said, proud of himself, "but you have to do something for me, too".

"Anything you want!" the rest of the verbs cried in one voice.

"You have to let me be the one who starts sentences. Every time I want to say something, the Subject jumps in front of me and I never get to be the first. I want to be the first every time you ask questions", he explained.

To cut a long story short, the other verbs agreed to let Mr. Do be the first in questions. After that, rivers of questions beginning with *Do* and ending in *every day, twice a week, on Mondays* etc. started flowing on our planet: "Do you fly every day? Do you eat fish on Mondays? Do they go there twice a week? Do we need to brush our teeth twice a day?" and thousands upon thousands of other questions.

All the verbs were happily reciting and even singing questions up and down the hills covered with flowers when, suddenly, they heard someone crying. They stopped talking at once and listened more carefully. This is how they realized that there were three voices crying, not only one. They soon discovered three little children crying under a bridge over a river of questions. They were *He, She* and *It* who were crying because nobody had invited them to be part of questions. As a matter of fact, when Mr. Do helped the verbs make questions, only *I, You, We* and *They* were there. *He, She* and *It* were still sleeping, being a little lazy. So, Mr. Do was asked, again, to help. He agreed to help them, but wanted something else in exchange: he should be the only one to end in letter *s*. He had noticed that, in sentences such as "He plays every day. She reads every evening. It barks at night" the verbs ended in an *-s*. Since he had two letters, *e* and *s*, in sentences like "He does his homework every Saturday. She does her best." etc. he could not accept other verbs to have the same honour. Eventually, all the verbs accepted Mr. Do to be the only one to have this *-es* ending for *he/she* and *it* and since then Mr Do has done his work as required taking front position in questions and the *-es* ending when appropriate.

5. FINDINGS

Stories as the ones above have a stronger impact on young learners, which means that they will remember the grammar rules explained in this way for a longer period of time. It goes without saying that a lot of practice was needed after the students were told the story and they were explained why it is wrong to say "*He doesn't walks" or "*He runs?". In order to help them practice at home, various handouts were created. One of the handouts used in an English centre in Romania, where the method of teaching grammar through stories is largely used is presented in Appendix 1.

The method of teaching grammar through stories is not to be used exclusively with young learners. Four, five and even six graders enjoy stories which are adapted for their age. Their level of understanding is different due to the fact that, by the time they get to those grades they will have been exposed to logical thinking. At the same time, their vocabulary is wider and their area of interest is more diverse. Stories as the one in Appendix 2, meant to present the main tenses or to review them, may be catchy and revealing.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE: THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Stories are entertaining and it has been proven that people retain information better and for a longer period of time if it is put in an anecdote. Nevertheless, is this thing alone enough to be a successful teacher of English? According to Bălan et al., a teacher may have nine roles in the classroom: *controller, assessor, organizer, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, investigator* and *motivator* (2001: 52-57). While all the roles above are real and important, it seems that the one role which excites and makes young learners pay full attention in class was left out: the *actor*. A teacher has to act in order to capture the students' attention and to compensate for the way textbooks present grammar: in a boring and linear manner, using tables which mean little to nothing to young learners. A teacher needs to go the proverbial extra mile in order to make things more interesting in the classroom. Still, how many teachers are able or willing to do this? Our profession is underestimated and faculties "producing" teachers do not give them the right training to make children forget that they learn something as difficult as the grammar of a foreign language and to give them the feeling that they are in a world where they can have fun with words which, otherwise, would scare them.

Books on teaching English focus on teaching the four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – without necessarily including teaching grammar in a special chapter. It seems that grammar is taken for granted and that teaching is seen as a part of the four skills mentioned above. This is one of the reasons for which to many young learners do not like grammar. Teachers teach tenses and other grammar notions in an abstract manner, a fact which leads to mechanical learning – the wrong way to learn almost anything. We opened many classroom books for young students and what we saw is that there are texts in the form of jokes, short stories or cartoons meant to teach vocabulary (words and expressions), but there are no stories explaining grammar. Even the most successful series of English classroom books used in Romania present grammar as being something that has to be done, lacking enthusiasm and imagination. Grammar is presented in such a manner that the teacher has to be creative and to compensate for the lack of fun, even if the book is entitled *Grammar is fun* (Paidos 1997, 2001). A book with such a title would have at least jokes about grammar or funny explanations, or a cute character explaining grammar in a way meant to put a smile on the young learners' faces. This one is definitely not the case. As a matter of fact, the book under discussion is just as dull as any other school grammar book.

Other books such as *Grammar Booster* (Roderick 2002) open the lessons with a very short, but funny cartoon introducing the grammar item to be taught. The explanations, though, look nothing like a story. The fact that the dialogues between a smart dog and his not very smart human friend are also provided in the form of audio files may be a plus, but not necessarily. A good teacher, with a little bit of acting talent, can do a better job, especially in those classrooms where there is no CD-player.

Being a classroom book preferred by many teachers, *Round-up* (Evans 2005) has more colourful drawings, some of them depicting funny situations and characters, but the grammar is presented in the same dull, schematic way, as if all the children were philology specialists used to work with tables. Tables are useful, but they have a story behind them most of the times. Our explanations are adapted to the magical age of childhood, where the presence of superheroes and other fantastic beings help young learners understand grammar. Talking about magic, there is a book for elementary students whose title is *Magic English* (Mateciuc 2007), but the only magical thing about it is that the explanations disappeared completely. It is up to the teacher to explain when to add letter *s* in the case of Present Simple, 3rd person, singular, and especially why.

It is not the aim of this research paper to make a list of all the books which do not present grammar through stories. It is enough to say that, after using or trying to use tens of textbooks, over the years, we have not seen such a book, yet. The stories and the handouts we use in the classroom are our own. A more serious thing is that, unfortunately, the grammar-translation method is still used on a large scale, at least in Romania. This is a very old method which, according to Vizental, has principles and techniques "similar to those used for teaching 'dead' languages such as Latin or Greek" (2008: 28) and which needs to be combined with other methods since the mentioned method is "doomed to fail" (id. *ibid.*).

Going the extra mile works very well with some classical methods of teaching. Behaviourism, for instance, is one of the methods which has excellent results after the students have understood the mechanism behind the grammar item. Generally speaking, the English textbooks do not have enough grammar exercises so that they could build what we call 'linguistic reflexes' in students. Teachers all over the world must come up with new exercises, found in books of grammar exercises or designed by them

because, with no exception, children constantly forget grammar markers such as the letter *-s* at the end of the verbs in the Present Simple for the third person singular, the *-ing* ending in the case of continuous tenses, changing the second form of the verb with the first form of the verb in the presence of the auxiliary verb *did* and so on. We have found it very useful to support the stories explaining the grammar items mentioned above with gestures suggesting them. The results have always been astonishing. The children not only make the necessary changes when they see the gestures, but they also prove that they understand the process, in their own way. As Marin puts it, understanding is one of the main features of behaviourism: "când se formează o legătură ori o asociere, aceasta reprezintă, desigur, cunoașterea problemei, cunoașterea relațiilor diferite care există în lumea exterioară; dar când le folosești data viitoare, aceasta este ceea ce numim intuiție. Cu alte cuvinte, aceasta înseamnă utilizarea cunoașterii, utilizarea legăturii dobândite" (Marin 2018: 151).

Some stories were doubled by other stories to correct common errors. For instance, the students were told a story in which the verb *did* was a shark which could feed on one kind of words only: the Past Simple or the second form of the verbs. When this shark entered, the second forms of the verbs (a.k.a. the Older Brothers) swam away in a split second. Moving the hand in such a manner as to suggest a shark swimming triggered in our students the reflex of changing the Older Brothers with the first form of the verbs, because they were those little fish swimming along with the shark and helping it keep the skin clean. Some of the students use the Past Simple of verbs in the presence of *did* only to see the hand imitating the swimming of a shark and to hear us making noises meant to suggest a thriller movie. They had fun and considered practicing English as a game, as something entertaining, but what really happens is that they prove to be aware of the necessary changes to be made.

For continuous tenses, the *-ing* ending became the tail of a dog. The story says that verbs liked to play a lot, but did not have human friends to throw the ball or a Frisbee. The God of the English Language accepted to play with them, but only if they accepted to wag their tails every time he threw the Frisbee. The verbs accepted and the God of the English Language brought his Frisbees: *am*, *are*, *is*, *was*, and *were*. When the students had to make sentences in the Present Continuous Tense and forgot one of the two grammar markers, all we had to do was to make gestures suggesting throwing a Frisbee or wagging the tail, depending on the forgotten marker. Most of the time, children who learned Present Continuous, for example, forgot the *-ing* ending, but quickly remembered it when they saw their teacher wagging an imaginary tail. Many of the students made the same gesture without being told to do so. It was their way of having fun and of showing us that they understood the necessity of using the "tail" represented by those three letters (i.e. *-ing*). Following a proverb which says that there is more than one way to skin a cat, the stories and the gestures may vary from teacher to teacher, if they have enough imagination to come up with their own fantastic explanations and the suggestive gestures. This is what going the extra mile is about. This and the effort of turning into an actor able to captivate the audience with the body language and the inflections in their voices.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The world is in an ever changing course and so are the teaching methods, but some things are still as they were at the beginning of the world, such as playing and listening to stories with fantastic characters. TRIZ or "the science of inventions" (TRIZ being "the Russian acronym for the Theory of Inventive Problem solving developed by Genrich Altshuller" (Vizental 2008: 50) may be a method suitable for all ages, "from children to rocket scientists" (Sidorchuck and Khomenko 2006, qtd. in Vizental 2008: 51), but stories will always be preferred by the majority of children and maybe by some scientists, too. In a world where children have to learn abstract things such as mathematics, and very down-to-earth concepts such as money, measuring time, gravity, friction forces etc., stories are their getaway vehicle. The great success the cartoons and animated movies have proves that children (and not only them) relate to fantastic worlds in which everything is possible. If a mouse can defeat a cat every time, if a man becomes very strong after eating the spinach from a can, then why not having verbs running over the fields, having fun and being happy that Mr. Do helps them make questions? English is not just a foreign language any longer. It is a means of communication in the modern world and learning it from early ages is an advantage. The grammar-translation method is anachronic, belonging to times which have long been gone.

“Earlier in this century, this method was used for the purpose of helping students read and appreciate foreign language literature. It was also hoped that, through the study of grammar of the target language, students would become more familiar with the grammar of their native language and that this familiarity would help them speak and write their native languages better. Finally, it was thought that foreign language learning would help students grow intellectually; it was recognized that students would probably never use the target language, but the mental exercise of learning it would be beneficial anyway” (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 11).

The twenty-first century finds the planet in a process of globalization through a language used in commerce, tourism, computers, music and movies to name a few human activities. In spite of this, the methods of teaching it have changed very little. Behind eye-catching drawings and short – sometimes funny, too – dialogues, we find the same method of learning grammar formulae and tables by heart, without explaining why. In essence, young students get the same unuttered answer to the questions they ask every time they are asked to change the form of the verb or to add an ending: why? The unuttered answer is “Because I said so!” The students will mechanically apply rules, and they will eventually speak correctly, but because of all the rules which seem to defy logic (why would you use the second form of the verb in an affirmative sentence in the Past Simple Tense, but not use it in the interrogative sentence?!) children do not grow fond of grammar and even have the tendency to reject it.

The Chinese experiment and all the handouts we have been using for years and years have proved that teaching grammar through stories has better results. The children have fun listening to the stories and understand why they need to do all those changes in order to make grammatically correct sentences. It goes without saying that the explanations are not the scientific ones, but ask the children if they care. As long as the children are very young (elementary school), they need to develop communication skills in English, speaking this language correctly. The scientific facts about tenses, for example, are for university students who study English in order to become specialists in philology sciences, but if they want to become teachers of English and to teach elementary school students, they should be ready to tell their students stories. Unfortunately, they will have to make their own stories because the editors of English textbooks for children forgot how they learned a lot of important things when they were little: through stories teaching them how to behave, how to love their family, how to be good, how to eat vegetables, how to treat animals, how not to kill insects just for the sake of killing etc. A world in which grammar books consist of stories explaining grammar rules without naming them “rules” would be a better world. Until then, teachers are on their own.

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- [12] http://tesol.aaa.org/tq_digital/TQ_DIGIT/VOL_25_3.PDF#page=92
- [13] Pedagogic Grammar and Second Language Acquisition, at <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/cels/essays/secondlanguage/atkins2.pdf>
- [14] Poetry Foundation, at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46952/hey-diddle-diddle>, at https://en.islcollective.com/resources/search_result?Tags=simple%20past%20song&search_work_sheet=GO&type=Printables


APPENDIX 1. MR DO TO THE RESCUE – PRACTICE

Mr. DO To The Rescue!


I am Mr. DO, a very strong verb!




I eat. Eat I? I eat not.




Help, help! Please, Mr. DO, help us!



DO I eat? 

I eat.

I DO not eat. 

Thank you, Mr. Do, you are a real hero!

I = eu You = tu He = el She = ea It = el/ea (things, animals) We = noi You = voi They = ei/ele

Exercise 1. Put Mr. DO in front of the following sentences to ask questions.

- a. You play computer games every Sunday. _____
- b. We ride our bicycles every afternoon. _____
- c. They watch television every evening. _____
- d. Johnny and Vicky go to school five days a week. _____
- e. I have a story book. _____
- f. You like reading. _____
- g. They watch cartoons. _____
- h. We fly kites. _____


Always REMEMBER:
 S + V = I eat apples every day.
 DO + S + V = DO I eat apples?


Exercise 2. Take Mr. DO and little NOT to say “no”. Use the sentences in Exercise 1.


- Example: a. You **do not** (don't) play computer games every Sunday. b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____ e. _____
- f. _____ g. _____
- h. _____
- Notice this: **do + not = don't**. Okay?

Hey, what about us?!


He She It




He eats. She eats. It eats. 


Do he eats? Do she eats? Do it eats? 


Okay, I will help you. Give me your “s” and letter “e”.




Mr. DO To the Rescue! Again! With “s” and “e”! What a team!


Does he eat? 


Does she eat? 

Does it eat? 

He eats. She eats. It eats.

He doesn't eat. 

She doesn't eat. 

It doesn't eat. 

Thank you, Mr DO, letters “s” and “e”! You are real heroes!

Notice: does + not = doesn't. He doesn't, she doesn't, it doesn't.

Always REMEMBER: S + Vs = He eats apples. She eats apples. It eats apples.
 Do + es + S + V = Does he eat apples? Does she eat apples? Does it eat apples?



APPENDIX 2

SIXTH GRADE - UNIT 4 - Not just another Halloween Story – The Monstenses Attack



It is Saturday afternoon. Brian fell asleep on the sofa, in the living room. He was reading a book and books usually make him sleepy... He soon started dreaming.

He was in the middle of the forest, surrounded by six knights on floating...skateboards, but the skateboards were not shining.

"I am looking at you, now, Brian, asking you to help me, but you are doing nothing", Sir Present Continuous said. His skateboard, made of To Be1 and Ving, was dirty.

"Yes, I looked for you yesterday, but you were not here. What did you do yesterday, why didn't you help me?" Sir Past Simple asked. His skateboard, made of V2 and Did + V1 was dusty.

"When I was looking for you, yesterday, you were watching television, you were not helping anybody", Sir Past Continuous reproached him from his scratched skateboard made of To Be2 and Ving.



"Yes, he never helps us. He likes to sit and do nothing all day. He doesn't think of the others", Sir Present Simple completed. His skateboard, made of V1(s) and Do/Does was worn out.

"I do not think that he is going to do anything to help us, and I am his newest friend!", Sir To-Be-Going-To Future said. His skateboard, made of To Be1 + going to + Ving was wrinkled.

"He will help us, I promise", Sir Future Simple said. "He will wake up and he will help us. If not, we will attack him!" His skateboard, made of will and V1, was filthy.

Brian was paralyzed. He could not move a muscle. The six knights grew angrier and angrier. They came closer and closer. The distance between them was shorter and shorter. The dream was getting longer and longer. The story became less and less interesting, and more and more annoying, so Brian woke up screaming:

"Make up your mind, monsters, are we going to do tenses or talk about adjectives?"

"You had a nightmare, dear", his mother told him. "You should not read horror stories before falling asleep" she said and took away his book.



Activity 1. Match the knights with the boxes by writing the correct number on them. Do not make mistakes, or the knights will attack!

1. Sir Present Simple 2. Sir Past Simple 3. Sir Past Continuous 4. Sir Present Continuous

S + to be1 + Ving
To be 1 + S + Ving?
S + to be1 NOT + Ving
Now, right now, at this moment etc.

S + V2
Did + S + V1?
S + did NOT + V1
Yesterday, long time ago, last month etc.

S + V1(s)
Do(es) + S + V1?
S + do(es) not + V1
Every day, never, once a week, seldom etc.

S + to be2 + Ving
To be2 + S + Ving?
S + to be2 NOT + Ving
Yesterday at 5 p.m., when the rain started etc.