PRESENTATION IN POWERPOINT: MAKING LIFE EASIER FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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Introducing computer technology into the classroom has been a wonderful breath of fresh air. Both teachers and learners are exited by this new method of accessing information, and impressed by the immense resource they have at their fingertips. The problem of using the Internet in its various forms (*e-mail, blogging, Skype*, etc.) in teaching-learning process has even become the main issue for a number of scientific conferences (the one held in May 2009, Moscow, is a good example). However teachers, perhaps unsurprisingly, tend to be the more sceptical audience: there are certainly areas in the field of language teaching where micro-processor fails to offer advantages. (What, for example, teaching grammar has in common with Internet technology? The design specifications of grammar books in comparison with their paper version… Numerous on-line tests aimed at checking students' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar… Instantly prepared lessons on certain websites… What else?) Meanwhile, a fair number of students in their teens or early twenties are typically comfortable with accessing information on-screen, and, perhaps more importantly, actually enjoy doing so. The question is: how to engage the interest and involvement of learners typically aroused by multimedia and thereby develop their language, especially grammar, skills? Being a teacher of grammar, I decided to launch a pioneering classroom project: *Making presentations in PowerPoint at grammar lessons*. So this article should be seen as an attempt to show the potential of computer technology use in action and, with regard to evaluation, to examine its pros and cons.

The obvious starting point in presenting grammar material is to show learners the form and usage of a particular item. There are in fact two opposite ways to do that. Teaching from examples, from a text, etc. implies ideas of inductive learning (for more details see [Thornbury, 2001]). We all have them, I suppose - deeply-ingrained sentences which we use again and again as illustrations of, for example, the Past Simple and the Past Perfect ('They arrived at the cinema after the film began' *vs* 'They arrived at the cinema after the film had begun'). Or even the whole texts like the one for demonstrating *used to* in teacher anecdote ('When I was a student, I used to…') Of course, the functionality of inductive learning varies greatly between grammar structures: not all sentences are purposeful and not all texts are long enough to provide a context where learners can make a realistic assessment of how clear a certain grammar point is. As S. Thornbury states, some kinds of language items are better 'given' than 'discovered' [Thornbury, 2001, p. 55].

The deductive, or rule-driven, approach is generally accepted to be the fastest and most popular way of bringing grammar material home to learners. The trouble here is that working on a number of rules can become insurmountable hurdle or a skipping-scanning race for many students. They need to have a reliable rule for using a particular grammar structure. So, what is it? A useful rule of thumb is a rule that shows the whole truth about a particular item of grammar. But the whole truth, as always of course, is a little more complex and vague. Ambiguity is a feature of language that teachers of grammar should take into account in the first place. That is why the best way to summarise the whole truth is to split the material into portions so that to encourage less advanced students to learn more about language structure. To do so we need rules of thumb on the early stages of learning.
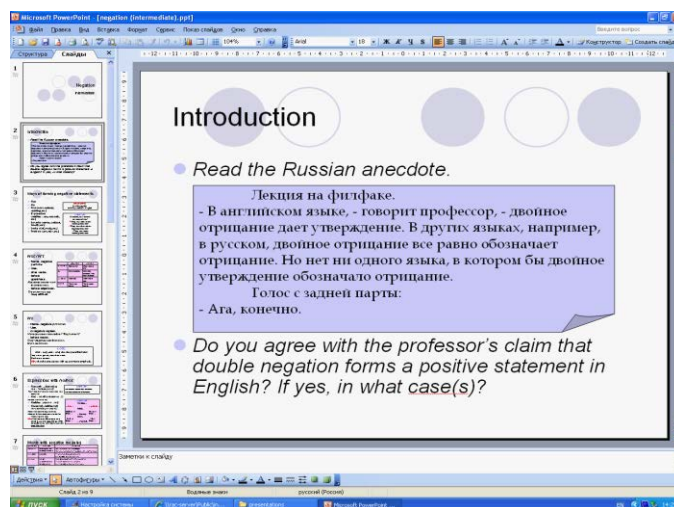
What does technology have to offer these approaches in teaching grammar? While the potential of computer programs for discovery learning is quite obvious (take, for example, concordancing programs), the problem of seeking rules of thumb is still open. Its solution came to me quickly and unexpectedly.

But first, some facts. The word 'powerpoint' is informally used nowadays to mean presentation, normally using the Microsoft PowerPoint program [Vernon, 2009, p. 46]. Actually, the term was coined in computer technology and then crept in the field of business communication. In foreign language teaching-learning as well presentation belongs so firmly that Business English and ESP lessons, namely, cannot do without this way of presenting information. Moreover, in most English for Science and Technology courses, there is a requirement to build up and develop the skills in point: students are supposed to be able to make a successful presentation with the help of multimedia and computer technologies. The syllabus of *Business English* designed for the 2nd year students at the Institute of Engineering Entrepreneurship (the former Institute of International Management) of Tomsk Polytechnic University is a good example [Working Programme, 2006, p. 6]. To meet specific needs of learners and help them fit physically and mentally into today's competitive world is the job of the Engineering lecturer. Our job, as teachers of English, is to enable students use their professional and language skills without difficulty in real time (not only in a quiet classroom setting). That is why we focus as much on strategy training as on language development. To fulfill this major objective a number of materials have been designed and put into practice lately, E. Nikolaenko's *Business English* being one of such [Nikolaenko, 2009]. It covers the most important areas of oral and written communication, with a particular unit teaching learners the art of making presentation.

My colleagues' experience has given me new insights into my current teaching practice. How can I get more out of such materials and implement their ideas into General English classes? I have already introduced computer technology to my lessons of grammar by getting the students to e-mail me some of their written tasks, to browse through certain grammar sites or to do exercises in the book they have chosen from the Internet resources for self-study. All these as mentioned above are well-beaten paths for both teachers and students. This time I needed something new to try. To keep up with the latest technology, I decided on PowerPoint and had to learn from …my students. Amazingly enough, learners happen to be more computer-friendly, especially when it comes to practice. So, ESP teachers as

well as our students have helped me to find my own way through making presentations based on grammar syllabus. What follows is supposed to be inner thoughts and ideas arisen from my teaching experience which I would like to share in my article.

Slide 1. Introduction

Introduction

- *Read the Russian anecdote.*

> Лекция на филфаке.
> - В английском языке, - говорит профессор, - двойное отрицание дает утверждение. В других языках, например, в русском, двойное отрицание все равно обозначает отрицание. Но нет ни одного языка, в котором бы двойное утверждение обозначало отрицание.
> Голос с задней парты:
> - Ага, конечно.

- *Do you agree with the professor's claim that double negation forms a positive statement in English? If yes, in what case(s)?*

The first and most fundamental thing the teacher needs to do is think positively about the material s/he is going to discuss in the presentation so that it could be briefly and efficiently organized on each slide, which is really challenging. Indeed, the space limit makes the teacher choose various forms of presenting information, besides text. These might be: tables, different lines, etc., even pictures. Needless to say, the golden rule here is not to overdo with it: students will be cross-eyed after three or four slides with nightmarish graphics or numerous points. One the other hand, I have noticed that students acquire information presented with the help of coloured diagrams, moving figures and so on more willingly than in traditional classroom situation - in books. The primary reason lies, of course, in the psycho-physiological nature of this phenomenon: reading the text from slides, watching the movements on the screen and listening to the teacher talk, when combined, give a strong memory effect.

Another reason that can explain the popularity of such slide-shows is the choice of topics. The point is that grammar syllabus is presented unequally: such areas of English as aspect, voice, mood and modality are too difficult for Russian learners to perceive and, therefore, take the bulk of time and energy. But besides the verb categories there are also other language items that are usually sprinkled around coursebooks in a much more diluted way. That is why presentations in PowerPoint are meant first and foremost for presenting areas that ELT practitioners accept as constantly problematic - word order, negation, questions, and the like. They should also focus on what could be classified as classic important minor language areas such as *some/any, much/many, few/little*, etc. The ones I used for presentation were: negation, questions and tenses in comparison.

The first topic sets itself apart from the others by offering another feature that *does* contribute to its success – engaging content.

'A good beginning makes a good ending' says a well-known proverb. To arouse my students' interest to negation and, of course, practice it, I challenged them to compare the ways of expressing negation in Russian and English by …reading a Russian anecdote.

The main task, though, was to answer the key question (see Slide 1). The students were kept puzzled up to the last slide when they learnt the right answer: the double-negation-is-not-possible-in-English rule, known for everybody from school years, is *not a*, better *no*, rule of thumb (For the whole truth see Slide 2). This allows us to conclude that an appealing introduction sets the tone to the whole presentation, what proves the proverb to be true.

Following the discussion of presenting the material in slides, it is worth noting that the whole presentation covers one particular topic and is usually built around 8-10 thematically based slides that *may* come in a slide show as illustrated above or *may not*. The latter means that the teacher can stop a slide show at *any* slide. S/he might want to put the ideas discussed in this slide into practice at once, by switching learners to written and/or oral activities. This is sure to prevent the students from getting bored with monotonous work - so typical for grammar practice. For example, to help learners grasp the meaning of 'experience' *vs* 'experiences' expressed by means of the Past Perfect and the Past Simple relatively, students can be asked to prepare a survey all the questions of which follow the pattern 'Have you ever (been to America)?' The task is to find the most experienced person in class. The results of the survey may trigger a further conversation when students ask each other to give more details about the partner's life experiences by setting a question like this: 'When did you (go there)?' Types of activities may vary.

So, what might be engaging in presenting grammar? Texts that have generic features, cross-linguistic analyses, purposeful tasks, etc. You might extend this list.

Slide 2. Key to Introduction
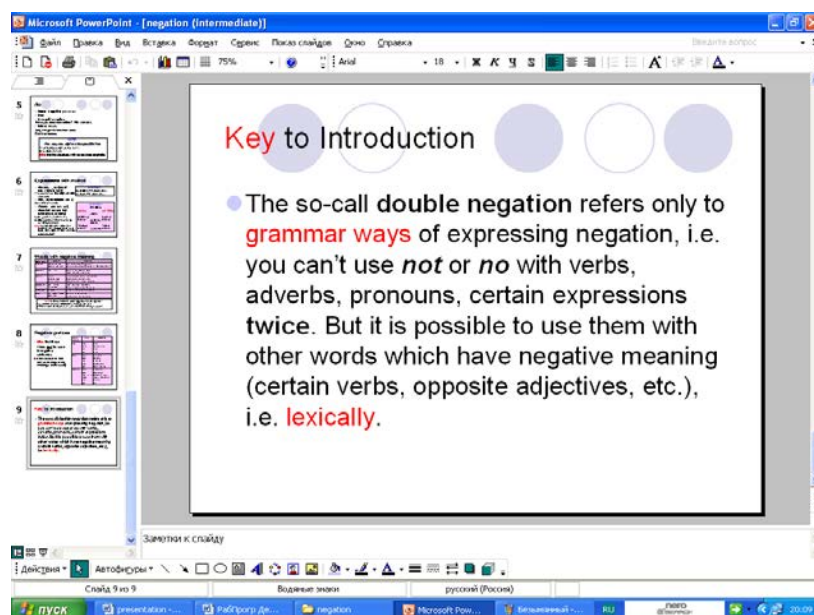
Apart from introducing a new theory, presentations have much more scope than coursebooks for interactive exercises. One of such is on translation from Russian into English. On every click first appears a Russian sentence, then its English version(s). That allows the teacher to correct students' replies right away. Tests can also be presented on slides. The one I used was to choose the right/wrong answers among the given (usually five-six) sentences.

Yet the biggest advantage of such a method is that it can help to make a rule-presentation and practice a more realistic proposition for intermediate learners. Illustrations of a particular grammar point (formation and usage) are all dealt with in a much more flexible way than is possible in a book. Certain slides can be printed out and then used as flash cards in class, especially with beginners.

Besides, those students who missed the lesson or still fail to grasp the meaning of a particular grammar point have a great opportunity to view the presentation again and do the exercises offered by the teacher on their home PC or in a computer class by downloading the material under study. For upper-intermediate students it is possible to give as a home assignment the task to find more information (for instance exceptions, their own examples, etc.) than that touched upon in the presentation. A far more challenging task will be to ask students to make a presentation themselves. All in all, they will cover the whole grammar item in one presentation split into a series of slides, each of which is prepared by a certain student.

The last but not the least, using presentations made in PowerPoint allows us to save on photocopying materials. We still face hard reality: not every language centre can allow their teachers the luxury of open access to the photocopier. In addition, we should mention the quality of the materials copied and what students feel about receiving a mere photocopy, but that is another issue…

To sum it up, let us highlight the features that can make computer technology a useful tool for developing grammar skills. These are:

- well-laid-out and limited to one slide per a separate bit of information;
- ready-made for classroom and/or home use;
- an opportunity to work on problematic areas again;
- engaging content;
- interactive activities;
- a good chance for increasing students' thinking time and developing creativity;
- a valuable addition to the teacher's repertoire of supplementary activities.

It would be wrong of me, in evaluating my own materials, not to mention their negative sides. The dangerous thing about the use of presentations, it seems to me, is that an over-reliance on this device *does* inhibit. You should make allowances for computer accidental removal of the data (with undercharged batteries), etc. and get other materials ready, just to be on the safe side. Otherwise, you'll have to reach for the last resort - a good old coursebook, or just go into class and let things develop. But not everyone wants to do this, at least not all the time!

Keeping up with new technology, of course, needn't be at the expense of the slightly older ways of teaching grammar discussed above. There'll always be a need for coursebooks, photocopiable ready-to-go lessons etc., whatever technology has to offer.

The exciting thing about presentations in PowerPoint, however, is that they transform grammar material into an interactive tool, providing features that were never available in printed coursebooks. The opportunity to present information in a very brief way means that teachers can use such presentations for just about any point they wish to make and at any time during the lesson. Meanwhile, the boundless internet resources together with photocopiable

materials facilitate the preparation of exercises and classroom activities aimed at practicing a particular grammar area. For the student, a medium which they enjoy using arouses interest to such a difficult language aspect as grammar is and can give less advanced students the confidence they need to know it.

There's the last note to say in conclusion. Encouraged by my experiences in class, I then implemented the ideas singled out in this article into another language course targeted at adult learners - *Corporative English for Professional Communication*. It provides its learners, prospective programmers working for an international computer company of a Special Economic Zone, with the opportunity to practice specific functions and language of business in a range of authentic situations, with PowerPoint presentations playing a key role in delivering any kind of information, not only grammar.

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К ВОПРОСУ О ДИНАМИКЕ ОРФОГРАФИЧЕСКИХ ИЗМЕНЕНИЙ

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Орфография - система правил, устанавливающая единообразные способы передачи речи на письме [Ахманова, 2007, с. 294]. Из этого определения следует, что орфография представляет собой «порядок, основанный на планомерном расположении и взаимной связи» орфографических правил. Любая действующая система подчиняется законам логики - строится на связи между явлениями. «Логические законы имеют самостоятельное значение и действуют независимо от воли и желания людей в любом процессе познания» [Введенская, 2005, с. 448]. Следовательно, орфография как действующая система также построена на четырех логических законах, реализацию которых можно проследить на конкретных примерах.

«Каждая мысль в процессе данного рассуждения должна иметь одно и то же определенное, устойчивое содержание» (Закон тождества).

Говоря о реформе орфографии, мы не должны забывать, что речь идет об изменении принципов написания. Поэтому, ведя отсчет орфографического реформизма со времен Петра I, мы допускаем логическую ошибку, так как Петр преобразовал графику (совокупность начертаний): «округлил» шрифт, устранил некоторые буквы, - а четких орфографических правил в грамматиках того времени еще не было, следовательно - реформа имела характер графической новации, а не орфографической.

Подчинение данному закону также обнаруживается в отказе многими учеными фонетическому принципу орфографии в статусе ведущего (далеко не все лингвисты считали возможным подчинить написание произношению, и, по сути, единственным последовательным апологетом фонетического принципа по сей день остаётся В. К. Тредиаковский).

Например, много споров было вокруг двойных согласных. Сторонники фонетического письма не раз предлагали отменить удвоенные согласные, не принимая во внимание то, что во многих случаях эти написания указывают на долгое произношение, структуру слова. Если в одних словах двойные согласные не произносятся (например, *рассказ, грамматика, аппетит*), то в других связь между написанием и произношением очень тесная (*ванна, Анна, поддать*). Если устранить повторяющуюся согласную, произношение исказится, и результатом оного будет *А[н]а, ва[н]а, по[д]ать* (в последнем случае мы получаем еще один омоним). То есть следствием нейтрализации орфограммы будет изменение орфоэпической нормы. «Конечно, можно сказать …что нет ничего предосудительного в том, что изменения в написании слов приведут в конце концов к соответствующим изменениям в произношении. Но орфографическая комиссия не была уполномочена вносить, хотя бы и косвенным путем, изменения в произносительные нормы русского литературного языка» [Шапиро, 1956, с. 18].

Второй закон - Закон противоречия - звучит следующим образом: *Две противоположные мысли об одном и том же предмете, взятом в одно и то же время и в одном и том же отношении, не могут быть одновременно истинными.*

Проиллюстрировать это утверждение можно попыткой Главнауки провести очередную реформу орфографии в 1930 году (а точнее упростить орфографию «до предельной возможности», так как работа комиссии 1918 года «остановилась на полдороге»). Проект изначально был неосуществим, потому что к делу подошли непоследовательно. «Наша орфография приурочена к русскому литературному языку и должна передавать его звуковую систему (то есть во главу ставится фонетический принцип - написание соответствует произношению). Отсюда задача реформы - приблизить начертание слов к их звучанию <…> Необходимым коррективом к фонетизму, взаимодействующим с ним фактором, удерживающим письмо от окончательного распадения, является морфологическое начало… Вопрос о принципах не в механическом подчинении орфографии фонетическому или морфологическому началу, но в границах применения каждого из них, в пра-