



TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH PLAY

Sentence construction awareness in nursery and primary education

Enseñar inglés jugando
Crear conciencia de construcción de frases en infantil y primaria

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KEYWORDS

*Playing with grammar
Primary English teaching
Nursery English teaching
Phonological awareness
Learning by playing
Learning by moving
Bilingual education*

ABSTRACT

Teaching English to young learners is a priority in our globalised society, especially within the growing context of bilingual schools. Thus, it is necessary to find a strategy that allows young learners to grasp the knowledge of the foreign language at a structural level. Nonetheless, children's cognitive development does not allow for grammatical explanations, it is thus that a tried and tested sequence of activities is provided for primary and pre-primary schoolteachers to be able to incorporate in their teaching, which will develop phonological awareness of the English language at a structural level, thanks to games, manipulation and movement.

PALABRAS CLAVE

*Jugando con gramática
Inglés en Primaria
Inglés en Infantil
Conciencia fonológica
Aprender jugando
Aprender moviéndose
Educación bilingüe*

RESUMEN

Enseñar inglés a los más pequeños es una prioridad en nuestra sociedad globalizada, sobre todo por la creciente popularidad de la educación bilingüe. Por tanto, es necesario encontrar una estrategia que permita a los más pequeños manejar la lengua extranjera a nivel estructural para construir frases, aunque su desarrollo cognitivo no les permite aprender gramática como tal. Por ello, una serie de actividades probadas con alumnos jóvenes se ofrecen para que docentes de infantil y primaria puedan incorporarlas en sus rutinas, para desarrollar conciencia fonológica y de estructura de frases gracias a juegos, la manipulación y el movimiento.

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1. Introduction

To procure that the future generations are fluent speakers of English is without a doubt one of our main objectives as a society both, at a European and at an international level. In the European Union, the Council of Europe encourages and advocates for multilingual communities in order to ease communication amongst different communities. Here in Spain, according to the Spanish Ministry of Education, in the academic year 2021-2022, 4.331 primary education schools used English as the language of instruction. Considering that there are 14.049 primary schools, the percentage is a considerable 30% (MEFP, 2022). To this, I should add, that nowadays English is the prevailing option when it comes to learning a second language at schools and high schools. Moreover, speaking English tends to be an important requirement to commence a professional career. Nonetheless, in the Spanish media, we are portrayed as being amongst the worst performing countries in the teaching-learning of English within Europe (El Economista, 2020; Europa Press, 2020; Meneses, 2021). However, since it will not be until the year 2025 that English will be included among the subjects being tested by the PISA exam, we will need to wait until then to be able to talk about specific data that tests students' performance in English at a national level.

Whether the media provides reliable data or not, it is undeniable that the learning of foreign languages, and specifically English, is one of our main priorities at an educational level. Consequently, bilingual schools and the teaching of content in a foreign language is not foreign to the Spanish society. Therefore, the purpose of this article is that of providing a series and sequence of activities that will aid primary and pre-primary school teachers with easy, fun and integrating activities for students to improve their level of English, whether it be in a bilingual context, or simply within the teaching of English as a subject.

At the aforementioned levels, the cognitive development of students does not allow them to reflect on language and the way sentences are structured (that is, the grammatical aspects that condition the construction of sentences), it is for this reason, that a series of dynamics are suggested that will allow very young learners to develop this sentence construction awareness in a fun, inclusive, active, fit-for-all way of learning.

But, where do these sequences come from? Actually, they come from an individual and a personal need. When my little nephew started bilingual education at the age of 5, back in 2019, him and some of his classmates asked me if I could give them a hand with 'Science', the bilingual subject most of the parents did not feel proficient enough to help their children with. It was with this daunting and thrilling challenge ahead of me that I began to rattle my brains in search for motivating activities that could serve me to teach a very diverse group of boys and girls aged between 5 and 6. This all started in September 2019, and we all know what happened a few months after. So despite my best initial efforts, after a few months, I saw myself obliged to stop the workshops, and when I could finally resume with the teaching after the lockdown, I had to restart the classes online before I could resume to the face-to-face teaching. After the lock down, I was back to work with a group of 6 young children. The online classes I was giving these 6 year olds lasted between 45' to an hour, and I must admit worked quite well. It is also true that having the chance of doing the classes face-to-face, allowed me to put into practice many activities where students needed to move around, and admittedly those worked especially well, since they allowed children to change routines.

One of the biggest challenges I had ahead of me, was that of teaching content to students who had no real knowledge of the target language, English, and who nonetheless could understand what I was teaching, if appropriately presented, but who struggled producing language themselves. They could repeat words or chunks of a sentence in a parrot-like manner, but they did not feel confident to utter much more than one or two words, so at the core of the creation of activities I always had the idea of playing with language in a way that would allow them to build up their confidence in the construction of sentences in the foreign language.

Together with this, the activities I designed were created with the purpose of helping a diverse group of very young students of English as a foreign language (EFL): a child diagnosed with a low degree of autism and ADHD,¹ (who had been advised to resit the third academic year of nursery, in order to allow him to be better prepared for primary education), 2 students with a higher level of English than the rest, two who didn't like English because they were struggling with the language and another one with an average level. Therefore, together with the challenge of catering for all my students' needs I also needed to help them with the subjects they had to study at school, so I needed to thoroughly analyse and study the Science and English textbooks these students were going to be using throughout the academic year.² I also took into consideration the guidelines and recommendations the Ministry gave primary school educators; thus, Phonics and phonological awareness were at the core of my design. The activities that will be presented here were designed and tested as an aid for both teachers and students in the bilingual education context, therefore they are not intended to drastically change or modify any already existing working methodology. These activities have been designed as a perfect partner workshop to carry out

1 Although this is a term widely used within the educational context, I have strong reservations about the definition of this condition as a disorder, since often highly active children, if cater for adequately, can be high achievers, and labelling this as a disorder has too much of a negative connotation from my point of view.

2 At this point it is important to point out that in Spain, a very high percentage of teachers follow textbooks in their everyday work with children.

with students who are already working with Phonics, and it is also equality suitable for those English teachers in the primary and pre-primary school classroom who teach English and may not be using Phonics.

Therefore, in the pages that follow I will start by considering bilingual education in Spain, the tools primary school teachers count on and how to possibly contribute to the instructions of English as a foreign language for young learners. Moreover, these activities, although designed for a very specific group of Spanish students, can be said to be useful for any other country where, as it is the case in Spain, most of the media and audio-visual material consumed is hardly ever in original version, since it is mostly dubbed, something one should consider when it comes to teaching a foreign language. In fact, it would be unwise to forget the considerable benefits watching TV in original version brings with it when it comes to learning a second language, something that has been studied and proven (Almeida & Costa, 2014; Birulés-Muntané & Soto-Faraco, 2016; Chaume, 2020; Rupérez Micola, Bris, & Banal-Estañol, 2009; Zabalbeascoa, González-Casillas, & Pascual-Herce, 2015). In a society where television is in original version we find that a considerable amount of its citizens have a degree of understanding of English before they start school. If most of what they watch is in English, children already understand and have a sense of sentence construction in the target language, and this constitutes an invaluable basis on which to construct bilingual education, something I might add, lacking here in Spain.

2. Bilingual education in Spain

Ever since 1996, bilingual education has been a reality in Spain, when an agreement was signed between the Spanish Ministry of Education and the British Council, and English bilingual education was implemented in our classrooms. The PEB (Bilingual Education Programme), as it is called, kick started with 43 primary education schools across Spain who joined an educational programme where 40% of the teaching hours were to be taught in English. This programme started off working with very young learners, including students aged between 3 and 4 (Dobson, Pérez Murillo & Johnstone, 2010). This bilingual education system was later to be extended through to primary and secondary education. Thus, 25 years after it was first implemented, and quoting the information provided by the Spanish Ministry of Education, nowadays there are 91 state schools of primary and pre-primary education and 58 high schools in the whole of the Spanish territory, with around 40.000 students following a bilingual teaching and learning programme. Remarkably, the guidelines given to these bilingual schools is considerably brief to say the least.

The last agreement signed between the British Council and the Spanish Ministry of Education, on June 23rd 2020, where the teaching of Phonics in Spain is agreed in order to promote English literacy in Spain, specifies the following guidelines for each educational stage (BOE, 2020, p. 43819):

1. Pre-primary education: teaching must be globalised encompassing essential aspects of learning at this stage. Students must be introduced to the phonics method of learning to read and write in English.
2. Primary education: English (literacy), Natural Science, Social Science and Artistic Education.
3. Secondary education: English (language and literacy), Biology, Geology and/or Physics and Chemistry and History and Geography (own translation).

Together with these short specifications, schools are granted a right of examination to future students who aim to enter these schools with bilingual programs, so as to allow them to decide on whether to admit these new students or not according to their English proficiency. It is true however, that the Spanish Ministry of Education provides a set of 10 videos lasting around an hour each, where plenty of examples are given to teachers to be able to implement the teaching of Phonics in their primary or pre-primary school classrooms.³ The Spanish Ministry of Education in cooperation with the British Council give teachers at bilingual schools the opportunity to take brief courses to help them with the task of teaching content in a second language (Dobson, Pérez Murillo & Johnstone, 2010). However, I believe the teaching of bilingual education should vary considerably depending on the country where it is implemented in order to adequate to students' needs, taking especial attention to the level of the second language students have to start with. Thus teaching literacy should not follow the same steps in Spain as in other countries where children already understand English because they watch television in original version.

Consequently, and taking into account the scarce instruction given, it is not surprising that bilingual schoolteachers in Spain demand methodological training to be better prepared to teach in the bilingual classroom (Campillo, Sánchez & Miralles, 2019; Durán-Martínez & Beltrán-Llavador, 2020; Nieto Moreno de Diezmas, 2019), notwithstanding the fact that improving their English proficiency is also amongst their main priorities (Durán-Martínez, Beltrán-Llavador & Martínez-Abad, 2020; Durán-Martínez & Beltrán-Llavador, 2020).

It is thus, that 'armed' with these scarce instructions Spanish educators commence their bilingual professional development. It is no wonder that these promising bilingual programs don't stand away from controversy (Pavón Vazquez, 2018), since bilingual education has the potential to benefit students greatly (Benson, 2002; Bialystok, 2016; Blom et. al., 2014; Madarova & Laborda, 2020; Vinuesa & Izquierdo, 2019). Once again, the media relates the negative impact bilingualism has on students and their learning outcomes (20minutos, 2016; Martín-Arroyo, 2017; Merino, 2015; Sánchez Caballero, 2021). Especially remarkable is the case related by Sánchez Caballero

³ The aforementioned videos can be found here: <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/mc/british-council/formacion-y-recursos/formacion-profesorado/infantil-primaria.html>

(2021) in *elDiario.es*, where we are told that according to 80% of the bilingual education teaching staff, students' performance has decreased. It is also possible to find academic research supporting this idea (Anghel, Cabrales, & Carro, 2016).

One thing is clear though, if basic subjects of primary education are being taught in English, those students who struggle with English, will also struggle with these basic subjects. Added to this, it is also of paramount importance to bear in mind that students with special needs, who need specific and extra support, are very likely to struggle even more with these basic contents they are being taught in a foreign language.

Thus, we are landed in a situation where schools are jumping on the bilingual wagon in a country where Phonics is established as an instrument to be used in the primary school classroom as a tool to teach English literacy. Thus, literacy and language learning need to go hand in hand, since the majority of Spanish children do not know the language they are being instructed literacy on. Conversely, the Spanish national educational system does not make it compulsory for university teaching programmes to instruct their students on this. Thus, most of those who will be future primary and pre-primary schoolteachers, are left to learn about Phonics as they plot along their professional career. Within this context, it is possible to assert that more work needs to be done to procure future teachers with the necessary tools that will enable them to provide the best possible outcomes both in the bilingual primary and pre-primary school classroom, and also for those who are not in bilingual systems but who are learning English as a foreign language. After all, those are the early stages of the future generations' education and as such should provide an adequate and solid basis on which to construct the knowledge they will acquire throughout the rest of their compulsory education.

2.1. Phonics and phonological awareness

As we have already seen Phonics is suggested as the ideal tool to teach English literacy. Therefore, we should understand what it is and how it is implemented. According to the National Literacy Trust in the United Kingdom (n.d.), Phonics is a programme implemented to teach literacy, that is, a methodology used to teach native speakers to read and write, whereby the emphasis is put on phonemes and their mapping into graphemes. It is thus, that English speaking children are presented with materials that allow them to play with words, identifying different sounds within a word, and associating said sounds with the way they are coded in written language. This system can be put into practice via games and activities where similar sounding words are used to create poems, songs, games and dynamics that help children become more acquainted with the letters that are used to write the language they speak.

The use of phonics has also been proven to be highly beneficial for young learners of English as a foreign language (Ibarrola, 2010; Rendón Romero, Navarro Pablo & García Jiménez, 2021; Ricart de Domingo, 2018), since students who work with it invariably improve their sound recognition and this definitely helps them to improve and develop the skills they are being taught. Together with this, it seems that students with special needs also benefit from the use of phonics in literacy training (Gillon, 2005; Joseph & Seery, 2004; Khasawneh, 2021; Shamir, Korat & Fellah, 2012).

As it has already been mentioned, Phonics is primarily used to teach native speakers of English to read and write, and in order to promote literacy amongst the students using this system, phonological awareness is intimately related with this way of working that phonics proposes (Beck & Beck, 2013; Cunningham, 2011; Stahl, 2001; Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 1998). Thus, in order to better understand phonics, it is necessary to also understand what phonological awareness is and how it is developed.

To develop phonological awareness on students means to train learners to break language up in smaller and smaller units (Gillon, 2017) whereby, a sentence is broken up into words, words into syllables and syllables into sounds. Moreover, a high degree of phonological awareness is linked to higher proficiency in a foreign language with a better phonological awareness (Abdon, et. al., 2019; Quiroga et. al., 2002), thus demonstrating its usefulness in the EFL class. Nonetheless, since this methodology is mainly used with native speakers of the language, the first stage of phonological awareness, that of words within sentences, is the one native speakers need to work on the least, given that speaking the language allows them to better distinguish one word from another, and they also have an acquired awareness of sentence construction. Nonetheless, word recognition (Wood & Terrell, 1998) and sentence construction (Jusun & Yunus, 2016) when learning a second language are an important asset when it comes to the teaching and learning of a second language.

This sentence construction and word recognition awareness, I believe to be one of the most important aspects to work with in the EFL classroom, especially when dealing with students who live in a country where most audio-visual productions are dubbed. Such is the case of Spain, where most students' knowledge of English before they start their formal education is almost non-existent. Thus, I decided to focus my attention on the first level of phonological awareness, that of sentence construction, in order to help create sentence awareness, whereby students can begin to develop a sense of where subject, verb and complements tend to go within the sentence, without obviously using that terminology, since their cognitive development does not allow for such abstract thinking yet. It is from this starting point that I began to look for ways of developing the activities that would best

fit my students' needs, and could also allow me to help them achieve the sentence awareness I wanted them to reach. Thus, one of my main objectives was to turn sentences and sentence construction into something concrete that students could manipulate and play with.

But, how can we achieve meaningful, fun, and inclusive learning with young learners? On the one hand, and taking into consideration the cognitive development of my students, the first thing I need to do was to make language tangible and easy to manipulate, so as to be able to create games and dynamics which allowed my students to manipulate language free from abstractions. Added to this, a considerable amount of research seems to point at movement as an ideal teaching tool for foreign language teaching whether it be through the use of the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology (Astutik, Megawati, & Aulina, 2019; Nuraeni, 2019; Putri, 2016;), or simply by developing activities which incorporate movements and/or drama (Bakhsh, 2016; Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013; Iswandhary, 2021; Malokhat, 2022; Rieg, 2009; Shin, 2017). Manipulating the language in a 'tangible' way is at the core of the design of the activities proposed here. The use of new technologies is also incorporated, since as I have already mentioned a certain amount of the teaching carried out with this workshop had to be performed online. Moreover, the use of ICTs often served as a motivating tool (Dewi, 2019; Diakou, 2015; Laksmi, Yasa & Mirayani, 2021; Ratminingsih, Mahadewi, & Divayana, 2018) that also enabled students to work in cooperation (Miin, Rou & Yunus, 2019), given that as I could observe playing Kahoot was something my students seemed to enjoy. The gamification of the activities presented was also a motivating factor that was taken into account in the development and design of the activities (Bakhsh, 2016; Morthy & Aziz, 2020).

3. Meaningful learning through playing and moving around

For learning to be meaningful, young learners need to be provided with sufficient and varied stimuli (Peck, 2001) which fits their cognitive skills and is adequate for their development. As well as variety, young learners also benefit from task repetition (Payant & Reagan, 2016), since being familiar with the activity ahead of them allows them to perform better. It was thus that I concluded that the activities I was to design had to have the following characteristics:

1. They needed to provide students with the opportunity of working with concrete manipulative materials.
2. They needed to encourage movement.
3. They needed to be activities which included pictures, thereby making them very visual.
4. It was also necessary to procure a variety of activities so as to be able to maintain students' attention.
5. I needed to establish a sequence and work dynamic students could become familiar with, so that there was a certain amount of repetition, and they could feel at ease performing the tasks.

The aforementioned were thought out for a very specific and varied group of 5-6 year-olds, nonetheless, they can also be said to be appropriate for young learners in general, given that, the dynamics established are designed to be inclusive: for groups of students with different levels, and, as it was the case with my group of students, for students with special needs, and very different levels of English.

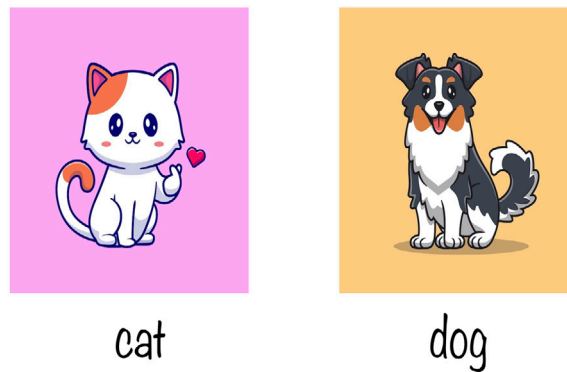
Therefore, once the characteristics of the activities are decided it is necessary to first establish a sequencing of acting to then follow by specifying the kinds of activities that can be used within the selected sequencing.

3.1. Sequencing

The sequencing designed for the English workshop is based on a gradation of knowledge and skills, where presentation would be followed by recognition, memorization and ultimately manipulation of the language taught.

Thus, the initial activity is necessarily that of presenting vocabulary with the help of flashcards or any similar tool. These flashcards would be presented initially as follows, with an image and the written word just underneath it. In my case, I created power points where to present the vocabulary. As it is often done, especially when it is a new word for the students, the teacher would read out the word and the students would repeat afterwards, this action will be repeated as many times as the teacher estimates necessary depending on the level of the students. As it can be seen, from figure 2 it is also important that students see and get used to the fact that one image may correspond to one or more words, given that when it comes to sentence construction this conception will be paramount:

Figure 1. Sample power point slide ANIMALS 1



Source: own creation (using images from freepik.com).

Figure 2. Sample power point slide ACTIONS 1



Source: own creation (using images from freepik.com).

After presenting the vocabulary, memory games can be played with the students where they need to pair images and words. If necessary, especially for younger students, it might be beneficial to have examples available for students to see on the board or on the walls of the pairs of images and words.

Once the teacher believes the students seem to have memorised most of the vocabulary, he/she can show the flashcards without the writing and ask students to say out loud the missing word. When I was doing the workshop online, I sent the parents a pdf version of the vocabulary that they could print, for students who felt less confident to have some visual support at home. Since I was doing this using power point, it was easy enough to add animation, and with a simple click, I could make the word appear once it had been said out loud.

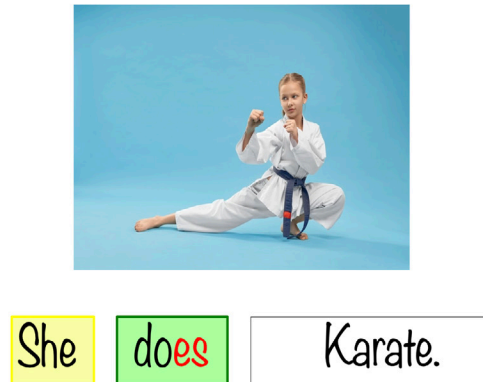
In this presentation and memorization phase I also created Kahoots using the same images that I used in the power points/flashcards. I used one of the images with 4 of the words they had learnt that day, although only one was the correct answer. At the beginning, when we played Kahoot, if I noticed that some students were struggling, I would read the possible answers putting especial emphasis on the way I pronounced the correct one. My objective was to get them playing without allowing them to develop anxiety and thus rejection towards the game because they might find it too difficult. This was a game they thoroughly enjoyed playing and they found highly motivating, especially the autistic child who was amongst the best performers, very often coming up amongst the first 3 highest-scoring players.

Once I was confident students dominated the vocabulary that had been introduced, I began constructing sentences and presenting them as the descriptions of pictures or very short videos. Following the same dynamics as for the presentation of vocabulary I first showed the power point with the sentence and I would ask them to repeat after me. Only when I felt they were ready, would I ask them to manipulate the parts of the sentence and 'write' sentences. The writing could be literal or by ordering words already written on paper. Therefore, the first stage was recognition, followed by memorization prior to construction. In this way, the presentation of sentences

was especially designed to raise students' awareness on sentence construction, creating grammar awareness in an easy, manipulative and tangible way.

In order to create sentence construction awareness, I presented simple sentences where I showed 3 main parts or chunks of the sentence: subject (in yellow), verb (in green) and complements (in white). These were presented in three chunks, these way students began to interiorise that in affirmative sentences the green bit goes first, that is the subject, followed by yellow and finished by white and the full stop. In figure 3 I have also highlighted the third person 'es' ending, since I also remarked on the fact that if the 'yellow square' was not he, she or it, it did not need the 'es'. I reserved the teaching of the 3rd person 's' for the second academic year of primary education, since my group of students were not prepared for that in the first academic year.

Figure 3. Sample power point slide SHE DOES KARATE 1



Source: own creation (using images from freepik.com).

Once students were acquainted with these sentence structure, they were presented with different kinds of manipulative activities that will be detailed in the following section, where they needed to order words in order to construct sentences.

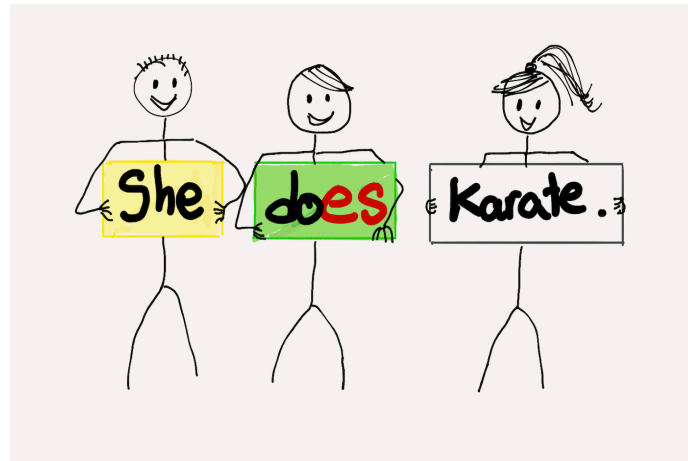
3.2. Activities and games

Taking the sequence mentioned above into account, where materials are presented, recognised, memorised and ultimately manipulated, there are several kinds of activities which I will describe separating them by stages of the teaching-learning process: presentation, recognition and memorisation and sentence construction.

The kind of activities to be used for the presentation stage that I propose are the following:

1. Using flashcards with the words written underneath. This can also be done with the help of power point or any other digital platform the teacher chooses.
2. If the school uses phonics, playing with the specific words to help students become familiar with the words, sounds and letters that compose them, can be a fun presentation activity.
3. When presenting sentences, a possible way of doing it is with power point, as it can be seen in figure 3. Nonetheless, any other digital or physical support could be used, such as with cardboard that is stuck on the board or the wall. The important thing is to leave the colour coding to allow students to interiorise where each word tends to go.
4. Another activity to present and play with sentences is 'the piano of children'. The class will be facing the front and 3 students will be chosen to be the piano keys, each student holds an A4 piece of paper with a chunk or word of a sentence in their hands facing the class, they will be told which is their chunk, and each time their heads are touched they need to say their word out loud. In order to make it more fun and dynamic, as well as touching students in the right order, the teacher can also touch children in the wrong order, sometimes faster and sometimes slower. In the latter case, it does not matter that words are said in the wrong order, since what the whole class is seeing is a correctly ordered sentence. This activity keeps them active and entertained. Figure 4 exemplifies what this activity would look like. It is worth mentioning here that when constructing sentences which are longer than 3 words, it is still advisable to give only one word per child, although always respecting the colour coding. This will prevent students from learning clusters of words that may fossilise with time, such as 'The girls', since 'girls' can also appear in a sentence without the article. It is preferable that students develop an awareness of the fact that within one chunk they might find more than one word.

Figure 4. The piano of children

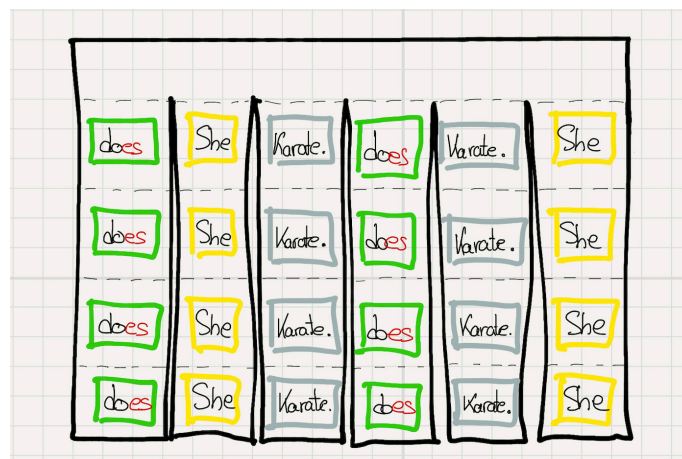


Source: own creation.

When it comes to the recognition and memorisation stage, I propose the following activities:

5. Playing 'memory games' with vocabulary, where the pairs are composed of an image (preferably the same one we have used to present the vocabulary) and its pair is the written word. All cards are put on a table face down and each student can turn 2 at a time. As in any memory game the student who gets the corresponding image with its word takes the cards for him/her or for his/her team if they are playing in teams.
6. 'Seek and stick' is a game that can be played to practice word recognition and sentence structure. (1) In order to practice word recognition and memorization, the teacher needs to stick around the class pieces of paper with words in columns, in stripes that are easily cut, and the teacher shows an image saying what it is, then students need to identify the word, move around the class to find it, and bring it back to their sit, where they will need to stick the word under the correct image on their worksheet. This activity can also be done the other way around, where students are shown a word and they need to find the right image to stick it on their pre-prepared worksheet next to the correct word. (2) When it comes to sentence recognition, the teacher will show an image and the correct sentence, as the example in figure 3, and around the classroom, students will find the sheets of paper shown in figure 5, and they will need to find the right word and stick it on their worksheets in the correct order. Although in figure 4, all the words can be found on the same piece of paper, the teacher may prefer to have different words in different pieces of paper, in order to encourage students to move around the class more. Alternatively, students will be given more words than the ones needed, so that they also need to discriminate from one subject or another, or one verb or another. This later option will be offered only when teachers know their students will be able to perform it, even if with a little help to start with.

Figure 5. 'Seek and stick'



Source: own creation.

7. Giving students an image such as the one in figure 6 and asking students to put the words in the correct order. If we have given them enough examples, and we have emphasised that yellow always goes first, they will find it relatively easy to put the words in the correct order. And that can be done in several ways: (1) by providing students with the different pieces of paper (each chunk in the right colour) and ask them to put them in the right order; (2) by having chunks stuck on the walls and asking students to find them (see figure 5), cut them and go back to their sits to stick them on their pre-prepared worksheets; (3) with a Kahoot where they need to order words, in this case the image used in this online platform should be the same one used in class to present the sentence, such as for example the girl in figure 6, and students need to put the words in the right order. Once students have become familiar with this task can we start to provide different images to ones presented in class to ask them to put them in the right order.

Figure 6. Sample power point slide SHE DOES KARATE 2

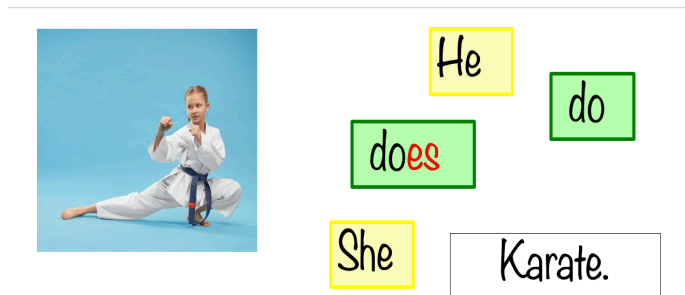


Karate. does She

Source: own creation (using images from freepik.com).

8. Another sentence construction activity is based on the piano activity, only this time we put children in the wrong order and their colleagues need to either say or move them to put them in the correct order. Since we are still on the recognition and memorization stage, students will have a visible version of the correct order of the words in case they still need some help.
9. After having practiced and consolidated students' awareness of sentence construction, we can start with the manipulative stage, where students are given the different chunks that make up a sentence without providing the written example.
10. 'Seek and stick' where students are just provided with an image, and they need to look for the correct words and stick them in the correct order. Here materials such as the one exemplified in figure 5 can be used.
11. 'Spot the sentence', in order to play this game students will be provided with the information in figure 7 and they will need to select the right words in order to 'write' the correct sentence. The writing can be done literally, asking students to write the sentence up underneath the image on a worksheet provided to them by the teacher. Nonetheless, I would suggest that for early stages students are asked to cut out the correct words and just stick the words in the correct order. This activity entails a higher proficiency of sentence construction awareness, since they also need to choose the correct words, leaving 2 words out.

Figure 7. 'Spot the sentence'



Source: own creation (using images from freepik.com).

4. Final remarks

The activities presented here were created and developed for a group of 6-year-olds of very different abilities and levels. With this in mind, an eclectic methodology was implemented, not only to be able to capture their attention, but also to allow different students to develop their different skills.

When this small group of students started taking part in the workshops some of them were already motivated when it came to taking English extra classes, others though, were highly demotivated and slightly reluctant to take part. However, as the time passed and they began to find they were capable of doing well and finishing the tasks they were asked to do, their motivation increased and they all performed really well at school too. When students were able to perform the more advanced tasks of sentence writing, they were demonstrating their knowledge of the structure of the English language. The games and activities practiced allowed them to develop an intuitive knowledge about subject, verb and complements and where they go within the sentence, which allowed to feel much more confident when constructing sentences and describing pictures. Thus, this workshop proved to be extremely successful. And although it proved to be really efficient with the small group of students who took part, that fact that my group of students was so diverse, indicates to me that it can be adapted to greater groups and I believe it has great potential. This is, but the starting point of a more extensive work to be carried out with whole classes, developing more tried and tested activities that can provide teachers with a graded selection of activities to be implemented throughout the whole of primary education and nursery too.

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