Language Support Model

University of
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Glasgow

Document 5

PRINCIPLES OF GRAMMAR DEVELOPMENT: for Teachers

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INTRODUCTION

Some children need help to develop **spoken grammar**. The SLT will analyse their speech and decide which grammar features to work on. Thereafter, they need lots of practice in using the grammar features in appropriate contexts.

Some children will need help with the 'little' **grammar markers**, such as for plurals and verb tenses. Other children will need help with understanding the relationships amongst **parts of sentences**, and for them we use colour coding. An overview of approaches is set out here, but there are lots of materials and games that will be provided to meet specific needs.

GRAMMAR MARKERS

Some children will need help to use grammar words such as pronouns. Others will work on the 'little' grammar markers that signal meaning. These are taught in an approximate developmental sequence, but of course at the level appropriate for the child. The sequence is:

- present progressive tense (*ing*);
- regular plurals (*s*, *z*)
- articles (*a* and *the*);
- regular past tenses (*ed* as in *pulled*);
- some common irregular past tenses (*went, came*);
- third person singular (present tense *s,* as in *walks*);
- possessive ('*s,* as in *mummy's*);
- verb *to be* (*is, are, was, were*);
- auxiliary verbs (*have, had* etc.)
- irregular plurals (*sheep*, *mice*, etc.)

WAYS OF TEACHING GRAMMAR MARKERS

It is important to work on only the 'target' grammar marker as decided upon by the teacher and SLT – not on every error the child might make! The sequence for work on grammar markers is:

- the adult first **models** the marker,
- the adult then **prompts** the child to use the marker,
- the adult '**recasts'** any errors.

These terms are defined next.

DEFINITIONS OF MODELLING, PROMPTING AND RECASTING

Modelling

Modelling is when the adult's talk gives a lot of **examples** of how the grammar marker should be used, maybe with some slight added stress. The games and activities provided allow for this. The child is not asked to copy directly at this stage, but may start to do so, which is helpful.

Prompting

Prompting involves encouraging the child to use the grammar marker in a **structured** game or activity. The games and activities provided will again give suggestions. There is still a very large step to take between using a target correctly in a structured game, and remembering to use it in everyday conversation, and lots of practice is needed.

Good ways of **prompting** the child include using;

- *alternative* questions, where the child is presented with a limited choice of responses. For example, asking '*Would you like just one book or both books?* prompts the child to respond using the singular or plural grammar marker, and incidentally gives them a model of how to use it.

- asking the child to *complete* the adult's utterance.   The child is encouraged to finish a sentence, or part of a sentence, that the adult starts. For example, the adult says '*This girl is riding her bike, these girls are riding…*'. The target is for the child to use *their,* saying '*Theirs'* or '*Their bikes*'.

Recasting

Recasting is used when a child makes an error on the target grammar marker, and the adult then **gives the 'good' version** - what the child 'should' have said. An example of recasting is:

- the child says *'They riding their bike.'* The adult rephrases and says something like *'OK, <u>they're</u> riding their <u>bikes</u>.'*, with emphasis on the grammar markers.

Recasting often turns the child's statement into a question in order to sound more conversational and natural rather than overtly corrective, as in *'Oh, are they*

riding their bikes?'. This often makes the child repeat correctly, and again is built in to the learning activities.

COLOUR – CODING SENTENCE   RELATIONSHIPS

Some children may have difficulties in understanding the relationships amongst parts of sentences. **Colour-coding** is used to highlight these relationships. This gives the child an extra visual cue to support the development of different and more complex sentence types. The colour code helps reinforce for the child which kind of word they are dealing with and how or where it can be used in a sentence.   The therapist will provide the examples and materials, and suggestions about how to use the scheme.

Introducing Colour Coding To The Child

We need to explain to the child that:

- **Sentences** are being targeted
- Sentences have different **parts**, and these have **names**.
- These parts will be given a **colour** always the same one.
- This will help to keep the parts in **order**.
- We will need to think about other examples and other **similar** sentences.

The Parts of the Sentence

Sentences are broken down into parts, and given names that children can understand. Auxiliary verbs are coloured the same as the main verb. Each part is then illustrated using colour coding. Each sentence part is also cued by a particular question.

Sentence part	Example	Colour	Question
Subject (the **doer**)	**The boy** is running.	orange	Who?
Verb (the **doing**)	The boy **is running.**	yellow	What…doing?
Object (the **done to**)	The boy is kicking **a ball.**	red	What?
Location (**where** the verb is done)	He plays **in the garden.**	blue	Where?
Instrument (**what** is used to do the verb)	I hit the ball **with a bat.**	brown	What using?
Indirect object (the **person or thing** the verb is done to)	I gave **her** a gift.	pink	Who to?
When/time (**when** the verb is done)	**Yesterday** I swam.	purple	When?
Why (the **reason** the verb is done)	I cried **because I was sad.**	black	Why?
Adjective (**description**)	a boy **with blond hair**	green	What like?
How (the **manner** in which the verb is done)	She cheered **loudly**.	turquoise	How?

Other parts are black on white as usual.

Sentences can be built up from two-parts like 'Subject + Verb' through three such as 'Subject + Verb + Object' to longer sentences like 'Subject + Verb + Object + When, Where or Why', and eventually sentences can be joined together with linking conjunctions. Where the child starts and ends will depend upon their learning.

Using colour coding

The questions used to elicit sentence parts are placed on appropriately colour-coded cue cards to use as visual prompts with the child when working on each sentence part. Pictures or symbols with words underneath represent each sentence part, with colour coded 'frames' or coloured backgrounds. For children who can read, words themselves can be colour-coded.

Understanding (comprehension) is taught before use, using pictures or actions to explain the colours, with lots of modelling by the adult. Once the adult is confident that the child has understood the basic principles of building sentences and that each part of the sentence has a different colour, the child is ready to work on saying the sentences.

For this stage, action pictures are used as before, with the general question 'What's happening?' The child is encouraged to produce the sentence parts at the level they are working, prompted by adult questions from the table. If the child only gives part of the sentence (for example just says: 'man'), the appropriate question(s) to elicit the rest of the sentence should be asked. For example, the adult could say: '*It is a man, but what is he doing*?' Or: '*Yes, running, so can you tell me who is running*?'

If the child produces an utterance that misses out the grammar markers, the adult should recast the sentence into the correct form, as usual.

The specific activities used by each child will be at the appropriate level, and will allow for lots of repetition and practice.