

EMBODYING GRAMMAR: MOTION AND EMOTION IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

● Miriam Stewart | Zürich



Miriam Stewart is a Drama in Education practitioner working in Dublin as a CELT trainer (training teachers to teach English as a second language) as well as

running her own course teaching English through drama. She is currently part of a research team working with refugees and immigrants to investigate the impact of adopting an embodied language learning approach. She has a B.A. Hons. in Montessori education and an M.Ed in Drama in Education.

I recently had the pleasure of facilitating a two hour workshop at the Sprache in Bewegung (Language in Motion) Conference hosted by PHZH, Zurich. Connecting with the theme of the conference, the workshop was a practical exploration of English grammar through embodied practices, beginning with a quick overview of the research on which these practices are based and moving swiftly on to the activities themselves.

The first grammar point we tackled was adjective order, a source of great frustration for nonnative speakers (and utter bewilderment for natives when they discover it exists!) We discussed the difference between expressing opinions and facts, moving freely to express the fluidity of an opinion and standing still to convey the unchanging nature of facts. We also sat on the floor when expressing nouns in use as adjectives (plastic, glass etc.) to emphasise their place as being closest to the word described. This culminated in a sentence building activity which represented adjective order

visually whilst being embodied by the participants.

This led to a discussion on the importance of having an emotional connection to language and the gap which exists between how we think of past, present and future in our native language (memories, emotions, hopes, plans) versus the way we interpret it in a language we are studying (rules, lists, structure). We explored this further by “taking a walk through time” to think about our own past, present and future and then representing these stages in still pose, creating frozen images depicting ourselves through time.

In keeping with our embodied focus, we also considered the need to link phonology with the study of grammar and explored the physicality and emotion of sound through several vocalisation techniques. We then focused on the role of voiced and unvoiced sounds in determining the pronunciation of ‘ed’ endings in regular past tense verbs in

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English. Gestures were chosen to represent the different endings (e.g. hitting a cymbal for 't' endings) and this was put into practise with a mingling activity in which participants had to try to find their correct 'ed' ending based on their verb sound and gesture.

The workshop ended with a reflection session during which the participants were encouraged to share their ideas and ask questions. This was wonderfully energetic and creative with lots of original insights and unique perspectives shared. As a practitioner/ researcher I find myself constantly learning from my participants and building upon these new discoveries to develop my practice, and this workshop was no exception.

Mark your Calendars!

The next Sprache in Bewegung Conference will be held on November 4, 2020 (afternoon) at the Zurich University of Teacher Education.

Our keynote speaker will be Marietta Rohrer-Ipekkaya who share her experiences with “Mehrsprachiges Erzähltheater”!

Keep an eye on our website for more info:

