

Transcript: TRG 3.4 Differentiation in the NCELP

SOW: stretch and challenge for higher proficiency learners

Length of Talk: 19:33 minutes

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Slide 1:

Welcome to Differentiation in the NCELP SOW, looking specifically at offering stretch and challenge for higher proficiency learners.

Slide 2:

This session will run as follows: we start with...

A refresher on what determines the difficulty of grammar, which will help us look at how to position stretch and challenge learning activities.

We will then consider levels of word knowledge to see how we can create challenge and finish by looking at learning activities which offer stretch and challenge within a selection of NCELP lesson resources.

Slide 3:

Research has shown that certain **factors** influence the difficulty of grammar: language factors, learner factors, and content/task factors (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019).

For this article in full see 'What determines the difficulty of grammar in a foreign language?' on the NCELP Resource Portal.

These **broad principles** help us design schemes of work and inform our expectations about what learners can do, when.

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In any one class there is a range of learner characteristics. Teachers will be best placed to bear learner factors in mind, along with language factors and from there, most usefully offer increased challenge by varying content and task factors.

The 'difficulty' of grammar depends on how we *measure* grammar knowledge:

What kind of task is the grammar needed for?

When thinking about the influence of the task or test, it can be useful to frame our expectations in terms of the 'Complexity', 'Accuracy', and 'Fluency' of language.

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The oral modality is generally thought to be more difficult than the written. So, grammar that learners can read or write is likely to be more **complex** than grammar they can use in their speech or listening.

Grammar that learners produce in writing is likely to be more **accurate** than grammar they can produce in spontaneous speaking.

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The grammar that learners can *understand* (by linking grammar that they hear or read to meaning or function) and grammar that learners can *produce* are usually different (DeKeyser, 2015).

Production is generally thought to be more difficult than comprehension (but not always). So, grammar that learners can understand in reading and listening is likely to be more **complex** than grammar they produce in speaking or writing.

Combining the former and latter together: Grammar that learners can produce in writing is often more complex and more accurate compared to the grammar they produce when speaking *more spontaneously*; grammar learners can understand when reading is often more complex than the grammar they can understand in listening. Note, however, that these are not hard and fast rules!

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Specifically in terms of task complexity: varying the cognitive load: different demands of an activity influence what learners can do with grammar (Bui & Skehan, 2018). Some activities place a higher cognitive load on learners than other activities. *Varying* this cognitive load, by varying task demands, is important. It can show where learners need more practice. Also, varying task demands provides opportunities for learners to encounter 'desirable difficulty' (Bjork & Bjork, 2014), where they are really pushed to recall some language. Let's explore this idea in more depth over the next four slides.

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NCELP tasks already avoid mechanical task completion by compelling students to contrast at least two parts of one grammatical system. For example, a speaking pair task requires learners to listen out for the verb ending that indicates the person of the verb (I vs s/he, or you all vs we, for example), or alternatively the tense, present or past. However, recognising that this is challenging in spoken modality, tasks are usually designed to scaffold other aspects of language production, e.g. by providing the vocabulary. The challenge of these activities can be increased by requiring higher proficiency learners to work without this support. This requires them to spread their attention over multiple elements within spontaneous production.

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As we know, NCELP tasks deliberately contrast pairs of features to build in desirable difficulty.

Where higher proficiency learners could benefit from additional challenge, teachers can prompt them to include additional features, in their written or spoken production.

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As the SOW progress, and learners' language knowledge develops, there are further opportunities for interactions that are more open-ended and will include this switching between different structures.

We should take care not to jump the more structured practice stages, as these are crucial preparation that supports subsequent unstructured production.

However, it is also strong practice for learners to repeat speaking tasks, and in response to evidence of higher proficiency, teachers can loosen the structure of task repetitions, as appropriate.

When they do so, teachers should expect that fluency and accuracy may decrease, at the expense of the increased complexity.

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NCELP speaking tasks are generally interaction tasks that are unscripted but which focus students' attention on a particular pair of grammar features.

One way to increase cognitive challenge for higher proficiency learners in these tasks is to prompt for further information. For example, in a task focusing on two persons of past tense activities, students can be encouraged to add an additional clause, a detail about time, place, further activity, or opinion. Sometimes these extension suggestions are in the teacher notes, but teachers can make use of the strategy with any such tasks with particular students, as and when appropriate.

Written production is also usually envisaged as 'from memory', and for this reason the tasks are often quite controlled, e.g. prompts in English with written translation. These can be interpreted as a form of planning support.

To challenge higher proficiency learners, it is straightforward to prompt them to substitute (or write in addition) two or three sentences of their own.

It's useful also to remember what we said about the differences in challenge between different modes and modalities.

Where the majority of students might be required to write a written translation of a text, higher proficiency learners might be challenged to complete the translation orally, initially.

Let's look at an example from one Spanish resource:

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Here the writing task has already been produced with two levels of challenge. This is the scaffolded version...

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This is the more challenging version.

However, it would additionally be possible to require higher proficiency learners to try to produce this text orally before they write (or even instead of writing it).

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And then at this stage of the lesson, higher proficiency students could turn away from the board and have a 2nd attempt at producing the whole text orally, using only the English version of the text.

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A framework for stretch and challenge, then, can involve changing the mode or modality for different learners in the class to increase the challenge.

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Having considered grammar, now let us turn to consider vocabulary.

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Whilst the SOW provide progression in these aspects of word knowledge, teachers can provide additional challenge tasks for higher proficiency learners, when appropriate.

This list of aspects of word knowledge can be a useful framework for suggesting activities to produce deeper word knowledge.

For example, whilst an NCELP vocabulary activity might prompt for written production of **individual words**, higher proficiency learners could be prompted to **write a sentence with the word in it**, which gives evidence of learners' knowledge of form, meaning, grammatical functions and/or associations and collocations.

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Here you can see an example of how newly developed homework tasks in Year 9 further develop students' word knowledge of meaning and use, through the word substitution activity in Part 2. Students are asked to make at least 10 replacements (or as many as they can) in **13 minutes**, using the words around the edge of the text.

The full text is on the next slide.

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Here students are developing their knowledge of word meaning and word use in context at paragraph level. Of course teachers need not wait until Y9 to use this type of activity. This premise could give teachers ideas on how to offer word substitution activities at paragraph level for students who benefit from this earlier.

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Now bringing in grammar again. Part three proposes a choice of two activities. Part 3b offers a progression to further challenge higher proficiency students.

As you know, the grammar spine within the SOW is not driven by traditional 'paradigms' (e.g., full sets of verb, article or adjectival agreements, all at once). However, in its totality the grammar spine will cover the full range of features for persons, subjects, tenses, and aspectual functions ('complete' versus 'ongoing'), and a range of key syntax (word order and relations between words) over time. If following the NCELP SOW, teachers will be ideally placed to look at what grammar students have done so far and structure learning activities to offer

stretch and challenge. Here is one such example. Teachers could alter the foci, depending on the level of challenge required.

The homework sheet in full and the answer sheet are linked on this slide for your reference. A Spanish version is also linked for your reference.

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As we have seen, varying task demands provides opportunities for learners to encounter 'desirable difficulty'. Let's look at some learner profiles to consider how this might play out in practice. (I just love this artwork! Taken from a German Y8 resource, although their names have been changed) Back to the task in hand, before we move on to look at the resources, take a few minutes' thinking time here to consider the questions on the slide and jot down some ideas. When you are ready, read through the next three slide. You will naturally have additional ideas to the ones given here as examples.

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Having explored both grammar and vocabulary, let's now take a look at learning activities which offer stretch and challenge within a selection of NCELP lesson resources.

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Open these linked resources on the following four slides to look in particular at how a selection of NCELP resources offer scope for differentiation for high proficiency learners. These ideas are of course transferable to other languages and phases.

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With particular reference to the final activity, the revising of use of word order 2 in sentences starting with time phrases, manner phrases, place phrases and direct object phrases offers the chance to introduce the idea of manipulating word order to create emphasis. Here teachers are not teaching a *rule*, rather an example of how WO2 can be used to create emphasis – in answer to a question about a particular idea. This is an example of where challenge is created through asking students to produce a) a complex grammar feature b) in the oral modality.

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Why we work with authentic texts:

an additional source of intrinsic interest (whether text is fact or fiction)

the enjoyment of hearing and reading different rhythm, rhyme

the opportunity to revisit phonics, vocabulary and grammar in new contexts

the chance to learn additional vocabulary, incidentally

the requirement to work with **some** unfamiliar language

the opportunity to use known language for a different type of production

Here we can also see that using known language for a different type of production offers a chance for differentiation for higher proficiency learners. The task demands of the final creative production exercise can be tailored to suit the

needs of higher proficiency learners by considering the mode, modality and task complexity.

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Here are two further lesson resources from Year 9. Teachers could transfer ideas from these learning activities to differentiate for higher proficiency learners within other lesson sequences as appropriate.

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We hope you have enjoyed exploring ideas on how to differentiate for higher proficient learners in the context of NCELP approaches.

To summarise: withdrawing scaffolding, increasing the open-endedness, increasing the length/breadth of required response, and changing the mode/modality of a task can all be straightforward ways to increase challenge for higher proficiency learners, but we must always bear in mind the tension between complexity, fluency and accuracy and know that increasing the challenge in terms of complexity will likely incur more learner errors and less fluency, at least initially.