

The language demands of History

A traditional principle of language teaching is that it proceeds from the here and now. That is, a language teacher in introducing new vocabulary or language features builds on what the learners can see, feel and hear in the immediacy of the classroom to make the language being used comprehensible. In contrast, history almost by definition deals with the 'there and then' of past events and circumstances in different parts of the world. In addition to this, the language of history often involves the understanding and use of a range of abstract and general nouns and verbs which communicate a variety of concepts. These abstract nouns may involve:

- roles: leader, monarch, emperor, minister, factory worker, servant,
- structures: government, monarchy, republic, empire, army
- processes: invasion, conquest, discovery, colonisation, reform
- actions: rule, migrate, prevent, deportation, passed (a law)

Another feature of historical discourse is the need to generalise about groups of people, significant individuals, trends in society, developments in technology and industry and so on. This necessitates the use of a variety of determiners, nouns, verb forms and adverbs which express the notion of making a generalisation. For example,

- By the early 1960s, many families had a washing machine. (few, some, most)
- The poor lived in wooden shelters. (the rich, the wealthy, the nobility)
- People in London tended to take shelter from the bombing in underground stations. (would, used to, were in the habit of taking)
- Children often worked in factories for up to sixteen hours a day. (usually, sometimes, hardly ever)

A third key feature of historical language is the need to understand and use language which communicates the notion of cause and effect. Therefore, pupils need to develop their ability to understand and use words or phrases such as: because, therefore, due to, caused, led to, resulted in etc.

Pupils also need to be able to make inferences from artefacts, pictures, DVD material and texts and in turn express inferences and relate them to 'evidence'.

I think that ..., This means that .., This suggests that .., This indicates that ..

Finally, the language relating to time and place is at the centre of the 'there and then' of history. Time may involve:

- Time when (more specific): forty years ago, twenty years later, a few months earlier.
- Time when (less specific): in the 19th century, in the 1960s, in the early years of the 16th century.
- Duration: for twenty years, over the next ten years, since 1850, from 1948.

It is also useful to remember that the nature of the KS1 and KS 2 curriculum and its organisation into units does not follow a continuous chronological path. Consequently, it may be unclear to many pupils what the connection is between different topics. Part of this lack of clarity will often be the *when* and *where* of each unit in relation to other units. In particular, it may be assumed

that the chronological sequence and differences in time between, for example, the Victorian Age, Tudor Times and Roman Britain are obvious. It is worth remembering to contextualise each new unit in terms of its place on a timeline relative to previous and also forthcoming topics. The location(s) of the unit can also be identified with the help of maps. Furthermore, other significant events, eras and locations which are not included in the National Curriculum (the construction of the Great Wall of China, the development of Great Zimbabwe, the Mayan culture etc.) can be plotted and thereby further inform pupils' sense of the past and of the links with world cultures and histories. This can also provide opportunities to draw on children and their parents' knowledge of historical events in Britain and elsewhere in the world.

All of these features of the language of history present considerable challenges to users of EAL as they learn to understand and use the more formal academic register of the classroom. However, these features of historical discourse do not necessarily mean that history as a subject is inaccessible to learners of English as an additional language. Instead the task is to find ways to make the language needed to explore, understand and talk and write about the past comprehensible and usable.

Use of objects and artefacts

To some extent, many of the things which primary teachers do to bring history alive and bring it into the immediacy of the classroom will go some way towards making history comprehensible. The use of pictures, photos, DVD material and artefacts as well as visits to museums and historical sites will all serve to bring the 'there and then' of history closer to the here and now. Using artefacts for example allows learners of EAL to hear and use the names of objects at the same time as seeing and / or handling them. Therefore the names of various objects are made comprehensible and the objects themselves provide opportunities for pupils to use the names. Furthermore, as well as naming the objects it is likely that part of the learning objective may be to identify the use to which the artefact was put. This provides the opportunity for pupils to extend vocabulary and language structures. The artefacts can be used to demonstrate / mime / act out their use – cutting wheat / bringing in the harvest for example – and therefore provide an opportunity to contextualise verbs such as harvesting, fighting, sewing, cooking, carrying, storing and so on.

What this situation needs as well as the opportunity to handle or observe artefacts and talk about them is a structure to support learners of EAL to hear and use language structures into which the names of artefacts and the verbs associated with their uses can be fitted. Therefore the use of a talk / writing frame such as the one below will give EAL learners support in understanding and expressing their understanding of the artefacts and their use.

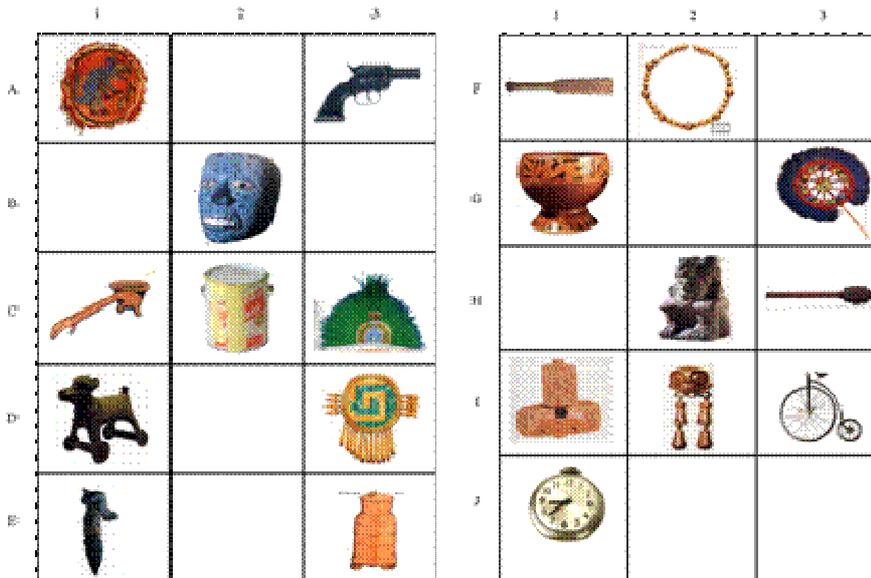
This is a
It is made of
It was used foring

This provides a clear and naturally repetitive frame which is helpful to EAL learners. Of course variety in language forms and structures is desirable and the aim is not to limit the range of expression of EAL learners. However, too much variety all at once can be confusing until core language patterns have been acquired.

Activity 1 Use of pictures

Of course it is not always possible to use actual artefacts and pictures of artefacts may be useful. In order to increase the opportunity to use the appropriate vocabulary and language structures it is possible to combine pictures with structured activities. For example the activity below uses pictures as part of an 'archaeological dig' simulation, in this case about the Aztecs.

The first activity is a paired 'barrier game' activity in which two pupils (Pair A) have a blank grid board and arrange their set of pictures according to the grid reference on the back of each card. They keep their grid hidden from Pair B who also have a blank grid board and a different set of cards. Pair A then ask Pair B if there is anything in a chosen grid square (eg. Is there anything in I2?). If there is an object in that square then Pair B give Pair A the object card (the earrings card). If the grid square is blank then they are told that there is nothing in the square. Pair B then have a turn to choose a grid square to see if they can find an object. This continues until both pairs have 'found' all the objects on each other's board



Following this the two pairs join together to look at the complete collection of objects. The four pupils then use the sheet below to match the pictures to the object names and record their location.

Object	What is it?	Location on grid
A razor edged club	-	-
A maize store	-	-
A ceremonial knife	-	-
A pendant	-	-
A toy dog	-	-
A shield	-	-
A gun	-	-
A fan	-	-
A brooch	-	-
An incense burner	-	-
A tin can	-	-
An earring	-	-
A whistle	-	-
A spear	-	-
A bowl	-	-
A watch	-	-
A statue of a god	-	-
A Quetzalcoat mask	-	-
A bicycle	-	-
A headdress	-	-
The four things we thought that were not Aztec artefacts were:		
1.	2.	
3.	4.	

This gives the pupils the opportunity to discuss the objects and negotiate the meaning of the object names. The pupils also have to identify four objects which they think are not of Aztec origin. While it is unlikely that pupils will have specific experience of Aztec artefacts they will be able to bring their knowledge and experience of other artefacts to the discussion. The activity and the activities that follow therefore provide not only opportunities to use particular vocabulary items and language structures but also to use language to explore and make sense of the topic. This 'exploratory' talk can involve, for example:

- clarifying: *What's that mean? What's a brooch? What do you do with it?*
- putting forward ideas: *It could be a knife, you might put things in it, I think it's a fan.*
- justifying: *The gun can't be Aztec because they didn't have guns a long time ago.*

Pupils can then think about and discuss what each object was made of and again record their thoughts on the following table. The 'T' column is for 'what we think' and the 'A' column is to record the actual answer which the teacher can provide at the end of this activity.

What is it made of?

Object / artefact	clay		stone		feathers		metal		wood	
	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A
Decor edged club										
Mosaic mirror										
Ceremonial headdress										
Pendant										
Toy dog										
Shield										
Fan										
Brooch										
Incense burner										
Earring										
Whistle										
Spear										
Arrow										
Statue of a god										
Quetzalcoatl mask										
Fireclay pots										

Finally they can decide what each object was probably used for.

What was it used for?

for war	for domestic purposes
for religious purposes	for decoration

Activity 2 Use of pictures

Not all topics will necessarily include consideration of artefacts, but the use of pictures can still help to contextualise objects or actions. Pictures can be incorporated into activities so that they are an integral part of the activity as well as contextualising the language. For example, the following activity is a matching activity in which the aim is for pupils to understand typical Tudor entertainments. The activity introduces a character, Alfred, whose cousin from the country, James, is coming to stay with him in the city. Alfred is planning to take James to a different kind of entertainment everyday. Alfred is also going to take a different friend of his to each event. The aim of the activity is to work out what activity they will be going to on each day, at what time and which of Alfred's friends will be going with them. To work this out pupils have to use some 'clues'.

Again, pupils working in groups of three or four will facilitate further exploratory talk.

The cards shown are:

- 10:00 a.m.
- the theatre
- Ann
- hunting
- Cards and board game competition
- Arthur
- 6:00 p.m.
- Marian
- a bear-baiting show

Clues:

Two days after going to the bear-baiting show they are going to go to a dance.

Alfred and James are going to go to the theatre on the day after they go hunting.

John likes playing games with dice.

On the day before they go to the dance Alfred and James are going to play bowls.

The dance starts at seven o'clock in the evening.

Clues:

Ann likes watching exciting stories.

Alfred is going to take James to a bear-baiting show on Wednesday.

The bowling starts three hours later than the hunting.

The play starts an hour later than the dance.

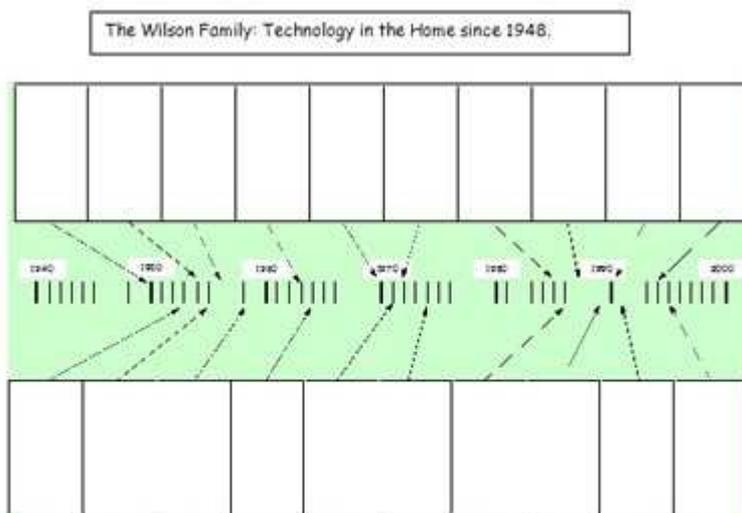
Mary thinks that hurting animals is very cruel.

The pupils can then arrange the cards on a baseboard such as the one below.

Date	Entertainment		Time	Friend
	picture	name		
Monday 1 st April				
Tuesday 2 nd April				
Wednesday 3 rd April				
Thursday 4 th April				
Friday 5 th April				
Saturday 6 th April				
Sunday 7 th April				

Activity 3 Use of pictures

Pictures can also be incorporated into a sequencing activity. The following activity uses a timeline to illustrate the development of technology for the home in Britain since 1948. The aim of the activity is to arrange the cards in the correct sequence according to the clues provided. There are four clue cards so that each person in a group of four has to contribute. Most of the 'answers' can only be worked out by cross-referencing clues from different clue cards.



Clue Sheet 1

- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got a gas cooker in 1950.
- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got a washing machine two years before they got the black and white television.
- John and Kathy got a microwave oven in 1968.
- John and Kathy got a mobile phone ten years after they got the microwave oven.
- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got a freezer two years after they got the microwave oven.

Clue Sheet 2

- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got a fridge four years after they got the gas cooker.
- John got a transistor radio for his 17th birthday.
- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got a freezer in 1971.
- John and Kathy got a mobile phone ten years after they got the microwave oven.
- John and Kathy got a dishwasher four years before they got a mobile phone.
- John and Kathy got a video player two years after they got the microwave oven.

Clue Sheet 3

- John bought a cassette player in 1970.
- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got a stereo record player the year after they got a freezer.
- John got a personal cassette player for his 40th birthday.
- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got a food mixer in 1964.
- Sarah got a Nintendo for her 10th birthday.

Clue Sheet 4

- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got a black and white television two years after they got the electric kettle.
- John and Kathy got a CD player three years after they got a video player.
- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got a personal computer in 1994.
- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got a vacuum cleaner the year before they got the fridge.
- Mr. and Mrs. Wilson got an electric kettle eight years before they got the food mixer.

This activity aims to use the 'history' of one family to illustrate the development and acquisition of technology in the home in order to enable pupils to generalise about this topic. This represents a move from the specific to the general. In terms of the language for expressing these ideas, it is a move from:

The Wilsons got a freezer in 1971.

to statements such as:

- During the early 1970s many families got freezers.
- By the early 1970s many families had a freezer.
- Freezers were a common feature of many homes by the mid 1970s.

Pupils can be helped to acquire the language for expressing generalisation by using a substitution table:

By the end of the	1950s	some	people	were able to	buy	a freezer
By the early	1960s	many	families	could	get	a mobile phone.
In the	1970s	most			have	a washing machine.
During the	1980s	the majority of			afford	a microwave oven.
	1990s					

and use this for the more abstract notions of generalising about a large number of families in less specific time periods. The language for incorporating these more general notions into a text can be further supported by using a writing frame similar to the one below:

Britain: Changes in Technology in the Home
since 1950

Since the beginning of the 1950s there have been many developments in technology that have influenced our everyday lives. Before 1950 most families did not have most of the things that we now take for granted in our everyday lives.

During the 1950s many families were able to buy new things such as

_____,
_____,
_____ and _____ .

Using a specific 'case study' of a family also has the advantage of making social history initially closer to the genre of narrative story. The time line in effect illustrates the story of the Wilson family. Story is generally more familiar and more accessible to young children in contrast to other genres and non –chronological text types.

Activity 4 Use of Speech Bubbles

Of course not all aspects of social history lend themselves to being introduced to children by some form of story. An alternative to story which again moves from the specific to the general is the use of 'speech bubbles' which provide statements about the topic as if they were made by people living in the era being studied. For example the activity below uses speech bubbles to explore some of the issues concerning the use of child labour in Victorian times. Some may object that these speech bubbles are 'fictional' primary sources of evidence and as such are not valid history. However, the aim is to enable learners to understand the issues and begin to appreciate the viewpoint and possible bias of individuals and distinguish between fact and opinion. In this way children are supported in moving towards using real primary sources which are usually more linguistically complex.

This kind of activity can lead to pupils role-playing supporters or those opposed to reform. This will allow them to begin to learn to use the language of more formal argument. Other drama activities such as 'hot seating' will also enhance pupils' experience of using this kind of language. A writing task such as writing an argument text in the form of a letter, suitably scaffolded by a controlled writing activity or writing frame could be a further extension to this activity.

Activity 5 Use of Key Visuals.

This activity, as with previously illustrated activities, uses an organising structure to enable children to make sense of the speech bubbles on the cards. These organising structures are often referred to as Key Visuals (Mohan 1986). Key Visuals are graphics such as charts, tables, time lines, Venn diagrams, maps, action sequences, tree diagrams and so on. As such they are information packages which show not only information but also the structure of the information they contain. A time line for example, shows the chronological arrangement of information while a

tree diagram shows information structured according to classification criteria. A chronological or a classification text essentially looks the same as words on a page and but is differentiated by its use of language and text structure, in contrast to key visuals which to a great extent can be differentiated by how they look on a page. Activities which oblige learners to complete a Key Visual are useful in enabling them to explore and verbalise their own understanding of the information and also to relate the language of texts to the Key Visual. The use of Key Visuals in this way can therefore be very useful in enabling learners of EAL to get an overview of the information and to begin to comprehend not only the language of the information but also to acquire the generic language characteristic of different genres.

Using Mohan’s Knowledge Framework to Support Planning

In order to aid planning for bilingual learners in history and make useful connections between language, texts, Key Visuals and thinking skills, the Knowledge Framework (Mohan 1986) can prove very useful. The Knowledge Framework is a tool for identifying the types of thinking involved in enabling pupils to engage with subject content and to carry out various learning tasks. It therefore enables a teacher to identify the thinking and by association the language demands and opportunities inherent in the content and tasks. It is divided into six linked areas in which the lower rows indicates the types of thinking involved in more contextualised or concrete subject content. The upper rows suggest the types of thinking involved in more abstract / conceptual subject knowledge.

Classification	Principles	Evaluation
Classifying, Defining, generalising	Explaining, predicting, inferring, identifying cause and effect, identifying causes and consequences	Evaluating, ranking, judging, justifying opinions, using evaluation criteria
Observing, Describing, Comparing, Labelling, Measuring	Sequencing, ordering chronologically, following instructions, identifying a process	Making decisions, selecting, expressing preferences, choosing between alternatives.
Description	Sequence	Choice

(Adapted from Mohan 1986)

For example, identifying the extent of Viking settlement in England may involve describing and comparing place names. The language for expressing description and comparison may involve:

*Scunthorpe ends in -thorpe.
Trevanrian and Trelow both begin with Tre-.
Skegness ends in -ness, but Boston ends in -ton.*

Furthermore, the task may also involve classifying place names to determine whether they were of Viking, Anglo-Saxon or Ancient British origin. The language for expressing Pupils may express classification and its justification by statements such as:

*Whitby must be a Viking settlement because it ends in -by.
Nottingham can't be a Viking settlement because it ends with -ingham.*

Another aspect of the task may ask pupils to generalise about a region. The language for expressing generalisation may involve:

*Most of the settlements have Viking names.
There are only a few Anglo-Saxon settlements in the east of the region.*

Of course this task can usefully be supported by the use of key visuals and asking pupils to complete branching diagrams, and colour coded / annotated maps. In this way, the Knowledge Framework helps to:

- locate topic content and tasks in a specific section of the Framework.
- identify the thinking needed to carry out the task.
- identify the language needed to understand and express the thinking.
- identify the form of key visuals which can encode the content.

The Knowledge Framework can also be used in medium term planning to ensure that learning tasks in a unit of study include a variety of higher order thinking skills as well as the kinds of more concrete thinking detailed in the lower half of the Framework. The example below shows how a history topic can be mapped onto the Knowledge Framework in order to identify possible activities and writing tasks which support the learning of content and concepts and the language related to the content and the thinking.

Classification	Principles	Evaluation
Exploring evidence on the social structure of Tudor England. A sorting activity to understand the classification of different groups in the social structure of society in Tudor Times. <i>Report text on 'Rich and Poor in Tudor England'.</i>	Exploring evidence about the reasons for Philip VI of Spain wanting to invade England. A sorting activity to identify the personal, financial, political reasons for wanting to invade England. <i>Explanation text on 'Why did Philip Send the Armada'.</i>	Exploring evidence as to whether Henry VIII was a good king. A sorting activity to identify positive and negative aspects of Henry VIII's reign. <i>Discussion text on 'Was Henry VIII a Good King'.</i>
Exploring information about what clothes men and women wore in Tudor Times. An activity to match different articles of clothing to name of article and to people according to gender, wealth and social class. <i>Report text on 'Clothes in Tudor Times'.</i>	Exploring information about the events which led to the failure of Armada. A sequencing activity to place key events on a timeline. <i>Recount text on 'What happened to the Spanish Armada'.</i>	Exploring information about the kinds of food that would be served at a Tudor banquet. A selecting activity to choose food items for a banquet from a menu with prices subject to a specified budget. <i>Report text on 'Preparing a Banquet Fit for a King or Queen'.</i>
Description	Sequence	Choice

Diversity and the History Curriculum.

Given the diversity of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds in contemporary British society and the often unacknowledged long history of such diversity, and Britain's global interactions resulting from its imperialist policies, it is difficult to define what constitutes a notion of 'our history', if indeed that is the principle that underpins National Curriculum history. The various debates about the nature and content of the history curriculum are too complex to detail in this guidance. Suffice to say that criticism has often focused on perceptions of curriculum content as being implicitly Anglo- or Euro-centric and populated largely by white males. A history curriculum is perhaps inevitably a partial view of the past because it is selective about the topics it includes or does not include and therefore reflects the preferences and prejudices of those who create it. However, this does not mean that it should not and cannot embrace different perspectives that contribute to the interpretation of the past.

What is important however, is that pupils and families regard what is taught as relevant, engaging, inclusive and worthwhile. To a great extent it is necessary to work within the parameters of the National Curriculum, but at the same time within the Key Stage 1 and 2 schemes of work there are many opportunities to interpret and adapt the existing units so that they encompass broader perspectives. This should involve the use of materials and activities which:

- explore events from non- British or European perspectives.
- question perceptions of situations and events, differentiating fact from opinion and identifying bias.
- acknowledge the contributions of different peoples and societies in different times to science, technology and culture.
- highlight the stories of and achievements of significant non-white individuals and groups

This shouldn't result in the mere inclusion of a few Black or Asian individuals or an annual topic in October during Black History Month but a wide ranging effort to enhance the curriculum. Support for developing and resourcing an enhanced curriculum can be found in materials such as GARP (Integrating Global and Anti-Racist Perspectives within the primary curriculum) (2005).

Conclusion

The learning of historical information and concepts and the acquisition of the language needed to explore the meaning and express understanding of them is not always easy for children. However, an approach to the subject which emphasises the use of visual support, activities which promote small group interaction and discussion, the movement from the specific to the general and the exploitation of Key Visuals can go a long way to making the subject accessible, enjoyable and a source of valuable language learning for users of EAL.

References

Mohan, B. (1986) *Language and Content*, Reading, Massachusetts, Addison Wesley.
 Resources
Global and Anti-Racist Perspectives within the primary curriculum (GARP) (2005)
www.garp.org.uk