

## Contrastive Grammar by Susan Gross

Most TPR Storytelling teachers have seen how effective questioning is when teaching the present tense, the past tenses, object pronouns, all of the conjugated verb forms, and so forth. But when it comes to the structures that are most commonly taught in levels 3 and 4, there is still confusion about how to apply questioning for maximum gains.

When I wanted to begin “teaching” a grammatical feature, I began by telling a familiar story. I infused that story with the structure in question and then circled (asked yes/no and either/or questions) every statement that contained the structure I was working on.

For example, when I started to work on subjunctive, I hauled out the pictures from the chapter one story of level one. Since my chapter one story is not familiar to all readers, I will use a familiar children’s tale (Snow White) in this article.

I speak all in French, of course. I will write in *franglais* (French mixed with English) to facilitate comprehension for non-francophiles.

Class begins with “*veut qu’elle soit*” written on the board. The meaning is also written in English: “wants her to be”

I begin telling the story in French, and whenever possible I insert “*veut qu’elle soit.*” For example, when the mirror tells the queen that Snow White is the prettiest in the land, I begin to ask questions: Does the queen “*veut que Snow White soit*” (want Snow White to be) the prettiest in the land? No, the queen “*ne veut pas qu’elle soit*” (doesn’t want Snow White to be) the prettiest in the land. Does the queen “*veut être*” (want to be) the prettiest in the land? Yes, the queen “*veut être*” (want to be) the prettiest in the land. The queen “*ne veut pas que Snow White soit*” (doesn’t want Snow White to be) the prettiest in the land.

So later when the servant takes her to the forest to kill her, I ask: Why does the servant have to kill Snow White? Does he have to kill her “*pour que la reine soit*” (so that the queen will be) --\* WRITE THIS ON THE BOARD-- the prettiest in the land or does he have to kill Snow White “*pour que la reine soit*” sick? Right, he has to kill Snow White “*pour que la reine soit*” (so that the queen will be) the prettiest in the land. The queen “*veut être*” (wants to be) --\* WRITE THIS ON THE BOARD-- the prettiest in the land. The queen “*ne veut pas que Snow White soit*” (doesn’t want Snow White to be) the prettiest in the land.

Class, who “*est*” (is) --\* WRITE THIS ON THE BOARD-- the prettiest in the land? Yes, Snow White “*est*” (is) the prettiest in the land. The mirror says that Snow White “*est*” (is) the prettiest in the land. The queen is furious. The queen “*ne veut pas que Snow White soit*” (doesn’t want Snow White to be) the prettiest in the land. But Snow White “*est*” (is) the prettiest in the land.

For this reason, the queen “veut” (wants) “qu’il la tue” him to kill her. --\* WRITE THIS ON THE BOARD-- Does the servant “veut la tuer”? (want to kill her) No, the servant “ne veut pas la tuer” (doesn’t want to kill her) but the queen “veut qu’il la tue” (wants him to kill her).

Class, does the servant “la tue”? (kill her) --\* WRITE THIS ON THE BOARD-- No! The servant “ne la tue pas” (doesn’t kill her) The queen “veut qu’il la tue” (wants him to kill her) but the servant “ne veut pas la tuer.” (doesn’t want to kill her) So the servant “ne la tue pas” (doesn’t kill her)

So now on the board you have the following contrastive grammar items:

veut qu’elle soit	wants her to be
pour qu’elle soit	so that she’ll be
veut être	wants to be
est	is
veut qu’il la tue	wants him to kill her
veut la tuer	want to kill her
la tue	kills her

In other words, you are contrasting the new grammatical feature (subjunctive) with the already-mastered grammar use of infinitive and use of present indicative. The difference in MEANING is what triggers the difference grammar. By teaching grammar in this way (that is, by contrasting the MEANING of structures) true comprehension is promoted. It is crystal clear to the students because each form means something different.

A final comment about subjunctive in French and Spanish: Students should hear subjunctive from the beginning. First and second-year students should NOT be sheltered from hearing the subjunctive. It should not be TAUGHT or emphasized or circled, but it should be used and quickly translated so that the forms do not sound wrong. If students hear these forms and they already sound right for two years of language class, then when you must actually teach the forms in level three, you will find that students are ready.

I introduced the subjunctive by using two or three familiar stories and volition (“veut” or “pour que”) as the trigger. In this way I got through the common irregulars and whatever regulars came up. Then we moved back to true TPR Storytelling where we made up stories as a class and I made sure to slip volition subjunctive into every story. When the students were retelling with ease, I then moved to another subjunctive trigger. I added subjunctive triggers (it is important that, doubt that, it is necessary that, etc) one at a time. By the end of the year I found that students had a *feeling* for subjunctive. They did not need to memorize a list of triggers because the *subjunctive feeling* was their most reliable guide for accuracy.