Introduction

Why this book?

There is no learning without remembering. And language learning – perhaps more than most other forms of learning – places huge demands on memory. As language teachers, whatever our teaching context, or the age, goals or learning style of our learners, or the materials we use or the methods we favour, in the end our aim is to optimize our learners' memory for language – to help them remember the sounds, words, chunks, structures and textual conventions of the target language. Whether we do this through an explicit focus on form, through rich and varied exposure, through plentiful opportunities to use the language in meaningful ways, or through a combination of all three, the cognitive processes of memory are central to everything we do.

We may be the most dedicated professionals, working in well-equipped classrooms, setting up enjoyable activities for highly motivated learners, but without also engaging the memory skills of the people we work with – their abilities to recognize, to notice, to process, to store, to retrieve and to reactivate language – very little can be achieved.

So if we want language to be remembered, and if we want our learners to become more proficient in remembering – both in class and independently – we need a bank of activities that can facilitate these processes. It is with this purpose in mind that this book has been written.

The role of memory in language learning

Memory underpins every aspect of successful language learning. It is the glue that binds us to the world of language around us and within us. As consumers and producers of language, we depend on our memories both to interpret spoken and written texts, and to speak and write effectively. Without memory, we also have no means of developing in these skills.

Most linguists would endorse this: Skehan (1998), for instance, maintains that having a good memory is a key component of language aptitude (the other components being auditory ability and pattern recognition). In many parts of the world, there has always been a strong focus on memory in

educational settings, and the memorization of word lists, dialogues and even entire texts has remained a very popular tool for the language classroom. But memorizing as a language-learning activity has not always been viewed favourably by language-teaching methodologists and materials writers. This scepticism can be at least partially traced to Noam Chomsky's (1959) critique of behaviourism, and his emphasis on the creative nature of language. If, as he claimed, much of what we write and say is totally unique in form, what purpose might there be in memorizing the borrowed words of others?

Thus, from the 1960s onwards, in North America and Western Europe in particular, the discrediting of behaviourist theory as an effective language-teaching methodology led to the widely shared view that memorization was a dry and meaningless activity, in conflict with a learner's natural ability to create unique and original utterances. And since then the debate has raged. Is language production an entirely creative process, or do we also depend on a bank of pre-fabricated language items stored in our mental lexicons?

Dwight Bolinger, among others, has argued that the role of memory in retrieving stored language items from long-term memory is as important – if not more so – than being able to piece these items together to make coherent utterances: 'Speakers do as much remembering as they do putting together' (Bolinger, 1961). Or as another linguist has put it: 'Language is … to be viewed as a kind of pastiche, pasted together in an improvised way out of ready-made elements' (Hopper, 1998).

More recently, the work of Michael Lewis and Dave Willis in particular (who were in turn influenced by the findings of corpus linguistics) has been representative of the increased interest in the viewpoint that language is 'grammaticised lexis' (Lewis, 1993). According to this view, fluency in a language is the result of having a stored bank (or 'phrasicon') of memorized chunks. This allows the speaker to assemble utterances in real time, without the need to generate each utterance from scratch, using an internalized grammar. Perhaps, as Lewis (1997) observes, 'we are much less original in using language than we like to believe'.

Wray (2008) has coined the term Morpheme Equivalent Unit (MEU) to refer to a word string or chunk of language that is processed like a morpheme, i.e. without the need to process the meaning of its component parts. So an expression like *at the end of the day* can be both stored and reproduced without any explicit focus on the individual words that it contains.

Other scholars, including Nick Ellis, have argued that these formulaic chunks may contain the 'seeds' of subsequent grammatical knowledge. In other words, these chunks 'release' their grammar over time. In practical

terms, this means, for instance, that a learner can develop an understanding of how the present perfect is used by first noticing, and subsequently memorizing, some chunks of language in which it occurs. This is contrary to the widely held belief that a structure must first be learnt before it can be used to generate utterances by slotting in appropriate vocabulary items.

If it is not only individual words and grammar that need to be remembered, but also the vast number of chunks that are required for fluent communication, then the demands on our memories are far greater than was previously thought. If all of these items are to be stored successfully, then a focus on both making language as memorable as possible and using explicit memorization activities would seem to make sense.

Memory and texts

Memory also plays three key roles in the interpretation of spoken and written texts. First, there is the need to be able to retrieve the meanings of the individual words and chunks that make up the text. Some researchers, such as Paul Nation, have estimated that we need to understand at least 95% of the words in a text in order to be able to predict accurately the meaning of the remaining 5%. Except when processing the most simple texts, this 95% 'tipping point' represents a large passive vocabulary – of at least 3,000 items, by some calculations, and possibly a lot more. In some skills-based approaches to reading and listening – which have instead emphasized the top-down skills of predicting, guessing from context, and skimming and scanning, for example – the need to have a critical mass of word knowledge to enable understanding has been somewhat undervalued.

Secondly, there is the role of working memory in processing each new element that we read or listen to, and in linking these to the elements that have already been interpreted. Research has shown that fast, proficient readers tend to have high working-memory spans, and because of this they are able to focus simultaneously on a higher number of complex and sometimes unrelated ideas. Thirdly, without long-term memory – in the form of mental representations of how texts are organized, as well as our knowledge of the world – we would not be able to bring our experience to bear in making sense of texts at all.

Similarly, when we speak or write, memory allows us to retrieve words, chunks and grammatical forms from our mental lexicons for active use as they are required. The more effectively we do this, the more able we are to produce language that communicates our intended messages smoothly and

concisely, and the more effectively we can organize texts in ways that make them intelligible to others. In writing this paragraph, I am aware that I am going through a process of scanning my own mental lexicon for appropriate language items to use, evaluating each option in working memory as it is retrieved, and discarding words that fail to express my intended meaning.

A good memory also enables us to produce text that is cohesive. Through my ability to retain the content of previously mentioned ideas in my working memory, I am able to provide links back to them with discourse markers and back referencing (such as the use of *also* near the beginning of the last sentence). And because I can also hold on to the form of what I have said, I am able to avoid the overuse of particular words.

Lastly, memory contributes to the overall coherence of a text by enabling its author to keep the purpose and the audience of the communication constantly in mind. I hope that mine is not letting me down too much here!

How does a memory for language work?

With memory being such a key skill in language learning (some have suggested that it is the fifth skill, alongside listening, speaking, reading and writing), it is surprising that comparatively little has been written about how the processes involved in remembering items in a second language may work. One explanation for this is that, as with much research into the brain's functions, little can be deduced with absolute certainty.

Below is a list of commonly used terms relating to memory that may be involved in the remembering of language. Though most writers about memory mention these terms, not everyone agrees on exactly how these different elements interact in the storage of new language.

- *Working memory*: Our senses are the first port of call for everything that we pay attention to around us. Working memory allows us to hold on to this data for a brief period of time so that we are able to manipulate it and process it consciously. So is this merely a more modern term for what was traditionally known as short-term memory? Not exactly. The concept of working memory, unlike that of short-term memory, implies a *state* in which things happen, rather than being merely a *place* through which language passes. It is limited not only by time, but also by capacity: only a small amount of data (five to nine pieces of information) can be maintained and processed in working memory at any given time. For more on the components that make up working memory, see the introduction to Chapter 1.

- *Long-term memory*: The storage of information in long-term memory – unlike in working memory – is a largely subconscious process and is apparently not constrained by either time or capacity. Material can be stored in long-term memory for anything between a few days and a lifetime, depending on the richness of links that were made with existing material in the initial encoding, and on the regularity of opportunities to retrieve and reactivate it. For more on what factors may help with the storage of information in long-term memory, see the introduction to Chapter 2.

- *Declarative memory*: Everything in long-term memory that we are able to access consciously can be referred to as *declarative memory*. This, in turn, may be broken down into *semantic memory* – knowledge about the meaning of a word, facts and figures about the world, etc. – and *episodic memory* – personal memories that relate to past events in our lives. Language classes all over the world focus extensively on remembering information about the language being learnt, and this data may be stored as declarative memories. For instance, learners may be taught and may remember that the past tense of *go* is *went*, that prepositions are followed by *-ing* forms of verbs, or that the English for the Arabic لا شكر على واجب is 'don't mention it'. Of course, being able to retrieve this information when asked does not necessarily mean that the learners will be able to use these same areas of language when required to in spontaneous communication.

- *Procedural memory*: Long-term memory also includes some memories that may be difficult, or even impossible, to consciously access. Their existence is nevertheless evident in our ability to perform certain tasks, such as tying our shoelaces, swimming or driving. No attention is generally necessary in order to access our memory of how to do these things, and if we consciously try to retrieve exactly what is happening, we may even struggle to do so. I recently tried to explain to my 14-year-old son how to make bread using the bread machine in our house, something that I do nearly every day of my life, but I found I was able to recall exact quantities only by actually putting the ingredients into the machine myself, and forcing myself to focus on what I was doing. In language-learning terms, there are links here with the concept of *automaticity* and *flow*. The more fluent we are as speakers, the more able we are to produce language with limited or no effort on the part of working memory at all. That is, we can express ourselves effectively without paying much conscious attention to what we are saying.

A model of memory

There are essentially three processes involved in remembering language: *encoding*, *storage* and *retrieval*. *Encoding* is how we make sense of data that we hear or read by linking it to existing knowledge; *storage* is putting this data into long-term memory; and *retrieval* refers to the way in which data is brought back from memory in order to be used.

Of the vast amount of spoken and written language that we are exposed to through our senses, we pay attention to only a small proportion, and a part of this enters our working memories. Only a very limited amount of what has entered working memory will in turn get stored in long-term memory and eventually be available for meaningful output in speech or writing.

So how may this relate to what happens in the language classroom? As teachers we provide plenty of input to the learners, in the form of reading and listening material, explanations about language, and writing on the board; we maximize the potential for processing this exposure in working memory by setting up activities like drills, gap-fills and other practice activities; and when the learner speaks or writes in freer activities, the teacher can see how much language has actually been retained in long-term memory and can provide further input to address any gaps.

But there is more to remembering language than pouring water from a jug into a series of empty and leaky vessels, and hoping that some of it will stay there! Knowledge is not just a commodity that is passed from one place to another without any form of interaction with the existing contents. Learners also bring a vast amount of prior knowledge and experience to the proceedings and use this in creative ways in the storage of new language.

Most memory researchers now acknowledge that what is already stored in long-term memory actually plays a huge part in the acquisition of new data, and that there is a two-way process of interaction between working memory and long-term memory that is essential both in storage and in working-memory processing. This can be seen in the following diagram adapted from Earl Stevick, *Memory, Meaning and Method*, Second edition (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1996).
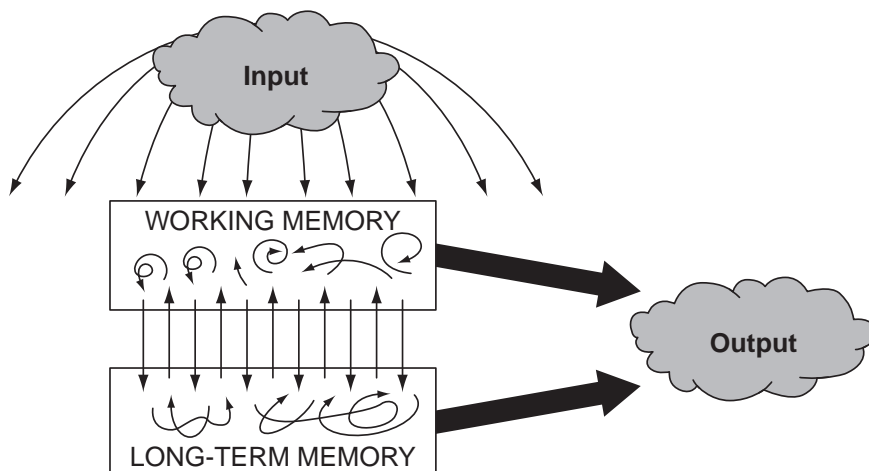
When new language data enters working memory, it immediately activates areas of existing knowledge in long-term memory and searches for links between them. Bryant (1990) has suggested that items in long-term memory are stored in 'dynamic networks' in which activation of one area leads to subconscious and rapid connections throughout the whole of long-term memory, which in turn can relay back new information to be processed in working memory. There may also be significant interaction between working memory and long-term memory in language production. When we speak fluently, we may be drawing directly from long-term memory, but when talking in a second language, there will often also be substantial working-memory involvement as we consciously plan, evaluate alternatives and restructure what is to be said.

Storing language in long-term memory, then, involves some complex and multifaceted interaction between working memory and long-term memory. It depends upon an ability to link new information with existing knowledge and to reflect upon these links. As already discussed, many linguists are now less inclined to regard the production of language as an entirely creative activity, recognizing that we rely to a greater extent than formerly believed on the retrieval and recycling of previously stored chunks and formulaic language. But learning a language, like teaching a language, is unquestionably still a creative process. Perhaps the element of creativity, however, lies as much in the process by which we store new language in long-term memory as in that of activating language from it.

What makes material memorable?

This link between creativity and memory can also play its part in the choice of materials that teachers and materials designers present to learners. In my twenty years as a language teacher, I have used a wide range of different teaching materials in many diverse contexts. One coursebook activity that sticks out in my mind as being particularly memorable is the reading maze in *Language in Use: Intermediate, Student's Book 1* by A. Doff and C. Jones (Cambridge University Press, 1994), which includes the short text below.

A year ago, you were driving your cab when you saw a couple fighting in the street. The woman shouted 'He's going to kill me!' and jumped into your cab. She turned out to be a Hollywood movie star – she gave you a large tip and asked for your address. Last month she died, leaving you £500,000 in her will, 'To the taxi driver who saved my life'. Add that to your savings, plus £10,000 from driving your taxi.

A friend back home is starting a business designing children's toys and has invited you to join her – it might be a good way to invest all that money. Or you could celebrate by going on a trip around the world …

| Go into the toy business | ➤ | **3** | (p. 23) |
| Go round the world | ➤ | **17** | (p. 115) |

In this activity, learners read a series of scenarios like this, and after each one, they have to make a decision, in pairs, about how to proceed. When they have agreed, they then go on to read the next text that they have chosen. Their objective is to make as much money as possible. It is an activity that my learners have enjoyed immensely and that I have always got a lot out of too; it has invariably promoted some motivated reading and processing of the text, as well as a lot of animated discussion.

If an activity like this is memorable for those who engage with it, then the time spent processing it may be increased and enriched, and consequently the potential for learning from it also improves. For educational psychologists Chip Heath and Dan Heath (2008), this 'memorability factor' is the key issue to address in deciding on the format in which to present material to be learnt. They have spent a great deal of their professional lives researching this area and have identified six criteria to facilitate the process

of making material memorable. These are *simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotions* and *stories*, the first letter of which form the easily remembered acronym SUCCES. These criteria may be outlined as follows:

- *Simplicity*: It is difficult to remember anything that is too complex to understand or that is cloaked in too much unnecessary waffle. In the reading maze, the text is written at a level that is accessible for an intermediate-level learner, while not being so simple that there is no challenge in terms of new vocabulary. The reader is given just enough information to enable them to understand what the situation is, and to be able to make an informed decision, based on what has been read.
- *Unexpectedness*: People are more likely to pay attention to something, and consequently remember it, if it goes against what is expected. Reading a text about yourself, in which you are the one who is making the decisions, is quite a novel way of doing things and will be a new experience for most people. The maze also arouses curiosity about what will happen next, which is a great way of maintaining interest and motivating the reader to carry on.
- *Concreteness*: Visualization is central to the storage of new information in long-term memory, but it is far more difficult to visualize abstract material than that which is clear and concrete. The maze describes events that have happened, that are happening and that are going to a happen, in a way that faciliates the creation of such images by the reader.
- *Credibility*: We quickly lose interest in ideas that are outlandish and unbelievable. In the reading maze, a number of exciting and dramatic events unfold, but still the maze is rooted in the day-to-day struggles of human existence. The challenge to make the right decisions in life in order to be successful is something that most people can identify with very strongly.
- *Emotions*: There is a powerful link between emotion and memory. Advertisers around the world have made extensive use of this fact by creating adverts that deliberately amuse, arouse or even annoy us. The reading maze is something of an emotional rollercoaster, involving dramatic themes such as reward, bankruptcy, fame and kidnapping. The fact that these events are happening to the reader, rather than to a third party, makes the degree of emotional involvement even more powerful.

- *Stories*: We remember the information contained in a story far more easily than if it were presented as a list of facts. Just think how many stories, in some format or other, we tell and listen to during the course of a day. The stories we hear often serve as a sort of mental rehearsal for our own lives, so it is as if we are programmed to hold on to things that come to us in this way. A very strong narrative element runs through the entire maze, and this helps us to immerse ourselves in the events and retain information almost without effort.

As language teachers, these are important issues to consider when deciding on the kinds of material we present to our learners, and on the types of activities to adopt. But memory is also a factor to consider when reflecting on our everyday classroom routines.

Incorporating memory activities into classroom routines

Building a focus on memory into the regular routines of the classroom is another way of increasing memorability. Not only can it help learners appreciate exactly what they are learning and provide a strong sense of achievement, but it may also raise awareness about what has not been remembered and may therefore require further work. Here are some ways of incorporating memory activities into a range of situations that commonly occur in the language classroom.

Presenting language

The board, be it black, white or interactive, is still the most widely used resource available to teachers. It is a fantastic way of drawing learners' attention to an area of language and helping everyone to focus simultaneously on forms and meanings. When teachers use it to present language, often the learners immediately copy down what is written into their notebooks. However, if we want learners to focus, and consequently to build stronger memory traces, discouraging copying during presentations (which can be distracting) and instead allowing time for the learners to copy afterwards may be more beneficial. In this way, and provided the presentation itself is made memorable by, for example, the use of graphics, images, humour and drama, there is a greater chance that the learners will remember the useful information about the language that the teacher is sharing.

Traditionally, language-presentation stages may include a focus on meaning, spelling, pronunciation, context and collocations. A focus on

mnemonics – a kind of 'trick' to help make the language more memorable – is also something worth including, where appropriate. This could involve linking a new word to other words that sound similar, using an acronym to help remember the various parts of a sentence, or building the language into a chant. See Chapter 5 for more details and further ideas.

Language on the board

By the end of a class, a teacher's board may be filled with the language that has been focused on during the course of the lesson. It could contain individual words (sometimes showing phonemic transcripts or stress patterns), chunks and expressions, or example sentences to illustrate a particular area of grammar. Some teachers' board work is highly planned and organized, while others use the board as a sort of notepad, writing up language items randomly as they come up in class. Either way, this is a very useful resource that can be exploited when incorporating memory activities.

If working with an interactive whiteboard, there is, of course, the option of saving the entire screen so that the language can easily be returned to in another class, or used to plan retrieval exercises. Some teachers without interactive whiteboards take a photo of the board at the end of each lesson with the same purpose in mind.

It is also worth spending a few minutes at the end of class just trying to get learners to retrieve the language that is on the board. One way of doing this is for learners to position themselves in pairs or small groups so that only one person can see it. The people who cannot see have to try and recall, aloud, what is written there. The person who can see the board tells them if they are right and supplies prompts, in the form of definitions, descriptions or mimes, where necessary.

Prompts can also be used by the teacher as a way to retrieve the board work. The teacher rubs out everything but the first letter of each word. Learners then work in pairs and try to recall everything that was written there, using the first letters as a memory trigger.

Another way of doing this is with the whole class working together. Everyone has a chance to try to remember what is written on the board before it is cleaned completely. As a group they then have to rewrite everything that was there, as accurately and as quickly as possible. Several people can write, or one person can be appointed as the scribe while the others call things out. If the teacher can remember anything that the class did not, the teacher wins – otherwise the class wins.

Gap-fill exercises

The gap-fill exercises typically found in coursebooks, where learners need to write in a missing word, are a good way to check the class's ability to use a particular area of language. When working with large, mixed-ability classes, however, the time needed to complete such an exercise will often vary immensely between different learners. What can the teacher do in this situation? If you stop the activity when the quicker learners have finished, the others will be deprived of the learning opportunity that the activity provides. On the other hand, if you wait until everyone has completed the exercise, how do you stop the fast finishers getting bored? One solution is to provide an extra memory challenge for those who have finished. Learners can be asked to try to remember as many of the sentences as possible before testing each other in pairs. Alternatively, one learner can read out the sentence, saying 'buzz' where the gaps are, and the other learner has to supply the missing word.

Reading and listening material

When I first trained to be a teacher, one of the things that was impressed on me during the course was the importance of incorporating pair work as soon as possible after the learners had engaged with a reading and listening text, and definitely before learners could be expected to provide feedback on what they had understood to the rest of the class. This advice is something that has stood the test of time for me and is still generally part of the way I teach today. Not only does it allow learners to build confidence before having to speak in front of a large group, but it also provides the opportunity for immediate activation of some of the language contained in the text, before it is lost from working memory. If we want learners to retain the items of language in a reading and listening text, then encouraging them to process it as much as possible, ideally through speech, can help to achieve this. One of the most effective tasks to accompany any kind of text is simply to ask learners to discuss in pairs everything they can remember about it.

This reactivation of language also applies to the extensive reading and listening that learners may do outside the class, of course. Allocating learners some class time for discussing the material they are accessing in their own time can help to facilitate this.

Speaking and writing activities

Many teachers now adopt a process approach to developing writing skills where learners are encouraged to plan, draft, edit and redraft their work.

Not only does this invariably lead to a more polished finished product, it also leads to more processing of the language the learners are using in their texts, and consequently to more remembering.

Building in an extra stage to a speaking activity where learners recall and reflect on what was said is another way of encouraging deeper processing of language and raising self-awareness about the learners' strengths and weaknesses. At the end of a mingling activity, for instance where learners walk around class interviewing different people, it may be useful to ask everyone to talk to the person next to them about who they spoke to and what was said. When learners are engaged in a speaking activity in small groups, it is often useful to incorporate a stage at the end where a spokesperson from each group reports back to the whole class on what they have been discussing. Not only does this let other groups know what they have been doing and promote some recycling of the language they have used, but it can also encourage a greater focus on accuracy and improve performance levels.

Another way of doing this is to appoint a 'listener' in each group. This person's task is to listen to the conversation without taking an active role. At various points in the discussion, the listener intervenes and summarizes, by giving feedback on who has said what, based on what he or she can remember. If there is a difference in level between the person who is listening and those who are speaking, then some very useful recasting of utterances can occur with this activity. See Chapter 4 for more activities like these which work with the recycling and reactivation of texts.

How to find your way around this book

If you are looking for an activity involving memory to use with a class, then dipping into the first three chapters of this book is a good place to start. The activities here focus on the three basic memory processes of encoding, storage and retrieval. Chapter 1, *Mental stretching*, looks at the role of working memory in language processing and explores some ways of challenging learners to push their personal boundaries regarding how much language their own working memories can deal with. Chapter 2, *Making language memorable*, is about language storage and offers some ideas on how language can best be presented to learners so that it is linked with previous knowledge and becomes more memorable. Chapter 3, *Retrieving*, looks at some motivating and dynamic ways of getting learners to go back to what has been focused on in previous lessons.

In Chapter 4, *Repeating and reactivating*, we take a more long-term view of these processes and emphasize the importance of revisiting material. The activities in this chapter explore some ways of structuring exposure- and output-based classes so that the memory potential is maximized.

Sometimes teachers need to be proactive in encouraging active memorization of material, and the activities in the next two chapters help teachers to focus on this area. Chapter 5, *Memory techniques and mnemonics*, demonstrates a range of 'tricks' which have been used in many different fields for remembering things exactly and illustrates some ways of adapting them to language teaching. Chapter 6, *Learning by heart*, highlights some effective techniques and strategies for committing entire texts to memory.

Finally, Chapter 7, *Memory games*, examines some ways in which different memory processes may be activated using a game format.

Many of the activities in this book require very little in the way of materials or preparation. However, the support materials presented in the book are also available as PDF files on the CD-ROM accompanying this book. These can be projected in the classroom, or printed out and handed to your learners. For teachers who are interested in exploring further any of the ideas presented in *Memory Activities for Language Learning*, at the end of the book I have included short lists of reference works and websites that I have found especially helpful.

As already noted, there is a strong link between emotion and memorability, and many of the activities in this book are deliberately structured to engage the emotions of the language learners who will use them. For some learners, however, in certain situations, such activities may be inappropriate. It is important therefore that teachers are mindful of cultural sensitivities and exercise due discretion when choosing activities to use in class.

1   **Mental stretching**

As we have seen in the Introduction, many psychologists would now tend to focus less on the view of short-term memory as a *place* which language passes through on its way to long-term memory, or even as the *process* by which this happens, but instead as the *state* in which our brains may be temporarily, but actively and consciously, engaged with auditory, visual or spatial data. To emphasize the active role that it plays, the term *working memory* is now often preferred.

Much of what is currently believed about working memory originates with the multi-component model developed and made popular by the psychologist Alan Baddeley. It consists of a *central executive*, controlling three systems – the *phonological loop*, the *visual-spatial sketchpad* and the *episodic buffer* – which are called into play depending on the type of data being processed.

The phonological loop

If a person who is talking suddenly stops and asks us to repeat what they have been saying, the chances are that, even if we have not been paying close attention, we will be able to repeat the last few words of their utterance. This is known as *echoic memory*, and we use it by playing back to ourselves in our minds the words that we have just heard. Since echoic memory lasts for only a few seconds and has a very limited capacity, the amount of language processing that can happen is negligible. This may be the kind of memory that is employed by language learners when a short utterance of up to around six known words is drilled in class by the teacher. Of course, if some or all of the words in the utterance are unfamiliar to the learners, then the power of echoic memory is even more limited and the chances of accurate repetition are decreased.

This type of memory can be extended, however, by what is known as the *phonological loop*. Unlike echoic memory which is a largely subconscious activity, this system is more conscious and acts as a sort of inner internal conversation, where utterances are constantly repeated to oneself to avoid decay. We can observe this process happening when we say a phone number to ourselves over and over again until we manage to find a pen to write it

down! The phonological loop allows for more language processing than echoic memory, and consequently we may be able to notice aspects of form and meaning, and create links with what is already retained in long-term memory.

Interestingly, the phonological loop is also employed as a mechanism to deal with written material. When we read a text, or indeed write one, recoding the visual input as auditory data and replaying it within the phonological loop allow us to understand the links between different ideas in what we are reading and, when we write, to produce text that is logically connected and coherent.

Many of the activities in this section will challenge learners to engage with this process.

The visual-spatial sketchpad

There is another way in which we can process visual data in working memory. In the same way that echoic memory allows immediate repetition of very short stretches of auditory data, *iconic memory* enables brief retention of visual material. Again, since it lasts for such a short period of time – less than a second in this case – processing of the image in any way is very limited. It is extended, however, through the *visual-spatial sketchpad*, which creates a sort of virtual world in the mind, temporarily generating images and allowing them to be manipulated and reflected on. This is the system we use when we have to think consciously about the route between two different places, or when we produce a drawing. The implications of this system for language learning may be less immediately obvious, but if it is combined with auditory material – when we try to explain the route to another person, for example, or, as in Activity 1.7: *Delayed TPR* (Total Physical Response) below, when we link an action with its name – the linguistic memory traces may be made stronger by its deployment.

The episodic buffer

Another form of multi-sensory processing of data may also occur in the *episodic buffer*. Here visual, auditory and spatial information is combined with information about chronological order into single episodic representations. It may be employed when we recall a scene from a film we have just seen, or the events of a story we have heard, as in Activity 1.12: *Reordered story* and Activity 1.13: *Co-constructed storytelling* at the end

of this chapter. Recent evidence suggests that this kind of multi-sensory processing of information can leave longer-lasting memory traces, and indeed, the episodic buffer is thought to have very strong links with long-term memory.

An important point to remember about all of these systems is that they are severely limited by both time and capacity. External factors can also greatly diminish our working-memory abilities. Just think how difficult it can be to try to remember something or read while someone is asking you a question at the same time. Things are further complicated by the fact that we often overestimate how much of what is temporarily held in working memory will be retained later. There have been numerous occasions during the writing of this book when I have struggled to recall ideas I had had earlier, which, at the time, I was convinced I would remember without writing them down.

The capacity of working memory can be somewhat increased, however, through the process of *chunking*. If we take a telephone number such as 035689256, we can retain it more easily in working memory if we break it down into three units, 035–689–256, than if we attempt to remember each digit individually. This principle can also be applied to words, so a person who recognizes the chunks of language within the last sentence (*telephone number*, *more easily*, *working memory*, *break it down*, etc.) would have fewer difficulties retaining it than someone who did not.

There is also recent evidence to suggest that through training and practice, improvements in working memory can be made. Tracey Alloway's (2010) research would indicate not only that this is the case, but also that high working-memory levels in the young may be a better predicator of future academic success than traditional IQ tests. Thus, the activities in this chapter work with two ideas in mind. First, that encouraging learners to process language through their working memories is a useful step on the way to moving some of that language into long-term memory, and secondly that a well-trained working memory can help learners to develop in fluency, listening, reading, speaking and writing.

1.1 Flash!

Memory focus	Processing an image in working memory and using language to talk about it.
Level	Any
Time	10 minutes plus
Preparation	Find some interesting images that contain a fair amount of detail, such as a street scene (see an example in Box 1.1a) or the interior of a house (see an example in Box 1.1b). Prepare to display them with a projector or make them large enough so that they can be seen by the whole class. With a small class, it may be possible for each person to be given their own picture to work with.

Procedure

1   Organize the class into pairs. Show them the picture and ask the learners to talk to each other about what they can see. Be available to deal with vocabulary queries as they arise, and encourage dictionary use. For lower levels, you may want to remind them of how the structure *there is / there are* works. Now tell them that they need to try to remember as much as they can about the detail of the picture.

2   After about 30 seconds to a minute, ask one person in each pair to turn so that he or she can no longer see the picture.

3   The 'seeing' person in the pair now asks questions to see what their partner can remember. These questions will vary according to the level of the learners. For the picture in Box 1.1a, these could include: *How many people are in the picture? What is the old lady doing?*, etc.

4   Change roles and use another picture.

Box 1.1a: Flash!

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Box 1.1b: Flash!

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Variations

1   Show just one image for 30 seconds. Now dictate a series of true and untrue statements about the picture. If the statement is true, the learners write it down as it is. If it is not true, they need to adapt it to make it true, and then write it down. This idea is based on an activity in *Images* by Jamie Keddie, Oxford University Press, 2009.
2   Show the learners a short video (maximum one minute) from a video-sharing website such as You Tube™ (http://www.youtube.com). Both learners in each pair watch the video. One learner tries to remember as much detail as possible, while the other thinks of questions to ask the other (e.g. *What colour was the man's shirt?*). After they have asked and answered the questions, they watch the video again to check.
3   Instead of using a picture, display a grammar table (like the one for an elementary group in Box 1.1c) for a short time. Make sure no one is writing anything down. Now take the table away and ask them to work in pairs to write down as many correct sentences as they can, just using words from the table. (There are 19 possible questions from the table below.)

Box 1.1c: Flash!

How long	did you	stay	last night?
How much		eat	
When		go	
What		get here	
How		do	
Why		go home	

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4   Display a short text or dialogue for a short period of time. Take it away and then ask the learners to write what they can from memory. Now ask them to work with a partner and to pool what they have written to produce their best version of the text together.

Drilling

Drilling in its basic format involves the teacher saying a word, phrase or sentence in the form to be practised, and the learners repeating it. This can be done chorally, with the whole class together, or individually, by the teacher choosing the person to repeat. If the utterance is longer than around seven or eight words, then working memory, as opposed to echoic memory, will be employed to a certain extent, but simply repeating still does not provide much in the way of cognitive challenge for learners. Here are some variations on drilling which may help to make the process more stimulating and meaningful, and consequently make the language being practised more memorable.

Dramatic drilling
Changing the way in which the learners say the words may help to make the language they are repeating more memorable. For instance, they could say the items very slowly, quickly, quietly or loudly. They could also repeat them in a way that reveals how they feel about the words: if the teacher is drilling a list of food items, for example, they repeat the word in an enthusiastic way if they like the foods, and in an unenthusiastic way if they do not.

Physical drilling
The teacher says the words while performing a physical action to make the meaning clear. The learners repeat both the words and the physical action. This works particularly well with a short story containing lots of action.

Who repeated?
The teacher stands with his or her back to the class and says a sentence in the form to be practised. Someone in the class repeats the sentence. The teacher tries to guess who it was who said it. If this is achieved, the person who spoke now has a turn at being the person at the front and says another sentence using the form.

1.2 Reversed drilling

Memory focus	Encouraging learners to process reformulated versions of their own utterances in working memory.
Level	Any
Time	5–15 minutes
Preparation	None

Procedure

1 When the learners are engaged in a freer speaking activity, listen in unobtrusively and make a note of some of the things that they are saying that could be improved upon.

2 Now write each utterance up on the board in a reformulated version, which makes it more accurate and/or uses more complex or clearer language. This should be done at a level which is not too far above the level of the learners. Give each utterance a number.

3 Bring everyone together and draw the learners' attention to the reformulated utterances on the board. Deal with any issues about meaning.

4 Now ask a learner to pick one of the utterances on the board. This could be either a reformulation of the learner's own utterance or the utterance of another learner. Ask him or her to say the utterance out loud. You now repeat the utterance in as natural a way as possible. The learner can now repeat the utterance as many times as desired. After each repetition, provide the learner with a natural model immediately.

Note

The idea for this activity comes from *Counseling-Learning: A Whole-Person Model for Education* by Charles A. Curran, New York: Grune and Stratton, 1972. Curran is the creator of community language learning (CLL) and coined the phrase 'Human Computer™' to refer to this approach to drilling.

1.3 The broken telephone

Memory focus	Providing practice in retaining long stretches of language in working memory.
Level	Elementary and above
Time	5–20 minutes (depending on the text)
Preparation	Choose a very short story or joke, suitable for the level of the group. Cut the text up into sections of one or two (if short) sentences. See the example in Box 1.3 for an intermediate group.

Procedure

1 Organize the class into groups of five to seven. Each group needs one set of the story sentences. These should be placed face down in order on the table next to the first person.

2 The first person in each group turns over the first piece of paper and whispers what it says to the next person in the group. The second person then whispers it to the next person, and so on. The last person, at the end of the line, writes down the sentence that he or she hears.

3 As soon as the first sentence has moved on from the second person, the first person can start whispering the second sentence to him or her, and so on. This way everyone is kept actively involved throughout the activity. When all of the sentences have passed down the line, the last person will end up with a complete version of the whole text.

4 Now ask each group to go through this version together, checking it for accuracy. Finally, they compare it with the original text and reflect on how any differences that they find occurred.

Box 1.3: The broken telephone

a) The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

✂ -

b) On the other hand, the French eat a lot of fat and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

✂ -

c) The Japanese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or the Americans.

✂ -

d) On the other hand the Italians drink lots of red wine and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

✂ -

e) The conclusion is 'Eat and drink what you like. It's speaking English that kills you!'

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Variation
The first person whispers the sentences to the second person in English. The second person then mentally translates this sentence into the mother tongue and says the sentence in the mother tongue to the next person. The third person then translates back to English, etc. Of course, this version is only possible in a monolingual group.

1.4 Sentence swapping

Memory focus	Challenging learners to process a list of grammatically similar sentences in working memory.
Level	Elementary and above
Time	15 minutes
Preparation	Create or find 10 example sentences which use an area of language that you would like your class to focus on. Make enough copies of these so that there are enough for one per learner. See Box 1.4 for some examples using the 'double *the* + comparative' structure for an intermediate group.

Procedure

1   Give one sentence to each learner in the class. Make sure everyone understands what their sentence says.

2   Ask everyone to stand up so that they can move around freely. Everyone finds a partner and shares their sentences by saying them to each other. They now practise their partner's sentence until they can remember it exactly.

3   When they are both sure that they can do this, they move off and find a new partner. They now repeat the process, but this time using the sentence that they remembered from the previous partner.

4   The learners keep swapping partners and remembering new sentences until you feel that everyone has heard most of the sentences at least once. Of course, they may hear some of the sentences more than once. This doesn't matter – if this happens they still pass the sentence on to the next person they work with in the usual way.

5   Everyone sits down and writes down all of the sentences that they can remember. Now ask them to work in pairs and to correct and add to each other's lists.

6   Show the class the original list of sentences so that they can compare it with what they have written. They now go through the list in pairs, discussing which of the sentences they agree with and why.

Tip: It is important when setting this activity up to make it very clear that learners need to remember their partner's sentence each time they work with a new person. This is best done by demonstrating at the beginning with a few learners in front of the class.

Variations

1   For an extra challenge, ask learners to remember each new sentence that they hear as well all the other ones they have heard. Each time they meet a new person they repeat all of the sentences they can remember.

2   Find a short text of five to eight sentences. Give each learner in the class one of the sentences from the text. The activity works as above, but at the final stage they are trying to construct a complete text rather than a list of sentences.

Box 1.4: Sentence swapping

The more coffee you drink, the more tired you feel.

✂--

The more you talk about your feelings, the better your relationships are.

✂--

The more you learn other languages, the more open-minded you become.

✂--

The more exercise you get, the more energy you seem to have.

✂--

The more possessions you have, the more you want.

✂--

The later you have children, the more difficult it becomes to adapt.

✂--

The more freedom you give children, the more they start to behave badly.

✂--

The more mistakes you make, the more your English improves.

✂--

The more weapons a country has, the more likely it is to be involved in a war.

✂--

The smaller the class size, the more we can learn.

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1.5 Working-memory challenge

Memory focus	Challenging learners to hold multiple new language items in working memory.
Level	Any
Time	5–15 minutes
Preparation	None

Procedure

1   Ask everyone to write down a list of six language items that they have learnt recently, or are struggling to learn or would like to learn. This could be single words, chunks or example sentences for an area of grammar. Allow plenty of time for this and encourage dictionary access, or help out by reformulating and correcting what they have written where necessary.
2   Now ask everyone to work with a partner and to swap lists.
3   Learner A now reads out two items from Learner B's list. Learner B repeats the items back in reverse order (i.e. repeating the second item and then the first). Learner A now repeats this process with three items, etc. What is the maximum number of items that Learner B can remember in reverse order?
4   Ask the learners to swap roles within their pairs and to give each other feedback, both on their ability to do the task and on the usefulness of the activity.

Variations

1   Make a list of sentences using a particular structure which get progressively longer (see the example below in Box 1.5). Learners work in pairs. Learner A looks at the sheet and reads out the sentences in order. Learner B listens and tries to repeat exactly the sentence that Learner A says. How far down the list can they get before it becomes too much to retain in working memory and they start making mistakes?
2   With a small class this activity can also be done as a competition. Divide the class into two groups. The teacher reads out the sentences in order and the members of each group take it in turns to repeat the sentences. Points are awarded according to how accurate the repetition was.

Box 1.5: Working memory challenge

I went to the shops. (5 words)

I bought a packet of rice. (6 words)

I had a shower in the morning. (7 words)

I played the guitar for a few hours. (8 words)

I listened to some music while I had breakfast. (9 words)

I made a cheese and tomato sandwich for my lunch. (10 words)

I watched a great football match on television in the evening. (11 words)

I wanted to swim in the sea but it was too cold. (12 words)

I cooked a really nice meal for everyone who lives in my house. (13 words)

I did some work in the garden and then came inside to have lunch. (14 words)

I tried to do some exercises in my grammar book, but they were very difficult. (15 words)

I went for a drink in a café with my brother and some of his friends. (16 words)

I had a delicious bowl of soup in a restaurant and then read some of my book. (17 words)

I took my little sister to school by car and then drove to my cousin's house for breakfast. (18 words)

I was really hungry, so I made lots of delicious pancakes and ate them all before everybody came home. (19 words)

I cleaned my house for three hours on Monday because it was very dirty after the party at the weekend. (20 words)

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1.6 Waiters

Memory focus	Storing an increasingly lengthy list of food items in working memory and linking them to members of the class.
Level	Elementary and above
Time	5–20 minutes
Preparation	None

Procedure

1   Explain that you are a waiter and choose one of your learners to be your customer. Tell them that your customer is going to order a plate of food and a drink from you.

2   Go over to the customer and ask him what he would like to order. This could be anything he likes (within reason). Your task is to remember what he says.

> Customer: I'd like chicken and chips and a large glass of lemonade, please.
> Waiter: Would you like peas with that?
> Customer: Yes, please.
> Waiter: Ice in the lemonade?
> Customer: No, thanks.

3   Now walk right out of the room and immediately come back in again. Go back up to the customer and 'deliver' his food.

> Waiter: Here you are, sir. Chicken, chips and peas and a large glass of lemonade with no ice.
> Customer: Thanks very much.

4   Now hand the activity over to the learners and choose somebody to be the waiter. This time the waiter is going to repeat what you did, but this time with two customers. This is not a competition, however, and the task of the customer is not to try to make the waiter fail. Remember that the more dialogue that happens in each conversation (*Would you like sugar?*, etc.), the more likely the waiter is to succeed.

5   Keep changing the person who is the waiter and keep increasing the number of customer orders he or she has to remember each time. What is the maximum number of customer orders that anyone can remember?

1.7 Delayed TPR

Memory focus	Holding a list of instructions in working memory.
Level	Any
Time	5–15 minutes
Preparation	None

Procedure

1   Check that learners understand the vocabulary needed for the instructions that will be used (*pick up*, *carry*, *put down*, etc.) by asking individuals in the class to perform different actions (*pick up your pen*, etc.).

2   Give a list of instructions for a learner to follow, making sure that he or she starts to do the actions only after the list is complete. Start with only a few initially, but then build it up to see how many instructions learners can retain in memory at a time. Here are some examples for an elementary group:

> Go over to the whiteboard.
> Pick up the whiteboard marker.
> Draw a man on the board.
> Put the marker down in front of X.
> Take Y's pen.
> Give it to Z.
> Pull W out of her seat.
> Sit in her seat.
> Put her book on your head.
> Turn round.

3   Ask learners to do the same activity in pairs.

Follow-up

At the end of each sequence at Step 2, ask the other learners to recall the instructions that were followed. This is a natural way of activating past verb forms.

Note

There may be a marked difference in the number of instructions different learners can retain. For this reason it is better not to put learners on the spot too much in the whole-class format.

1.8 What did you say again?

Memory focus	Processing an area of grammar in working memory.
Level	Any
Time	5–15 minutes
Preparation	Plan some sentences about yourself that contain lots of examples of the structure to be focused on. See Box 1.8 for example sentences for beginner and upper intermediate groups.

Procedure

1 Read out the sentences at least once. The learners listen and try to remember as much information as possible. They should not make notes.
2 Ask the learners to work in pairs and tell each other as much as they can remember from what was said. They need to change the sentences from first to third person.
3 One learner tells the class what he or she can remember. The others and/or the teacher fill in any missing details.
4 The learners then do the same activity in pairs. Learner A tells Learner B lots of sentences about him- or herself using the forms. (They may need time and help to plan these first.) Learner B listens, tries to remember and then at the end repeats back everything he or she can recall. Learner B needs to change the sentences from first to second person.
5 Learners A and B then swap roles and repeat the process.

Box 1.8: What did you say again?

Beginners

My father is 84 years old.

My mother is 66 years old.

My older sister lives in London.

My younger sister is a teacher.

My older brother lives in Spain.

My younger brother lives in Devon.

Upper intermediate

I wish I hadn't given up playing rugby. If I hadn't given up I could've got quite good.

I wish I hadn't eaten so much last night. I feel really bloated this morning.

I wish I was more organized and didn't leave things to the last minute.

I wish I was better at getting out of bed in the morning.

I wish I'd learnt to drive when I was younger.

I wish I was rich enough to buy a big house with a garden where my kids could run around.

Note

This is a simple yet powerful language-recall activity. If the level of the speaker is higher, then the listener is nicely challenged to process new language. If the reverse is true, then the listener naturally reformulates what was said when he or she feeds back, and in doing so provides a gentle push to the speaker's own level.

1.9 The longest sentence

Memory focus	Challenging learners to retain a long sentence in working memory.
Level	Pre-intermediate and above
Time	5–15 minutes
Preparation	None

Procedure

1 Put the learners into groups of five to eight and ask them to stand in a circle or agree on an order between them. Their task is to create the longest sentence that they can as a group, with each person saying only one word at a time.

2 The first person in the group says one word. The next person now has to repeat the first person's word, and then say another which could follow it.

3 This process continues around the circle for as long as possible, with each person repeating the sentence as it stands up to that point, and then adding another word at the end.

4 If anyone feels that someone adds a word that is not possible, this should be discussed in the group and, if necessary, an alternative suggested. You need to be available to resolve any disagreements.

5 After about five minutes, ask each group to try to bring their sentence to a close.

6 Finally, ask one person from each group to tell you their sentence and write them up on the board. They can now be corrected if necessary and the class can comment on which is the longest / most interesting sentence, etc.

Note
I learnt this activity from Cecilia Orlandini, a teacher of teenagers in Italy.

1.10 Dialogue reconstruction

Memory focus	Holding sentences in working memory and then reconstructing them into a coherent dialogue.
Level	Any
Time	10–15 minutes
Preparation	Choose or write a six-line dialogue which is suitable for the level of the class. If using a projector, write each line on a separate PowerPoint® slide in a random order. Alternatively, write each line on a separate piece of paper that is large enough to see when held up in front of the class. See Box 1.10 for an example for an elementary group.

Procedure

1   Put the learners into groups of six and give each person in the group a number from 1 to 6. If the number of learners in the class does not divide into groups of six, two people in some of the groups can represent one number. Check that everyone is clear about who they are by asking all the '1's to raise their hands, etc.

2   Ask everyone to close their eyes except the '1's. Make sure nobody is cheating! Display one of the sentences (not the first one) and ask the '1's to try to remember it exactly. They should do this by holding it in working memory rather than by writing it down, of course! Remove the sentence. Now ask the '2's to open their eyes and everyone else to shut theirs. Display another of the sentences and ask the '2's to try to remember it exactly. Repeat this process with all of the sentences.

3   Now ask each group to try to reconstruct the six-line dialogue using all of the remembered sentences in the correct order.

4   Write the original dialogue on the board for them to compare with the reconstructed dialogue.

Box 1.10: Dialogue reconstruction

Did you have a good journey?

✂--

Not bad, but I'm a bit tired.

✂--

I'm sure you are! How long was the flight?

✂--

Eleven hours, and the food was terrible.

✂--

Really? Shall we get something to eat?

✂--

That would be great!

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Variation
Pin multiple copies of the lines of the dialogue randomly on the classroom walls. Learners work in pairs. One learner goes up to one of the sentences on the classroom wall, remembers it exactly, goes back to his or her partner (who has remained seated) and dictates the sentence to them. When six sentences have been collected in this way, each pair then tries to put all of the sentences into the correct order.

Follow-up
1   Once the complete dialogue is up on the board, drill it both chorally and individually, focusing on appropriate intonation. Now rub out some of the words and ask the learners to repeat the dialogue again. Gradually rub out more and more of the dialogue, until eventually the learners are repeating the dialogue with just a blank board to look at.
2   Learners engage in spontaneous conversations starting with *Did you have a good weekend/evening/party/meal/holiday?*, etc. They try to keep the conversation going for as long as possible.

1.11 Learner-generated texts

Memory focus	Encouraging learners to hold in working memory a text that has been co-constructed with them.
Level	Any
Time	20 minutes plus
Preparation	Choose a topic that the class could say some things about. This might be something that you know nothing about, such as a band that everybody likes, or the place where everybody lives. Find a picture of it if appropriate.

Procedure

1 Tell the class what the topic is and show the picture if you have one.
2 Ask for a volunteer from the class to say something about the topic. With a low-level group, this could be in the mother tongue. Now orally reformulate what was said to provide a more accurate or more sophisticated model. For instance, if a learner says *Near to here have many beaches very beautiful*, you could reformulate this as *There are a lot of really beautiful beaches nearby*. Write one word of the sentence on the board to stand as a memory aid for it, and then drill it around the room.
3 Try to construct about 10 different sentences with the learners. With each sentence, repeat the process of reformulating it, writing a word on the board to represent it, and then drilling it.
4 Keep reviewing everything by pointing at each word on the board, and asking the learners to recall the sentence it represents.
5 Finally ask everyone to write down all of the sentences as far as they can remember them. Do this yourself as well. The following sentences were produced when working with a group in Angola.

    Angola is rich in natural resources.
    Angola is a big country.
    Lots of different languages are spoken there.
    Angola has lots of oil and diamonds.
    Angola had a long civil war.
    Angola is at peace now.
    Angola is in South West Africa.
    Angola has a variety of different cultures.

6   Learners can now compare their sentences with each other's, and improve them where necessary.

7   Now ask one learner to write all of the sentences on the board. Can they now rewrite everything so that the sentences are linked to form a coherent text? Here is what one group in Angola produced from the sentences above.

> Angola is a big country in South West Africa. It is rich in natural resources like oil and diamonds. Lots of languages are spoken here and it has a variety of different cultures. It had a long civil war but is now at peace.

Note

This activity is based on Earl Stevick's 'Islamabad technique' (so called because it was first used as a way of producing a student-generated text about Islamabad). You can read about it in his seminal work, *Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways*, Heinle and Heinle, 1980, or in its re-edited and reissued format, *Working with Teaching Methods: What's at Stake?*, Heinle ELT, 1998. Instead of writing a word on the board for each utterance, you could also draw a symbol or simple image, or stick up a coloured piece of paper to represent it.

1.12 Reordered story

Memory focus	Challenging learners to hold the gist of a story in working memory, and to order it using their awareness of cohesive devices.
Level	Intermediate and above
Time	10–15 minutes
Preparation	Choose a story that can be broken down into no more than 10 short sections. Make a copy of the complete story for each learner in the class and one extra copy which has been cut up into slips. See Box 1.12 for an example for an intermediate group.

Procedure

1   Choose 10 learners to come to the front of the class. Give each learner randomly one of the slips from the story. Tell them the slips make up a story, but that it is in the wrong order. Their task as a whole group is to put the story in the correct order. No one may show their slip to anyone else.

2 Each person in turn reads out what is on their piece of paper in a loud, clear voice. Anyone can ask questions about language, but try to encourage the class to deal with these queries themselves, wherever possible, without intervention from you.

3 Anyone can now make suggestions as to the order of the story. The learners at the front move themselves according to the order suggested.

4 Keep encouraging them to tell the story from the beginning and to move themselves around until everyone is happy with the order.

5 Learners work in pairs and retell the story as they remember it.

6 Finally give out the complete story to everyone.

Variation
Divide the class into groups of 10 and give each group a set of the slips. They try to put themselves in the correct order as quickly as possible, but again without showing their slips to anyone else. With classes that will not divide into 10 exactly, sentence 5 can be taken out and/or two learners can share the same slip. For more examples of texts that can be used in this way, see 'Teacherless tasks', in *More Grammar Games* by Paul Davis and Mario Rinvolucri, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Follow-up
Learners write an ending for the story.

Box 1.12: Reordered story

Gunesh was furious to think that everything was over. That Ayo didn't love her any more and had found somebody else.

As she packed up her things in the bedroom, her eyes fell upon the bed and an idea came into her head.

She went to the kitchen and took out a packet of frozen prawns from the freezer.

Back in the bedroom she took off the four bed posts, poured the prawns inside, and then replaced the posts again.

She phoned Ayo on her mobile. 'The flat is all yours,' she said.

Ayo and Lee moved in that afternoon. They were pleased to see that Gunesh hadn't taken the bed with her.

Time passed, and they couldn't help noticing a strange smell in the bedroom, which seemed to be getting worse.

After a few months it was unbearable, and neither of them could work out where it was coming from.

Eventually they decided they could stand it no longer. Ayo phoned Gunesh to say they were moving out. Would she like to buy the flat from them at a reduced rate?

Gunesh accepted and went round to get the keys. She smiled to herself as she saw the removal men carefully lifting the bed into the removal van.

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1.13 Co-constructed storytelling

Memory focus	Challenging learners to hold the spoken utterances of a story in working memory.
Level	Any
Time	5–20 minutes (depending on the story)
Preparation	Choose a story that your class will find interesting and that has a substantial dialogue content. Alternatively, use the example in Box 1.13, which is pitched at a pre-intermediate group.

Procedure

1 Choose volunteers to play each of the characters in the story and invite them to the front of the class. For the story in Box 1.13, you will need five people to play the five characters of the man, the wolf, the tree, the young woman and the wise old woman who lives at the end of the world. The rest of the class simply watch the story.

2 Tell the story, adapting it to suit the level of the group you are working with. Each time there is a line of dialogue, say what the character says, and then indicate that the person playing that role should repeat the line. Encourage them to do it as naturally as possible, adapting the level of the lines to suit the learners. It also helps to break the dialogue up into short manageable chunks before they repeat it. The actors should move around the stage as the story demands it.

Follow-up

Give out the text of the story and ask the learners to do the same activity in groups of six. One person in each group (a stronger learner) takes on the role of storyteller.

Note

I learnt the idea of learners repeating and performing the dialogue content of this story from the storyteller Michael Quinn, who has used it with mixed-nationality groups of adults at the Totnes School of English.

Box 1.13: Co-constructed storytelling

The unluckiest man in the world

Once upon a time the unluckiest man in the world was sitting on a bench. 'Why does everything I do go wrong?' he asked himself. 'I've lost my job. I've lost my girlfriend, I've lost my home – I've lost everything!' Then he had an idea. 'I'll walk to the end of the world and I'll ask the wise old woman how to get some luck.'

So he started on his journey to the end of the world. After walking for a while, he came to a forest and there he saw a wolf. The wolf looked very sad and very thin and very hungry. 'What's wrong with you?' said the man.

'I don't know what to do,' said the wolf. 'I feel so weak and tired and hungry all the time and I don't know why.'

'Well,' said the man, 'I'm going to the end of the world to ask the wise old woman how to get some luck. If you want I could ask her why you're so hungry.'

'I would be very grateful,' said the wolf, and the man continued on his journey.

After a while he came to a tree. The tree looked very small and sad, and all of its leaves were missing – even though it was the middle of summer.

'What's wrong with you?' said the man.

'I don't know what to do,' said the tree. 'I can't grow. All of the other trees get bigger and bigger but I just stay the same.'

'Well,' said the man, 'I'm going to the end of the world to ask the wise old woman how to get some luck. If you want I could ask her why you can't grow.'

'Oh, thank you so much,' said the tree, and the man continued on his journey.

When he was nearly at the end of the world, he came to a lovely house, and standing at the front door was a very beautiful young woman. 'Come inside!' she called to him. 'You must be hungry after your journey,' and she cooked him a wonderful meal with delicious wine and they laughed and joked together. But then the young woman suddenly started to cry.

'What's wrong?' said the man.

'I don't know what to do,' said the young woman. 'I'm so sad and lonely living here on my own, and I don't know why.'

'Well,' said the man, 'I'm going to the end of the world to ask the wise old woman how to get some luck. If you want I could ask her why you are so sad and lonely.'

continued

Box 1.13: (*cont*.)

'Oh, thank you,' said the young woman. 'You are so kind.' And the man continued on his journey.

And finally he got to the end of the world and there was the wise old woman sitting on a cloud. 'What do you want?' asked the wise old woman.

'I want to know where my luck is,' replied the man.

'It's right in front of you,' said the wise old woman. 'You just have to recognize it.'

'Oh, I see,' said the man. 'Thanks very much.' And the man was just about to go when he remembered the questions of his friends. He listened as the wise old woman whispered the answers to him, and when she was finished he started to walk home again.

He got to the house of the beautiful young woman. 'The wise old woman said you need to find a husband to live with you,' he called to her. 'Then you won't be sad and lonely.'

'I see,' said the young woman. 'Would you like to be my husband? You could live with me in this lovely house and I'll cook for you every day and massage your feet.'

'I'm sorry,' said the man, 'I have to go and find my luck. The wise old woman said it's right in front of me. I just have to recognize it. Sorry.'

And he continued on his journey. When he got to the forest, the tree said to him, 'Did you find out what is wrong with me?'

'Yes,' said the man. 'The wise old woman said there is a box of treasure under your roots. You need to find somebody to dig it up so that your roots can grow again.'

'Could you dig it up?' said the tree. 'You can keep the treasure.'

'I'm sorry,' said the man. 'I have to go and find my luck. The wise old woman said it's right in front of me. I just have to open my eyes and see it. Sorry.' And he continued on his journey.

Soon he came to the wolf, lying on the ground, almost dead. 'Did you ask the wise old woman for me?' said the wolf.

'Yes,' replied the man. 'The wise old woman said you are hungry because you're not eating enough. To feel better you just have to eat the first stupid man who comes your way!'

And that is exactly what he did!