

The Role Of Innovative Technologies In The English Lesson

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ABSTARCT: *Today the theory and practice of language and culture attracts more and more scholars, it has become evident that the investigation of its problems requires expertise from the different points of view of various areas of linguistics.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are reasonable grounds for supposing that only studying a foreign language, without supplying some cultural awareness is not enough to provide for mutual benefit in the international relationships. This foundation serves as a starting point for the origin of a new science. The primary aim of the investigation is to prove that the language stands into the close contact with culture and history. Consequently their synchronic research would be very useful for language education. The goal of teaching speaking skills is communicative efficiency. Learners should be able to make themselves understood, using their current proficiency to the fullest. They should try to avoid confusion in the message due to faulty pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary, and to observe the social and cultural rules that apply in each communication situation. To help students develop communicative efficiency in speaking, instructors can use a balanced activities approach that combines language input, structured output, and communicative. *Language input* comes in the form of teacher talk, listening activities, reading passages, and the language heard and read outside of class. It gives learners the material they need to begin producing language themselves. Language input may

be *content oriented* or *form oriented*.

Content-oriented input focuses on information, whether it is a simple weather report or an extended lecture on an academic topic. Content-oriented input may also include descriptions of learning strategies and examples of their use.

Form-oriented input focuses on ways of using the language: guidance from the teacher or another source on vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar (linguistic competence); appropriate things to say in specific contexts (discourse competence); expectations for rate of speech, pause length, turn-taking, and other social aspects of language use (sociolinguistic competence); and explicit instruction in phrases to use to ask for clarification and repair miscommunication (strategic competence).

In the presentation part of a lesson, an instructor combines content-oriented and form-oriented input. The amount of input that is actually provided in the target language depends on students' listening proficiency and also on the situation. For students at lower levels, or in situations where a quick explanation on a grammar topic is needed, an explanation in English may be more appropriate than one in the target language. *Structured output* focuses on correct form. In structured output, students may have options for responses, but all of the options require them to use the specific form or structure that the teacher has just introduced. *Structured output* is designed to make learners comfortable producing specific language items recently introduced, sometimes in combination with previously learned items. Instructors often use structured output exercises as a transition between the presentation stage and the practice stage of a lesson plan. textbook exercises also often make good structured output practice activities.

In *communicative output*, the learners' main purpose is to complete a task, such as obtaining information, developing a travel plan, or creating a video. To complete the task, they may use the language that the instructor has just presented, but they also may draw on any other vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies that they know. In communicative output activities, the criterion of success is whether the learner gets the message across. Accuracy is not a consideration unless the lack of it interferes with the message. In everyday communication, spoken exchanges take place because there is some sort of information gap between the participants. Communicative output activities involve a similar real information gap. In order to complete the task, students must reduce or eliminate the information gap. In these activities, language is a tool, not an end in itself.

2. METHODS

In a balanced activities approach, the teacher uses a variety of activities from these different categories of input and output. Learners at all proficiency levels, including beginners, benefit from this variety; it is more motivating, and it is also more likely to result in effective language learning. Students often think that the ability to speak a language is the product of language learning, but speaking is also a crucial part of the language learning process. Effective instructors teach students speaking strategies -- using minimal responses, recognizing scripts, and using language to talk about language -- that they can use to help themselves expand their knowledge of the language and their confidence in using it. These instructors help students learn to speak so that the students can use speaking to learn.

Language learners who lack confidence in their ability to participate successfully in oral interaction often listen in silence while others do the talking. One way to encourage such learners to begin to participate is to help them build up a stock of minimal responses that they can use in different types of exchanges. Such responses can be especially useful for beginners. Minimal responses are predictable, often idiomatic phrases that conversation participants use to indicate understanding, agreement, doubt, and other responses to what another speaker is saying. Having a stock of such responses enables a learner to focus on what the other participant is saying, without having to simultaneously plan a response.

Some communication situations are associated with a predictable set of spoken exchanges -- a script. Greetings, apologies, compliments, invitations, and other functions that are influenced by social and cultural norms often follow patterns or scripts. So do the transactional exchanges involved in activities such as obtaining information and making a purchase. In these scripts, the relationship between a speaker's turn and the one that follows it can often be anticipated. Instructors can help students develop speaking ability by making them aware of the scripts for different situations so that they can predict what they will hear and what they will need to say in response. Through interactive activities, instructors can give students practice in managing and varying the language that different scripts contain. Language learners are often too embarrassed or shy to say anything when they do not understand another speaker or when they realize that a conversation partner has not understood them. Instructors can help students overcome this reticence by assuring them that misunderstanding and the need for clarification can occur in any type of interaction, whatever the participants' language skill levels. Instructors can also give students strategies and phrases to use for clarification and comprehension check. By encouraging students to use clarification phrases in class when misunderstanding occurs, and by responding positively when they do, instructors can create an authentic practice environment within the classroom itself. As they develop control of various clarification strategies, students will gain confidence in their ability to manage the various communication situations that they may encounter outside the classroom.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two common kinds of structured output activities are *information gap* and *jigsaw* activities. In both these types of activities, students complete a task by obtaining missing information, a feature the activities have in common with real communication. However, information gap and jigsaw activities also set up practice on specific items of language. In this respect they are more like drills than like communication.

Information Gap Activities

- Filling the gaps in a schedule or timetable: Partner A holds an airline timetable with some of the arrival and departure times missing. Partner B has the same timetable but with different blank spaces. The two partners are not permitted to see each other's timetables and must fill in the blanks by asking each other appropriate questions. The features of language that are practiced would include questions beginning with "when" or "at what time." Answers would be limited mostly to time expressions like "at 8:15" or "at ten in the evening."
- Completing the picture: The two partners have similar pictures, each with different missing details, and they cooperate to find all the missing details. In another variation, no items are missing, but similar items differ in appearance. For example, in one picture, a man walking along the street may be wearing an overcoat, while in the other the man is wearing a jacket. The features of grammar and vocabulary that are practiced are determined by the content of the pictures and the items that are missing or different. Differences in the activities

depicted lead to practice of different verbs. Differences in number, size, and shape lead to adjective practice. Differing locations would probably be described with prepositional phrases.

These activities may be set up so that the partners must practice more than just grammatical and lexical features. For example, the timetable activity gains a social dimension when one partner assumes the role of a student trying to make an appointment with a partner who takes the role of a professor. Each partner has pages from an appointment book in which certain dates and times are already filled in and other times are still available for an appointment. Of course, the open times don't match exactly, so there must be some polite negotiation to arrive at a mutually convenient time for a meeting or a conference.

Jigsaw Activities

Jigsaw activities are more elaborate information gap activities that can be done with several partners. In a jigsaw activity, each partner has one or a few pieces of the "puzzle," and the partners must cooperate to fit all the pieces into a whole picture. The puzzle piece may take one of several forms. It may be one panel from a comic strip or one photo from a set that tells a story. It may be one sentence from a written narrative. It may be a tape recording of a conversation, in which case no two partners hear exactly the same conversation.

- In one fairly simple jigsaw activity, students work in groups of four. Each student in the group receives one panel from a comic strip. Partners may not show each other their panels. Together the four panels present this narrative: a man takes a container of ice cream from the freezer; he serves himself several scoops of ice cream; he sits in front of the TV eating his ice cream; he returns with the empty bowl to the kitchen and finds that he left the container of ice cream, now melting, on the kitchen counter. These pictures have a clear narrative line and the partners are not likely to disagree about the appropriate sequencing. You can make the task more demanding, however, by using pictures that lend themselves to alternative sequences, so that the partners have to negotiate among themselves to agree on a satisfactory sequence.
- More elaborate jigsaws may proceed in two stages. Students first work in input groups (groups A, B, C, and D) to receive information. Each group receives a different part of the total information for the task. Students then reorganize into groups of four with one student each from A, B, C, and D, and use the information they received to complete the task. Such an organization could be used, for example, when the input is given in the form of a tape recording. Groups A, B, C, and D each hear a different recording of a short news bulletin. The four recordings all contain the same general information, but each has one or more details that the others do not. In the second stage, students reconstruct the complete story by comparing the four versions.

With information gap and jigsaw activities, instructors need to be conscious of the language demands they place on their students. If an activity calls for language your students have not already practiced, you can brainstorm with them when setting up the activity to preview the

language they will need, eliciting what they already know and supplementing what they are able to produce themselves. Structured output activities can form an effective bridge between instructor modeling and communicative output because they are partly authentic and partly artificial. Like authentic communication, they feature information gaps that must be bridged for successful completion of the task. However, where authentic communication allows speakers to use all of the language they know, structured output activities lead students to practice specific features of language and to practice only in brief sentences, not in extended discourse. Also, structured output situations are contrived and more like games than real communication, and the participants' social roles are irrelevant to the performance of the activity. This structure controls the number of variables that students must deal with when they are first exposed to new material. As they become comfortable, they can move on to true communicative output activities.

Communicative Output Activities

Communicative output activities allow students to practice using all of the language they know in situations that resemble real settings. In these activities, students must work together to develop a plan, resolve a problem, or complete a task. The most common types of communicative output activity are *role plays* and *discussions*.

In role plays, students are assigned roles and put into situations that they may eventually encounter outside the classroom. Because role plays imitate life, the range of language functions that may be used expands considerably. Also, the role relationships among the students as they play their parts call for them to practice and develop their sociolinguistic competence. They have to use language that is appropriate to the situation and to the characters. Students usually find role playing enjoyable, but students who lack self-confidence or have lower proficiency levels may find them intimidating at first. To succeed with role plays:

- **Prepare carefully:** Introduce the activity by describing the situation and making sure that all of the students understand it
- **Set a goal or outcome:** Be sure the students understand what the product of the role play should be, whether a plan, a schedule, a group opinion, or some other product
- **Use role cards:** Give each student a card that describes the person or role to be played. For lower-level students, the cards can include words or expressions that that person might use.
- **Brainstorm:** Before you start the role play, have students brainstorm as a class to predict what vocabulary, grammar, and idiomatic expressions they might use.
- **Keep groups small:** Less-confident students will feel more able to participate if they do not have to compete with many voices.
- **Give students time to prepare:** Let them work individually to outline their ideas and the language they will need to express them.

- Be present as a resource, not a monitor: Stay in communicative mode to answer students' questions. Do not correct their pronunciation or grammar unless they specifically ask you about it.
- Allow students to work at their own levels: Each student has individual language skills, an individual approach to working in groups, and a specific role to play in the activity. Do not expect all students to contribute equally to the discussion, or to use every grammar point you have taught.
- Do topical follow-up: Have students report to the class on the outcome of their role plays.
- Do linguistic follow-up: After the role play is over, give feedback on grammar or pronunciation problems you have heard. This can wait until another class period when you plan to review pronunciation or grammar anyway.

Discussions, like role plays, succeed when the instructor prepares students first, and then gets out of the way. To succeed with discussions:

- **Prepare the students:** Give them input (both topical information and language forms) so that they will have something to say and the language with which to say it.
- **Offer choices:** Let students suggest the topic for discussion or choose from several options. Discussion does not always have to be about serious issues. Students are likely to be more motivated to participate if the topic is television programs, plans for a vacation, or news about mutual friends. Weighty topics like how to combat pollution are not as engaging and place heavy demands on students' linguistic competence.
- **Set a goal or outcome:** This can be a group product, such as a letter to the editor, or individual reports on the views of others in the group.
- **Use small groups** instead of whole-class discussion: Large groups can make participation difficult.
- **Keep it short:** Give students a defined period of time, not more than 8-10 minutes, for discussion. Allow them to stop sooner if they run out of things to say.
- **Allow students to participate in their own way:** Not every student will feel comfortable talking about every topic. Do not expect all of them to contribute equally to the conversation.
- **Do topical follow-up:** Have students report to the class on the results of their discussion.
- **Do linguistic follow-up:** After the discussion is over, give feedback on grammar or pronunciation problems you have heard. This can wait until another class period when you plan to review pronunciation or grammar anyway.

Through well-prepared communicative output activities such as role plays and discussions, you can encourage students to experiment and innovate with the language, and create a supportive atmosphere that allows them to make mistakes without fear of embarrassment. This will contribute to their self-confidence as speakers and to their motivation to learn more.

Planning a Lesson

Set Lesson Goals

Lesson goals are most usefully stated in terms of what students will have done or accomplished at the end of the lesson. Stating goals in this way allows both teacher and learners to know when the goals have been reached.

To set lesson goals:

1. Identify a topic for the lesson. The topic is not a goal, but it will help you develop your goals. The topic may be determined largely by your curriculum and textbook, and may be part of a larger thematic unit such as Travel or Leisure Activities. If you have some flexibility in choice of topic, consider your students' interests and the availability of authentic materials at the appropriate level.
2. Identify specific linguistic content, such as vocabulary and points of grammar or language use, to be introduced or reviewed. These are usually prescribed by the course textbook or course curriculum. If they are not, select points that are connected in some significant way with the topic of the lesson.
3. Identify specific communication tasks to be completed by students. To be authentic, the tasks should allow, but not require, students to use the vocabulary, grammar, and strategies presented in the lesson. The focus of the tasks should be topical, not grammatical. This means that it may be possible for some students to complete the task without using either the grammar point or the strategy presented in the first part of the lesson.
4. Identify specific learning strategies to be introduced or reviewed in connection with the lesson.
5. Create goal statements for the linguistic content, communication tasks, and learning strategies that state what you will do and what students will do during the lesson.

Structure the Lesson

A language lesson should include a variety of activities that combine different types of language input and output. Learners at all proficiency levels benefit from such variety; research has shown that it is more motivating and is more likely to result in effective language learning.

An effective lesson has five parts:

- [Preparation](#)
- [Presentation](#)

- [Practice](#)
- [Evaluation](#)
- [Expansion](#)

The five parts of a lesson may all take place in one class session or may extend over multiple sessions, depending on the nature of the topic and the activities.

The lesson plan should outline who will do what in each part of the lesson. The time allotted for preparation, presentation, and evaluation activities should be no more than 8-10 minutes each. Communication practice activities may run a little longer.

1. Preparation

As the class begins, give students a broad outline of the day's goals and activities so they know what to expect. Help them focus by eliciting their existing knowledge of the day's topics.

- Use discussion or homework review to elicit knowledge related to the grammar and language use points to be covered
- Use comparison with the native language to elicit strategies that students may already be using
- Use discussion of what students do and/or like to do to elicit their knowledge of the topic they will address in communication activities

2. Presentation/Modeling

Move from preparation into presentation of the linguistic and topical content of the lesson and relevant learning strategies. Present the strategy first if it will help students absorb the lesson content.

Presentation provides the language input that gives students the foundation for their knowledge of the language. Input comes from the instructor and from course textbooks. Language textbooks designed for students in U.S. universities usually provide input only in the form of examples; explanations and instructions are written in English. To increase the amount of input that students receive in the target language, instructors should use it as much as possible for all classroom communication purposes. (See [Teaching Goals and Methods](#) for more on input.)

An important part of the presentation is structured output, in which students practice the form that the instructor has presented. In structured output, accuracy of performance is important. Structured output is designed to make learners comfortable producing specific language items recently introduced.

Structured output is a type of communication that is found only in language classrooms. Because production is limited to preselected items, structured output is not truly communicative.

3. Practice

In this part of the lesson, the focus shifts from the instructor as presenter to the students as completers of a designated task. Students work in pairs or small groups on a topic-based task with a specific outcome. Completion of the task may require the bridging of an information gap (see [Teaching Goals & Methods](#) for more on information gap). The instructor observes the groups and acts as a resource when students have questions that they cannot resolve themselves.

In their work together, students move from structured output to communicative output, in which the main purpose is to complete the communication task. Language becomes a tool, rather than an end in itself. Learners have to use any or all of the language that they know along with varied communication strategies. The criterion of success is whether the learner gets the message across. Accuracy is not a consideration unless the lack of it interferes with the message.

Activities for the practice segment of the lesson may come from a textbook or be designed by the instructor. See [Identify Materials and Activities](#) for guidelines on developing tasks that use authentic materials and activities.

4. Evaluation

When all students have completed the communication practice task, reconvene the class as a group to recap the lesson. Ask students to give examples of how they used the linguistic content and learning or communication strategies to carry out the communication task.

Evaluation is useful for four reasons:

- It reinforces the material that was presented earlier in the lesson
- It provides an opportunity for students to raise questions of usage and style
- It enables the instructor to monitor individual student comprehension and learning
- It provides closure to the lesson

See [Assessing Learning](#) for more information on evaluation and assessment.

5. Expansion

Expansion activities allow students to apply the knowledge they have gained in the classroom to situations outside it. Expansion activities include out-of-class observation assignments, in which the instructor asks students to find examples of something or to use a strategy and then report back.

Identify Materials and Activities

The materials for a specific lesson will fall into two categories: those that are required, such as course textbooks and lab materials, and authentic materials that the teacher incorporates into classroom activities.

For required materials, determine what information must be presented in class and decide which exercise(s) to use in class and which for out-of-class work. For teacher-provided materials, use materials that are genuinely related to realistic communication activities. Don't be tempted to try to create a communication task around something just because it's a really cool video or a beautiful brochure.

Truly authentic communication tasks have several features:

- *They involve solving a true problem or discussing a topic of interest*
- *They require using language to accomplish a goal, not using language merely to use language*
- *They allow students to use all of the language skills they have, rather than specific forms or vocabulary, and to self-correct when they realize they need to*
- *The criterion of success is clear: completion of a defined task*

4. CONCLUSION

In view of the fact that many junior academics in language departments are required to spend a considerable amount of their time teaching practical language classes, and that many of them come to the task from an academic research background, often involving a topic in the fields of literacy, cultural, historical or area studies, it is surprising and a little worrying that departments are not doing more to prepare staff for a substantial part of their academic role. Bearing in mind the typical background and profile of senior academic linguist, it would be unreasonable to expect most language departments to mount a programme of raining independently; nevertheless, there is much room for collaborative provision with Education and Staff Development or, where one exists, a language centre. Unless the decision is taken to hive off language teaching to a specialist centre or to dedicated, trained language-teaching staff, it might be thought that departments should ensure that anyone embarking on a career in languages is at the very least introduced to the rudiments of second language acquisition and second language instruction, the theory and practice of grammar teaching, approaches to

translation, techniques for teaching listening and reading, applications of ICT, and assessment of language proficiency (Klapper 2001: 7-8).

There is moreover wide divergence in the various aims of language teaching and learning. Quist (2000) discusses a ‘clash of cultures’ in language teaching in universities, between the liberal tradition which emphasises the cultural and intellectual aims of language teaching and learning in Higher Education, and the instrumental paradigm which emphasises ‘real-world’ skills with “an emphasis on speaking and interpersonal skills at the cost of writing or accuracy” (Quist 2000: 131). The CRAMLAP questionnaire responses reflected this clash in aims and methodology in Regional and Minority Languages teaching and learning, broadly reflected within the ‘Philological’ and ‘Communicative’ traditions, but there was often little in the responses to suggest theoretical reflection.

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