Project No. 12:
"Learning and teaching modern languages for communication"

Communication in the modern languages classroom

by Joe Sheils

Council for Cultural Co-opération

Strasbourg 1988

Preface

Joe Sheils' document on communication in the modern languages classroom fully reflects the new dimension which Project No. 12 has added to the work of The Council for Cultural Cooperation of the Council of Europe in the area of modern languages. While Project No. 4 was born out of the desire to provide a coherent theoretical framework for the communicative teaching and learning of modern languages, based on highly specific terminal objectives defined in terms of a series of threshold levels, the new Project was designed to go a stage further in applying the model to classroom practice in the light of the needs of pupils and teachers. The priority given to teacher training in international workshops designed to explore teaching methodology, and indeed, to devise classroom materials, is a good example of this approach. At the school level, the aim was to broaden the scope of observation and information exchange to include a wider interaction network that extended far beyond the pilot projects, to which visits and exchanges of information had previously been confined. At its second meeting, in November 1983, the Project Group decided to set up a small counselling group to coordinate the activities of the interaction network. Its task was twofold: (1) to improve information exchange and disseminate information more widely, and (2) "to investigate the possibility of drawing up a document bringing together pedagogical ideas underlying materials production, treating some of the recurrent problems posed by 'communicative classroom' practice, and giving examples of linking different types of teaching materials from a variety of sources". The minutes of the meeting added, "It was most important that such a document should seek to make the work inspired by the successive Modern Languages Projects as concrete as possible for teachers".

Joe Sheils, who had been invited to be a member of this counselling group in his capacity as leader of an interesting pilot project in Ireland, was the obvious choice of person to prepare such a document, insofar as his responsibilities at The Linguistics Institute of Ireland in Dublin would permit. We are grateful to him for taking on this mammoth task and for his efforts to meet tight deadlines. We are indebted to The Linguistics Institute of Ireland for its generous cooperation, without which the production of this document would not have been possible.

In his introduction the author draws attention to the wide variety of techniques that language teachers use for achieving teaching/learning objectives in a communicative approach. He depicts this remarkable variety of practices by "providing examples drawn from a range of recently published materials and specialised source books which would appear to illustrate good practice in a communicatively oriented classroom".

The fact that the emphasis is on classroom practice does not prevent the author from discussing underlying principles at the beginning of each of the main chapters. He puts forward some personal thoughts which rarely cover more than a page or two but which enable him to define objectives and provide a rationale for the various practices illustrated in the chapter - all of which reflect the same approach ("Approach" being the title used for these brief theoretical introductions). Between the first chapter where some principles of a communicative approach are summarised and the chapter devoted to an approach to developing comprehension skills, Joe Sheils makes a point of defining the role of interaction which is the key to all communication in the classroom. To this end, he analyses the effectiveness of work in pairs and in groups, considers common objections and suggests practical ways of overcoming them. He is, however, well aware that such work does "not guarantee that learning will take place", and rightly points out that "learners must be engaged in meaningful and satisfying tasks in a supportive atmosphere".

The bulk of the book (Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) deals with the four main skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. It was originally planned to set the book out differently, but in the end the more traditional layout proved to be clearer and more convenient. It was essential not to neglect the importance of *integrating* these skills in the classroom. The author avoids this pitfall: right from the second chapter, which deals with interaction, he stresses the need for "an integrated approach to the skills", and he comes back to this in every chapter.

The final chapter takes a lucid look at the problem of teaching grammar in the context of a communicative approach. The author shows that the emphasis on communication does not by any means imply a neglect of the forms of the language, as some people once believed.

Joe Sheils' book is an anthology. Using quality as the sole criterion, he has selected a wealth of educational material from the leading authors and specialists in each field, some of whom contributed to the workshops for teacher trainers organised by the Council for Cultural Co-operation of the Council of Europe. The material mainly concerns the teaching of English and French, but German, Spanish and Italian are not overlooked. One is sometimes sorry, when reading a book like this, which is a compendium of material, not to know the background to, or outcome of, particular activities described in the publication that is being quoted, but there were constraints of space and it is difficult to see how this could have been avoided. The comprehensive bibliography will enable readers to satisfy their curiosity.

Joe Sheils' book has been conceived and written in such a way that it is destined to become a standard reference work for language teachers and those who train them. It is also a landmark in the natural and coherent evolution of the Council of Europe's work in the area of modern languages. Joe Sheils was well aware of this as far back as 1984, when the plans for such a study were still on the drawing board. Quoting a statement by John Trim in the report *Modern Languages (1971-1981)*, he said, "We cannot content ourselves with a statement of terminal objectives ... We must pay greater attention to the processes by which they are attained". This book is an excellent illustration of this new focus.

Denis Girard
Chairman of Project Group No. 12.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my gratitude to the members of the Counselling Group: Denis Girard (Chairman of Project Group No. 12), Rune Bergentoft, Dagmar Heindler and Jan van Ek. Their guidance, support and patience are greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank my colleagues at The Linguistics Institute of Ireland for their help: Eoghan Mac Aogáin (Director), Iosold Ó Deirg, Carmel Murtagh and in particular Siobhán Supple for her advice at different stages in the preparation of the document. Special thanks are due to Monica Adderley for the care with which she typed the manuscript.

Joe Sheils,
Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann/
The Linguistics Institute of Ireland,
31 Fitzwilliam Place,
Dublin 2.

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to draw together some current pedagogical ideas which reflect the principles of a communicative approach. An examination of recent teaching materials reveals a great variety of techniques and the examples below illustrate some of the methodological options available to teachers and to those interested in developing classroom materials. While the choice of activities is inevitably somewhat arbitrary, it is hoped that readers, whether in pre-service or in-service training, and particularly when preparing or adapting classroom materials, will find something of use in what might be viewed as a toolbox of ideas and techniques.

One of the factors which influences the effectiveness of classroom learning experiences is the quality of the teaching/learning materials and the way that they are used in class. It is for this reason that this document concentrates on providing examples drawn from a wide range of recently published materials and specialised source books which would appear to illustrate good practice in a communicatively oriented classroom. These include materials developed by groups of teachers who participated in the interaction network organised within the framework of project No. 12 of the Council of Europe, "Learning and teaching modern languages for communication", as well as ideas described in the reports on Council of Europe workshops for teacher trainers. A list of sources from which illustrations or ideas have been taken is contained in the appendix.

It was decided to present a majority of illustrations for English because of the amount of material available for EFL. Efforts to create a balance in presenting examples from other languages were influenced to a considerable degree by the resources available to the writer. It is hoped that any imbalance can be redressed in future studies. Some important areas have had to be omitted from this document and others have been less than fully treated. These, and other key areas, will, no doubt, feature in future studies as the present work is only the first in a series on methodology.

A number of ways of presenting the illustrations were initially considered. In the event a somewhat traditional-looking approach has been adopted in that the four skills are treated in separate chapters. It is hoped, however, that this organisation will not be interpreted as suggesting a discrete skills approach to teaching. Their integration is so obvious that it has not been thought necessary to draw attention to this at all times and teachers quite naturally integrate skills in classroom activities. At specific points in the teaching process, however, it is necessary to focus on a reading or listening text, a role play, a discussion, etc. Accordingly activities are organised under the present headings for ease of reference. They are not defined according to level as in general this seems fairly obvious and many activities can usually be adapted to suit different groups of learners.

Chapter 1 reviews some principles of a communicative approach and their implications for teachers, learners and materials. Chapter 2 examines some difficulties associated with an interactive approach to language learning and offers some suggestions for dealing with these. The principles underlying the development of comprehension skills are outlined in Chapter 3 by way of introduction to listening activities which are illustrated in Chapter 4 and to reading activities in Chapter 5. Ways of promoting oral work are described in Chapter 6 and a variety of writing tasks are presented in Chapter 7. Some aspects of the role of grammar in a communicative approach are outlined and illustrated in Chapter 8. The bibliography contains suggestions for background reading, indicates some general sources containing practical guidelines for classroom practice and offers guidance on where to find further information on specific aspects of methodology.

Contents

1. SOME PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Summary:

1.1 Features of a communicative approach

A communicative approach is essentially learner-centred. It aims to motivate learners to want to learn the target language by building on and extending their knowledge and experiences. It interests them by focusing on relevant themes and by giving them some choice in selecting texts and tasks to meet the aims and objectives of the syllabus. Learners' communicative ability is developed through their involvement in a range of meaningful, realistic, worthwhile and attainable tasks, the successful accomplishment of which provides satisfaction and increases their self-confidence.

Communicative language teaching emphasises the development of learners' ability and willingness to use the target language appropriately and accurately for the purposes of effective communication. Priority is attached to understanding, negotiating and expressing meaning and the learning of structures and vocabulary serves this aim. This approach is reflected in the increasing number of syllabi and textbooks which are organised around categories of meaning indicating what the learner should be able to *do* in the target language, and which have drawn their inspiration from publications such as the influential 'threshold level' specifications of the Council of Europe [1].

Syllabi and textbooks which promote the development of communicative ability must take into account the components or sub-competencies which constitute this ability. These have been summarised by van Ek [2]:

(a) *linguistic competence*, i.e. "knowledge of vocabulary items and mastery of certain structural rules through which they are processed into meaningful utterances";

(b) *socio-linguistic competence*, i.e. "the ability to use and interpret language forms with situational appropriacy" (the context - who is communicating with whom, about what, where, for what purpose - determines the choice of language forms);

(c) *discourse competence*, i.e. "the ability to perceive and to achieve coherence of separate utterances in meaningful communication patterns";

(d) *strategic competence*, i.e. the ability "to use verbal or non-verbal strategies to compensate for gaps in the user's knowledge of the code";

(e) *socio-cultural competence*, i.e. "a certain degree of familiarity with the socio-cultural context in which the language is used";

(f) *social competence*, i.e. the desire and self-confidence to interact with others as well as "empathy and the ability to handle social situations".

The development of communicative ability has to be related to the needs of learners [3]. They have both immediate and potential communicative needs. They need to know how to express their own meanings in the here-and-now of the classroom as they share knowledge, experiences, interests, opinions, feelings and as they accept their role in the organisation, carrying out and evaluation of learning activities. This is not to suggest that there is no role for the mother tongue – there is, especially in the earlier stages - but learners need, over a period of time, to acquire the means to profit from the regular opportunities for genuine communication in the classroom.

Learners also need to be prepared to use the language for real communication outside the classroom, for example, on visits to the target community, meeting foreign visitors at home, exchanging letters, audio or video cassettes, results of projects, etc. with schools or friends in the target community. In this process learners need to experience the similarities and differences between their own experiences and concepts and those of the target culture so that communication is facilitated by appropriate inter-cultural understanding.

In addition to their communicative needs, learners need to learn how to learn so that they can assume greater responsibility for their own learning. They need: ways of coping when their linguistic resources are not fully adequate, good study skills, the ability to assess their own performance and progress, and the ability to identify and solve learning problems. The development of learner autonomy is a gradual process which must be deliberately encouraged and fostered. Perhaps the greatest challenge facing language teachers is to find the optimum ways of leading them towards gradually increasing autonomy [4].

A communicative classroom has to be created over a period of time. It requires a supportive socio-emotional climate where the learner becomes actively and personally involved, knowing that he or she is respected as an individual with his or her views, interests, strengths, weaknesses and preferred style of learning. It is characterised by a spirit of cooperation where learning the target language is a socially shared experience. In the words of Piepho:

"The medium is the message - the act of instructional interactives elicited by the process of understanding and misunderstanding, trails and errors, the negotiation of meaning and significance of themes, topics, texts, feelings etc., individual differences of perception, awareness, cognition, opinion or attitude are *the* most important and powerful reason for talking, reading, listening, writing, for exchange, statements and arguments" [5].

1.2 Implications for the teacher

Communicative teaching is based on the conviction that learning a language is a process which can only be achieved effectively by using the language for the purpose of communication. This has implications for what the teacher does in the classroom for it is the teacher who decides whether or not to facilitate the creation of a classroom atmosphere conducive to communication. Krumm suggests the following key questions to help teachers identify the extent to which their actions support a communicative approach [6].

"Probe-questions for identifying teacher attitudes that support communicative pupil behaviour

1. *Support of cooperation and autonomy*
   - does the teacher offer more than one text/topic for discussion?
   - are the students interested?

- do they make suggestions which one to select?
- do they offer their own suggestions?
- does the teacher give reasons for his or her suggestions?
- does he or she comment on the students' ideas?
- does the teacher suggest analysing texts in view of the different realities of target and student culture?
- do students argue from the point of view of their personal experiences and emotions?
- does the teacher support students in expressing (orally or in writing) their own reactions/answers to texts and topics?
- does he or she give them opportunities to co-operate and discuss their own statements independently?
- do students become actively involved in group or pair work in order to develop reactions and statements of their own?

2. *Partnership-behaviour of the teacher*
   - do students dare to express unconventional ideas and opinions in the classroom?
   - does the teacher accept such utterances and try to incorporate them into the discussion?
   - do students dare to make free utterances even though they are uncertain whether these are correct or not?
   - does the the teacher support them in expressing their own ideas and tolerate them?
   - do the students listen to each other and tolerate others' ideas?
   - does the teacher take into account the individual personalities of the students?
   - do teacher and students together try to make use of their different experiences and ideas?

3. *Giving feedback and self-confidence as far as the use of the target language is concerned.*
   - do the students try to express their problems and/or feelings in the target language in spite of language difficulties?
   - does the teacher help them to find adequate expressions?
   - does the teacher encourage students to help each other?
   - do the students help each other to express themselves adequately in the target language?
   - does the teacher encourage them to work individually/in pairs and to help and correct each other?
   - do they use dictionaries or other materials independently?
   - does the teacher wait with corrections until the students have finished their utterances?
   - does the teacher show that he or she is delighted when the students are successful?"

The teacher who adopts this attitude is no longer the dispenser of knowledge, the one who decides who will speak next, the distributor of sanction and judgements. As well as possessing certain knowledge and skills, for example, competence in the target language, knowledge about the culture of the target community, sensitivity to the needs and interests of learners, awareness of the nature of the language learning process, a communicative language teacher is:

- a manager of classroom activities
- a facilitator of learning
- a co-participant in the learning process
- a negotiator
- a motivator/stimulator

- an adviser/an expert
- an encourager
- a resource
- a provider of feedback on learners' attempts at communication
- a competent speaker of the target language
- a good listener
- an observer/monitor
- a researcher
- a patient person

This view of the classroom makes many demands on the teacher. He or she needs to be aware of the principles and key concepts which underlie this approach so as to ensure coherence in his or her work. The communicative teacher strives continuously to learn and to improve. This requires openness and flexibility, a willingness to keep informed, to attend workshops, to listen to colleagues, to share experiences (not only in the staffroom but also by visiting each other's classroom) and inevitably to take some risks. The communicative teacher is patient because in class things do not always work out as planned, attitudes (one's own as well as those of colleagues) change very slowly and institutional constraints may pose certain problems. Perhaps a key role for teachers is to communicate with and support each other. No one has a monopoly of knowledge or experience and 'caring and sharing' is as important among colleagues as among learners.

There is one further unavoidable implication which must be emphasised, obvious though it is. An approach based on the belief that learning a language is achieved by using it to communicate means that in class the teacher must be willing and able to communicate well in the target language. Where a teacher feels insecure in the target language, he or she must be helped to develop the confidence to use the language in class, to take risks just as the learner is expected to do (and to tolerate his or her own errors), while resolving to avail of whatever opportunities present themselves to improve his or her proficiency in the language.

1.3 Implications for the learner

In a communicative approach learners are expected to take their share of responsibility for their learning, to negotiate and cooperate with each other and the teacher in selecting objectives and ways of achieving them, while exploring what are the best ways for them of using and extending their existing skills and knowledge.

By implication, the good learner is willing to:

- communicate at every opportunity (inside and outside class)
- be personally and actively involved in learning activities
- negotiate/make suggestions about texts, tasks and methods
- compromise
- share knowledge, experiences, feelings, reactions ....
- respect the individuality of others
- live with uncertainty and take risks
- learn from attempts at communication
- accept correction from both teacher and classmates
- seek guidance
- look for patterns in the language
- find ways of remembering new language
- use resources (e.g. reference books, library, penpals, etc.)
- discuss problems
- share solutions
- evaluate texts and tasks
- evaluate his or her performance and general progress

1.4 Implications for materials

Appropriate classroom materials can contribute greatly to the quality of learning experiences. Some criteria which may be helpful when choosing materials are discussed in various sections of this document - see, for example, 3.3 (Choosing texts), 3.4 (Choosing tasks), 6.1.3 (Choosing and organising communicative activities), 8.1.2 (Teaching/learning grammar - some key questions and principles). Accordingly only a few introductory questions are listed below:

- are the materials likely to interest, challenge and personally involve the learners?
- do they build on and extend learners' experiences and concepts?
- are the objectives primarily communicative?
- are the objectives and the means success-oriented, i.e. clear, realistic, worthwhile and suited to the learners' level?
- do the materials provide good models of natural language use, i.e. are meaning, form and use coherently related in context?
- do they offer choice in content, tasks and methods of working?
- do they allow for different interests, styles and speeds of learning?
- do they encourage cooperation and sharing rather then competition?
- are they task-based, providing an appropriate balance between practice and communicatively-oriented activities?
- are activities sufficiently varied to avoid constant repetition of similar kinds of tasks?
- do the materials encourage learners to evaluate the texts and tasks?
- do they provide guidance for learners in coping with learning difficulties?
- are there regular opportunities for revision and consolidation?
- are the materials presented in a way which allows learners to work independently when necessary and to evaluate their performance?
- is there provision for regular self-assessment?

Teachers will always have to adapt materials to their own particular situation, no matter how carefully they may have been designed. In the case of more "traditional" textbooks, dialogues may have to be altered (e.g. natural discourse to replace structural dialogues), authentic texts may have to be added and more meaningful tasks may be required for purposeful language learning. There is no single package or panacea for communicative teaching and teachers are daily faced with the challenge of providing a choice of suitable texts and activities for their learners.

REFERENCES

[1] Threshold level specifications have been issued for many languages. They include:

van Ek, J.A., 1975. *Threshold level English*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Published in 1980 under the title *Threshold Level English* by Pergamon, Oxford.

van Ek, J.A., 1976. *The threshold level for modern language learning in schools*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Published in 1977 by Longman, London.

Coste, D., J. Courtillon, V. Ferenczi, M. Martin-Baltar, E. Papo and E. Roulet, 1976. *Un Niveau-Seuil*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Published in 1981 by Hatier, Paris.

Baldegger, M., M. Müller and G. Schneider, 1980. *Kontaktschwelle Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Published in 1984 by Langenscheidt, Munich.

Galli de' Paratesi, N., 1981. *Livello Soglia per l'insegnamento dell'italiano come lingua straniera*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Slagter, P.J., 1979. *Un Nivel Umbral*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

[2] These are described in detail in: van Ek, J.A., 1986. *Objectives for foreign language learning, Volume 1: Scope*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

[3] The issue of needs analysis has been discussed in, for example:

Richterich, R. (ed.) 1983. *Case studies in identifying language needs*, Oxford: Pergamon.

Porcher, L., 1980. *Reflections on language needs in the school*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Published in French under the title: *Interrogations sur les besoins langagiers en contextes scolaires*.

[4] For a comprehensive and practical account of a pioneering approach to the promotion of learner autonomy, see: Dam, L., *Intermediate English – an experiment in learning and teaching*, 1982/1983. The project, begun in 1980, focuses on joint pupil-teacher evaluation as the focal point of the teaching-learning process. It is also concerned with heightening learners' awareness of communication, language and learning as a central concept in assessing learning and with how teachers can benefit from observing and assessing learners' activities. The project is described in three mimeograph documents and it is stated that further information may be had from: Gerd Gabrielsen, Danmarks Lærerhøjskole, Emdrupvej 101, 2400 Kobehnavn N, Denmark and Leni Dam, Paedagogisk Central, Hundige Boulevard 11, 2670 Greve Strand, Denmark.

[5] Piepho, H.-E., 1986. "Some basic principles of communicative foreign language learning", in C. Edelhoff, (ed.), Report on Council of Europe workshop 2, April, 1986, Reinhardswald-schule, Federal Republic of Germany: *The Communicative Teaching of English. In-service Methodology and Evaluation*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe: p.6.

[6] Krumm, H.-J., 1984. "Effecting Change in Teacher/Student Interaction", in S. Tella, (ed.), Report on Council of Europe workshop 3, June, 1984, Hämeenlinna, Finland: *Communicative Language Teaching in the Classroom*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe: pp. 34-40.

2. PROMOTING INTERACTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Summary:

2.1 The value of interaction activities

Interaction may be viewed as a technique for getting learners to communicate with one another, or, more broadly, in Allwright's definition, as: "the necessarily social nature of classroom behaviour, of classroom pedagogy, in a very general sense"[1]. This latter concept encompasses the learner's own contribution to the management of his or her learning with the pedagogic implications of deeper learner involvement, enhanced self-respect, greater confidence and a consequent willingness to take risks because of a supportive 'socio-emotional' classroom atmosphere.

In order to create suitable conditions for such a learner-centred approach it is necessary in the first instance to consider what can be done to implement an interactive approach in the narrower sense, i.e. learners communicating with one another. This does not mean speaking only, but includes an integrated approach to the skills. By way of example, learners might first listen to or read a text on their own, then discuss their interpretations in pairs, repeat this in larger groups and finally in a whole class discussion. Writing (e.g. note-taking, report, summary, personal reaction) could be introduced at any stage. The reading or listening activity could be preceded by a preliminary discussion to create expectations and arouse interest in the text.

Pair and groupwork ensure increased learner-learner interaction and reduce the amount of teacher-whole class talk. Learning through interaction puts the learners at the centre and reverses the classical pattern of classroom interaction:

- teacher initiates
- learner responds
- teacher evaluates

Critics of groupwork warn that small groups reduce the teacher's ability to monitor production and may lead to the fossilisation of errors. They also point to the organisational and temporal difficulties which pair or groupwork pose (see 2.2).

These understandable fears have to be balanced by an appreciation of the value of working in smaller groups in any discipline and in particular in a language class. The greater opportunity to learn by communicating, the more relaxed atmosphere, the increased freedom and personal involvement, the possibilities for differentiation, have to be considered. As Brumfit points out, "the small group simulates natural conversational setting more closely than any other mode of classroom organisation (if we include pair work with groupwork) ... in the most integrated, non-threatening, and flexible mode of class organisation available to the teacher"[2]. Brumfit stresses that groupwork can focus on activities to promote accuracy as well as fluency. It may even increase the efficiency of accuracy work and help learners become used to organised groupwork so that they don't feel insecure in the freedom later afforded by fluency-based group activities. A further benefit accrues from the teacher's 'chatting' (rather than formal teaching) on his or her 'visits' to the various groups which can provide useful language data for learners.

There is no suggestion that all communicative classroom activities must involve pair or groupwork. This is only one element in a learner-centred approach but nonetheless a most important one which is widely accepted as essential because it is only by communicating in the performance of meaningful tasks that learners will learn how to exploit and extend their limited but developing competence.

While small group activity has a long tradition and is a normal part of classroom practice in many places, there may be situations where it is less common and where the fear of such activity may even create a psychological barrier to innovation. Some possible objections to small groupwork are listed below and possible ways of coping with the difficulties are then suggested.

2.2 Objections to groupwork

A. Organisational difficulties:

- class is too big (fear of chaos)
- classroom is unsuitable (overcrowded; seats cannot be moved)
- noise level is too high (disturbs class next door; could lead to discipline problems)
- takes too long to organise (the whole class may be spent organising and carrying out one activity; the bell may ring before it is finished)
- lack of appropriate activities in the course materials (teacher too busy or not sure how to prepare his or her own)
- where aids are prepared (worksheets, cue cards etc.) and used with several classes, items get lost and further delays occur
- not possible to monitor all the pairs/groups and so mistakes cannot be corrected

B. Some learner-related difficulties:

- learners may be unaccustomed to cooperate with one another in an activity if they are used to a teacher-dominated approach
- they think it is silly to carry out the activity in L2 (after all the teacher doesn't use L2 very often in class)
- they don't have enough L2 (or think that they don't) to complete the task so communication breaks down or they revert mainly to L1
- some learners are shy or become anxious if asked to speak in front of others
- they aren't sure exactly what they have to do
- certain learners use it as an excuse to be disruptive
- some learners are always finished before the others and become bored or restive

2.3 Ways of organising groupwork

These problems are not insurmountable. The classroom can be organised to facilitate different kinds of interaction and potential difficulties can be averted by careful planning. The suggestions below are based on common sense and the experience of teachers [3].

2.3.1 Classroom organisation – what can be done about it?

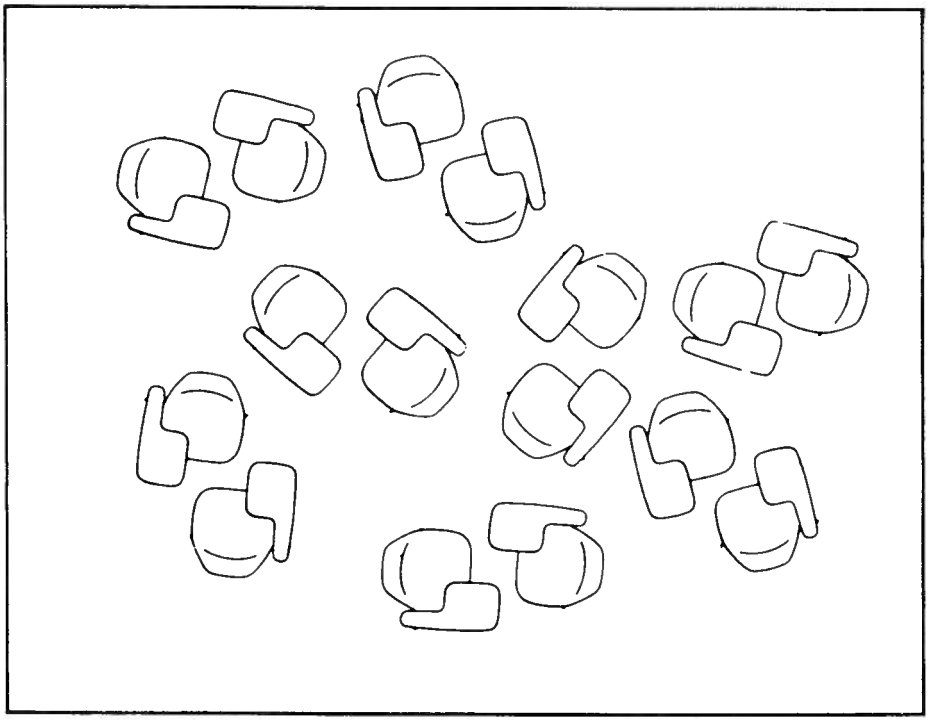
Where the furniture is bolted to the floor, O'Reilly offers a few suggestions to the teacher who is willing to tolerate a certain amount of upheaval[4]:

- some learners sit facing backwards in their seats which creates the possibility of a greater variety of groups
- learners work across the aisles if they are not too wide
- where the aisles are wide learners sit on the floor and form groups.

The last arrangement seems to motivate adolescents who adopt an air of complicity with the teacher and other members of the group.

Where the furniture can be moved:

- tables can be joined together to form squares or rectangles
- circular, oval or horseshoe arrangements are possible for larger groups. Chairs can be lifted over the tables and placed inside the shape. They can easily be turned back to the tables when learners need to write.
- learners can fill the square inside the circle rather than sitting in a way that defines its outer limits.



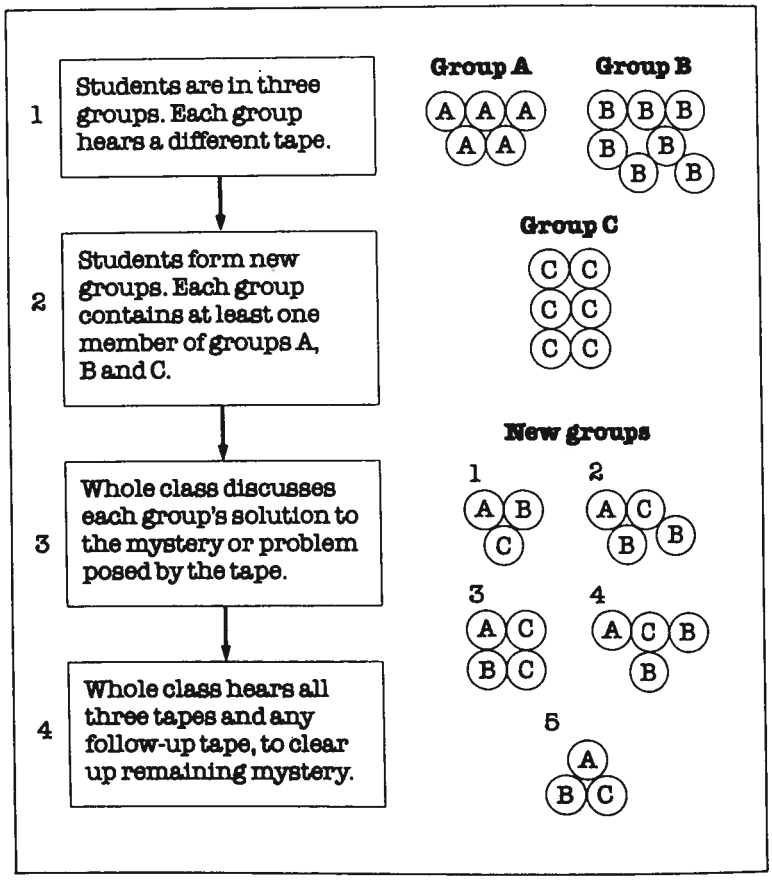
(Source: O'Reilly, M. 'Spatial Organisation in the Communicative Class'. *Practical English Teaching*. 5/4. June 1985, Mary Glasgow Publications.)

Cross-grouping:

This technique is described by Abbs and Freebairn [5]. In a class of twenty-five learners, five groups of five are set up and each learner is identified by a letter: A, B, C, D, E. When the first group has completed its activity new groups are formed. The A's, B's etc. each form a new group and report on the findings of their previous group so that there is further sharing of information. In this way reluctant speakers must at least listen carefully and take notes in the first group so as to report to their new group.

The technique is used in jigsaw listening and reading activities (see 4.3 and 5.3) where the first group works with texts which provide only part of the information necessary to complete a task. The members then move to form new groups containing at least one person from each of the previous groupings and information is shared so that the task can be completed.

example: organising a jigsaw listening activity



(Source: Rixon, S., *Developing Listening Skills*, Macmillan).

2.3.2 Some techniques for forming pairs/groups at random

There are good reasons for allowing learners to form their own social groups in the classroom. It may also be useful to form groups at random from time to time and some of the following well-known techniques may be helpful.

- birthdays (months)/signs of the zodiac
- favourite colour/pop group etc.
- shoe sizes/colours
- matching cards are distributed e.g.

- **personalities:**

Napoleon	Bonaparte
Marie	Curie
Bob	Geldof

- **ritual expressions:**

Bon	Voyage
Gute	Reise
Happy	Birthday

- **sets:**

dog	cat	Pairs		
carpenter	busdriver	secretary	teacher	Groups

- **associations:**

referee	whistle			
carpenter	timber	saw	plane	Groups

- **two-line dialogues:**

What's the time?	4.30
Woher kommen sie?	Aus Hamburg
Tu veux jouer au tennis?	Non, merci. Je suis fatigué(e)
¿Un cigarrillo?	No, gracias, no fumo

- **numbers:**
  Cards with numbers are handed out at random and a learner calls out those who will work together, e.g. 1 and 4, 2 and 6, etc. Variation: sets of numbers are distributed so that there are two (or more for groupwork) of each number and those with the same number work together. Cards with drawings of small clocks could be given out and learners with the same time form pairs or groups.

- **pictures:**
  A series of different pictures are distributed, two copies of each, so that everyone receives a picture. Learners do not show one another their pictures. They circulate and ask questions in order to find the person who has the same picture. Drawings of matchstick people, objects, places, events etc. can be used.

- **texts:**
  A variety of cartoons minus their captions or speech bubbles are given to half the class. The other half receives the missing texts. (Newspaper headlines and articles could also be used). Learners move around and exchange information to find their partners.

Note: As these are intended as preliminary organising activities it is important not to allow them to go on for too long. The process can be speeded up in a class of thirty, for example, by distributing only five different pairs of cards. Learners will still form pairs but more quickly than if there were fifteen different pairs of cards. In other instances, cards might be colour coded so that the number of classmates with whom they should interact in order to find their partner is reduced.

2.4 Implementing small group activities – some key questions:

A. Preparing activities: Do I .....

- set short simple tasks in the early stages? It is better to start with activities where the language is already fairly familiar to learners and which can be organised with the minimum of learner–movement. They need to be familiar with pair work before being introduced to groupwork.

- provide a motivating activity which gives learners a reason for interacting? Suitable activities offer a challenge (but not an unrealistic one) and so provide purpose, satisfaction and enjoyment.

- ensure a variety of types of activity over a period of time so as to develop all the skills and to avoid an unbalanced approach with the consequent risk of boredom?

- plan the activity carefully in advance? It is important to check that all the aids needed are there e.g. worksheets, cue cards, dictionaries, etc. and to try to anticipate organisational and language difficulties.

- arrange the classroom so that if necessary learners can move around?

- train learners to form pairs/groups quickly? Many activities lend themselves to choosing at random or on the basis of minimal disruption. Certain activities may be better suited to learner self–selection (e.g. those requiring personal responses) while others lend themselves more to teacher–directed selection (e.g. ensuring that there is at least one 'good' learner in each group).

- allow learners time to get used to pair and groupwork by introducing them on a gradual basis? They may be more familiar with competitive than with cooperative activities, with teacher–learner interaction than with learner–learner interaction and with teacher–directed activities which may not be particularly learner–centred.

B. Running the activity: Do I .....

- introduce the activity with enthusiasm and confidence which will hopefully transfer to the learners? (Lack of enthusiasm or confidence will certainly influence them adversely).

- explain clearly the nature of the activity and what each learner has to do? It helps to keep instructions as short and simple as possible. It is important to check that learners have understood the task and where necessary to supply a model.

- supply all necessary information and where appropriate pre-teach useful language? The degree of language preparation will depend on the type of activity. In some cases advance language work may be neither necessary nor desirable while in other instances a worksheet with key speech intentions and vocabulary may be helpful.

- heighten learners' awareness of the relevance of the activity? They could be encouraged to suggest how the (micro) skills developed might be applied in situations outside the classroom.

- set a strict time limit and consistently stick to it? It is better to set a limit which is too short rather than too long and to give learners a warning, e.g. two minutes before the end. It is a good idea to have an extension activity or a new activity ready for early finishers.

- move around among the pairs/groups while the activity is in progress, making sure that reluctant or slow learners get started and know how to continue? While being available as a resource the teacher should also insist on the use of dictionaries or other aids where appropriate.

- listen rather than interrupt during fluency type activities, letting the interaction flow and tolerating errors which do not lead to a breakdown in communication? Recurring errors could be noted for a later language practice activity. Examples of successful communication (and particularly the use of communication strategies, e.g. circumlocution, gesture) should also be noted so that in the feedback session any reference to errors can be balanced with praise for successful efforts at communication.

- introduce the target language on a gradual basis as the social language of the classroom (organising, carrying out and evaluating activities) and praise all efforts in the language? Where learners persist in using mainly L1 during an activity a learner (or pair of learners) could be nominated as observer(s) to each pair or group in order to note the uses of L1. These can later be examined and learners brought to realise that they might have attempted at least an approximation in L2.

C. Follow-up: Do I .....

- provide feedback to the learners after the activity? One or two pairs could demonstrate the activity, groupwork results can be shared and discussed. Evaluation of the activity could focus on the content as well as the language used. Knowing that there is a follow-up can help to sustain learner motivation when difficulties arise during the activity.

- organise myself and learners so as to avoid unnecessary frustration at a later stage? It is a good idea to train learners to gather up and properly file aids (e.g. cue-cards, pictures etc.) so that all are accounted for and ready for reuse with another class.

- provide appropriate activities to meet language needs arising from the pair/groupwork and respond to any other learner needs or interests which may have been revealed as a result of the activity?

Obviously pair and groupwork do not guarantee that learning will take place. Learners must be engaged in meaningful and satisfying tasks in a supportive atmosphere. As Piepho stresses: "But above all it is the style of interaction, the atmosphere of cooperation and teaching/learning and the task quality in class that promote and develop communicative skills and abilities"[6].

REFERENCES

[1] Allwright, R.L. 1984. 'The Importance of Interaction in Classroom Language Learning'. *Applied Linguistics*, 5/2: 156–171.

[2] Brumfit, C. 1984. *Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching.* Cambridge University Press, p.78.

[3] for example: Paine, M. 'Groupwork: Guidelines for Success' and Willis, J. 'Chaos or Control in the Communicative Classroom?' in *Practical English Teaching.* 4/1, September, 1983: 28–34. Mary Glasgow Publications.

[4] O'Reilly, M. 1985. 'Spatial Organisation in the Communicative Class'. *Practical English Teaching*, 5/4: 54–56. Mary Glasgow Publications.

[5] Abbs, B. and J. Freebairn, 1979. *Building Strategies.* Teacher's Book, Longman.

[6] Piepho, H.–E. 1986. 'Some Basic Principles of Communicative Foreign Language Learning'. in C. Edelhoff (ed.). Report on Council of Europe Workshop 2, April, 1986, Reinhardswaldschule, Federal Republic of Germany. *The Communicative Teaching of English. In-service Methodology and Evaluation.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

4. DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS

Summary:

4.1 Approach

The aim of listening comprehension activities is to enable learners to understand natural speech, according to their reasons for listening, whether in a face to face situation or as listeners in a non-reciprocal situation, i.e. where they have no control over the stream of speech. The latter context is the main concern of this chapter as recorded speech is a key source of input for learners in the classroom.

Features of natural speech:
Spoken language differs in a number of respects from written language: there is greater redundancy; it is more repetitious (a feature of interactional type speech in particular); it contains more fillers; there is usually less cognitive content than in a similar passage of written discourse (although there may be considerable interactive and attitudinal content); the discourse is less structured, (e.g. discontinuous and fragmented structures, changes of direction); cohesive devices are more difficult to identify; there may be ungrammatical forms and unimportant words may be slurred or dropped. Difficulties may also be caused by such features as the rate of delivery, unfamiliar rhythm and stress patterns, the number of speakers, different registers, strong regional accents, poor articulation, overlapping speech, emotional speech and background noise.

In order to develop the skills and strategies necessary to cope with natural speech, learners need to be introduced to authentic or authentic-sounding texts on a planned basis. Their confidence can be built up by a judicious choice of texts and preparatory activities (see below 4.2.1 Pre-listening activities). It is important that only short passages are played in the early stages and that both the linguistic and cognitive content are appropriate to the learners' level. It is helpful in these stages if speech is clear and not too fast, if the number of speakers is limited, and if learners do not have to cope with too many new words and structures or with a variety of accents. These conditions can be met by the use of carefully prepared authentic-sounding or 'semi-authentic' recordings made under controlled conditions which are an increasingly popular feature of many recent elementary and intermediate level courses.

Where the focus in on teaching rather than on testing listening skills learners should be allowed to hear the recording a number of times. Listening can be made purposeful and may be guided by the provision of a variety of suitable activities (and not simply multiple-choice, true/false and wh- questions). If skills are to be developed, rather than simply tested, it is important that learners have regular opportunities to evaluate both the text and the activities so that they learn to work out for themselves where their listening problems occur and what might be done to help solve them.

4.2 Some listening activities

A number of well-known activities are illustrated as follows:

4.2.1 Pre-listening activities
4.2.2 While-listening activities
4.2.3 Post-listening activities

Transcripts of the recorded text are reproduced in full or in part only where this seems essential for a full appreciation of the activity

4.2.1 Pre-listening activities

Learners can be prepared for or oriented towards the text in various ways. Where appropriate they:

- are told what type of text they are going to listen to so that their knowledge of that particular type of discourse is activated, e.g. news bulletin, interview with a famous person, buying something, etc.
- are provided with any necessary background information about the text, e.g. "This is an interview between .... They are talking about .... The speaker presumes that listeners are aware of .... Do you remember the incident in the news last week ....?", etc.
- may be advised that the speech is fast, they won't understand everything at the first listening, gist comprehension is adequate initially, they will understand a little more each time they hear the text
- hear a shortened, simplified or slower version before the text is played
- study photographs or drawings which create certain expectations about the speakers and events in the text
- are given key vocabulary and expressions which occur in the text. They could use these to imagine what the text is about or to create their own versions which can then be compared with the recorded text.
- discuss the theme of the text. This gives learners an opportunity to express their own views, feelings and experiences both before and after listening to the recording.
- read a summary, (e.g. a series of jumbled sentences which they put in what they imagine to be the correct order. They check this when listening to the text).
- read a short parallel text, (e.g. a newspaper article which corresponds to a radio/T.V. news item)
- complete a gapped transcript of the recorded text

Some examples:

example (i)

Learners are informed that they are going to listen to Bill and Susan making a date on the phone. Their knowledge of such situations, i.e. their 'dating script' (from their own experience or mediated through cinema, television, reading) leads them to expect to hear the voices of a man and a woman, one voice 'present' and the other slightly distorted as heard through the earpiece of a telephone. They could try to anticipate the discourse, e.g. inviting, accepting an invitation, making a suggestion, accepting or rejecting the suggestion and making an alternative proposal, arranging time and place to meet, vocabulary relating to entertainment. Visuals would be particularly helpful, creating expectations about sex, age, number of speakers, mood of speakers, social background, location.

example (ii)

Learners are told that they will listen to a text requiring understanding of numbers where they are to write down the populations of the world's ten largest cities. First, they write down their own predictions of what they imagine the population of each of the ten cities to be. Then, in groups of three or four, they share their predictions and narrow them down to a single agreed set of numbers. Each group writes its predictions on the board. Where the text is played or read out learners note the populations. These figures are read back and compared with the predictions. The group with the greatest number of correct predictions (or whose guesses are closest) is the winner.

(Source: Kehe, D. and P., 'Entering a Lesson through Predictions', *Modern English Teacher*, Vol. 13, No. 3, Spring, 1986, Modern English Publications Ltd, pp.3-5.)

example (iii)

In the following example learners will listen to a news item dealing with the enormous traffic jams which occur at the beginning and end of the summer holidays in France. With the aid of a dictionary, they first classify the vocabulary as they wish [A]. They then try to find nouns in the word list which correspond to the adjectives listed in [B]. Finally, they add appropriate verbs to make sentences [C]. The same procedure could be used as a post-listening activity instead.

The transcript of the news item is too lengthy to reproduce here, but essentially it describes a number of huge traffic jams and offers advice to motorists.

[A] Divisez la classe en petits groupes et essayez de classer les substantifs suivants dans les catégories appropriées.

Bouchons, statistiques, morts, embouteillages, chevauchement, flux, la sécurité, des endroits, la route, un trafic, direction, littorals, bison, itinéraires de délestage, pôles, la circulation, carrefour, jonction, autoroutes, vacanciers, bretelles, usagers, Minitel, la direction de la sécurité et de la circulation routière, périodes, l'affluence, accidents, victimes, la Gendarmerie.

[B] Essayez de trouver des substantifs dans l'exercice précédent qui correspondent aux adjectifs suivants:

routière, bien précis, dense, atlantiques, futé, de délestage, brûlantes, orange, rouge, noir.

[C] Mettez un verbe avec chacun des substantifs: e.g. La route - bloquer.

(Source: *Authentique en Français*, Authentik Language Learning Resources Ltd., Dublin).

example (iv)

Learners create a text from key words which they later compare with the recorded text.

- learners are told they will hear a radio news bulletin report on a hold-up in a post office in Campoleone and that they can later read a newspaper account of the same incident
- before listening or reading they make up their own account of what might have happened from a list of words supplied
- they then listen to the tape and compare their versions with that on tape

- in a follow-up phase they read the transcript of the radio account, correcting their own story
- finally, learners read the newspaper account for the fine detail

TENTATIVO DI RAPINA **OSTAGGI** **AGGRESSIONE**
SPARI **I MILITI** **3 MALVIVENTI** **1 CARABINIERI**
A VOLTO COPERTO/SCOPERTO **INFRANGERE IL BLINDO X**
DANNI **DISARMARE** **FERMARE UN'ALTRA MACCHINA**
SCORTA DEL FURGONE **FUGGIRE** **LASCIARE LIBERO**
LE ARMI **UNA MAZZA** **DANNI**

Transcript of the radio news item:

Cronaca:

Tentativo a vuoto di rapina con danni in un ufficio postale a Campoleone, in provincia di Latina. Marcello Guerrini ha chiesto al direttore dello stesso ufficio postale, il Sig. Giurini, i particolari dell'aggressione:

- **Verso le 13, 13.05, circa, sono entrati 3 malviventi, due a volto scoperto uno a volto coperto, per una rapina. Hanno infranto il blindo X con una mazza; mentre stavano effettuando la rapina sono giunti i carabinieri con la scorta del furgone.**
- **A questo punto che è successo?**
- **Si sono probabilmente impauriti.**
- **Hanno preso degli ostaggi?**
- **Si, abbiamo sentito degli spari e hanno preso 2 ostaggi. Con loro si sono coperti la fuga. Hanno costretto i militi ha lasciargli la macchina e sono andati via con la macchina dei carabinieri.**
- **Anche con le armi dei carabinieri?**
- **Si, sembra che li abbiano disarmati. Almeno 3 credo di sí.**
- **Le armi dei carabinieri e soprattutto l'ostaggio. Poi è stato lasciato libero?**
- **Si, poi è stato lasciato libero perché hanno fermato un'altra macchina.**
- **L'ostaggio chi era?**
- **Guardi, è una signora conosciuta che viene spesso peró sinceramente non mi ricordo il nome.**

(Source: *Autentico in Italiano*, Authentik Language Learning Resources Ltd., Dublin).

4.2.2 While-listening activities

Some possible activities are summarised below and a number of these are then illustrated in the following section. (The same system of numbering and lettering the activities is used in both sections to facilitate cross-referencing).

Summary:

4.2.2 (a) questioning
4.2.2 (b) recognising
4.2.2 (c) matching

4.2.2 (a) questioning

- multiple-choice
- true/false/don't know
- open-ended.

4.2.2 (b) recognising

- recognise the type of text, e.g. interview, advertisement, sports commentary, story ...
- recognise the context - who is speaking to whom, about what, where, when, i.e. name and approximate age of speakers, how well they know one another (formal, neutral or casual register), their attitude (polite/impolite, friendly/unfriendly), the topic, where they are (clues from background noises, loudness of voices)
- recognise the general purpose of the interaction, e.g. seeking information, social 'chatting' (little or no information content)
- recognise specific speech intentions
- recognise selected items, e.g. key words, the number of times a particular expression is used, all the proper names which occur
- recognise and appreciate the value of rhetorical features, e.g. ways of encouraging someone to say more, repetition, fillers, formulae for introducing an opinion, an explanation, emphasising. A transcript of the text is helpful in a follow-up discussion on the role of these features.

4.2.2 (c) matching

- match dialogues, short narratives, descriptions with the correct pictures or symbols; the focus may be on the literal content e.g. description of a picture, or on interpretation, e.g. matching the expression of attitudes and feelings with facial expressions and gestures
- rearrange a set of jumbled pictures, e.g. to match the sequence of events in a story
  variation: a number of pictures which are not so obviously related to the story are included. Learners choose the pictures that they associate with the story and explain their choice to their partners. The extra pictures allow learners to see different things in the story.
- match a spoken and written text, e.g. a news item in a radio/T.V. broadcast with a newspaper headline; statements with the names of speakers (who said what?)

4.2.2 (d) following instructions

- mark directions on a map
- fill in details on an outline map (e.g. rivers, roads, buildings) or picture (e.g. draw furniture in a room)
- modify a picture according to instructions, e.g. draw a moustache on someone, colour in objects
  variation: note any differences between a spoken description and a picture of a person, place or object. The differences may simply be marked on the picture or the picture may be modified to correspond to the spoken text.
- label objects or people in a picture
- draw a picture or diagram (abstract pictures are obviously the most difficult)
- perform actions (miming a story; assembling: e.g. shapes or blocks, arranging a set of pictures, etc.)

4.2.2 (e) note-taking

- transfer information to a grid
- complete a form
- complete a flow chart (e.g. boxes with headings) so that the key points in a sequence are noted in order (a story, recipe, assembling something, following a procedure)
- write down a telephone message for someone who is absent
- take notes around key words or themes supplied in advance e.g. list words referring to "sport", "violence", etc.; take notes on what the speaker says about something or someone
- note the main points in a discussion
- note how the speaker expresses opinions, attitudes, feelings .....
- study a paraphrase of what someone says, then listen carefully and note what the person actually said
  variation: study the text of what a person is thinking/preparing to say (e.g. illustrated in a thought bubble) and then compare this with what he/she actually says)

4.2.2 (f) using a transcript

- mark pauses in an unpunctuated transcript of a spoken text (followed by discussion of the role of pauses)
- listen to a text and underline slight differences which occur in the transcript of the text

4.2.2 (g) interpreting

- a short uncontextualised and deliberately vague extract is played (e.g. part of a dialogue or discussion) and learners infer who the speakers are, their relationship, what they might be talking about, where they are (clues from content, register, tone of voice, intonation, background noises). Extracts where the literal meaning is different from the implied meaning lead to a greater variety of interpretations and consequently to more discussion.
- listen to comments in a dialogue or interview and evaluate the speaker's attitude, e.g. approving, disapproving. The text should not be too explicit and attention can be directed to features such as tone of voice and intonation

4.2.2 (h) completing

- aural cloze: insert missing words (gaps should not occur too frequently) and nonsense words could be substituted to retain the natural rhythm of the speech; as a help to learners the missing words could be supplied in a jumbled format
- complete unfinished utterances: the tape is stopped and learners predict the rest of the utterance (several options could be supplied)
- "role-listening": learners listen to a dialogue in pairs, each listening in the role of one of the speakers. The tape is stopped without warning and the learner listening in the role of the next speaker continues the dialogue, predicting the next utterance and addressing his/her partner. The tape is then played, the two versions are compared and a discussion may follow on the appropriateness of the learner's utterance to the context. The most effective dialogues are those where the speakers have adopted standpoints and where the discourse has a reasonably predictable pattern e.g. expression of an opinion followed by partial or total disagreement and expression of an alternative opinion. The actual words used are less important than predicting the type of speech intention. With video it would be possible to use conversations with more than two people and the tape could be stopped at any point as it would be clear who is speaking to whom. (This technique is described by Anthony Bruton in *Modern English Teacher*, Vol. 9. No.3)
- dialogue completion: learners hear only one of the speakers in a telephone conversation and imagine what the other speaker might be saying

- complete an unfinished story, joke ...
- 'patchwork listening': the volume is turned down at various points and learners try to guess the missing elements. On the first listening they note whatever they can. On the next playing the volume is lowered at different points so that learners can verify their guesses or revise them. The process continues until learners have the gist of the complete text. (This technique is described by Alan Maley in *Modern English Teacher*, Vol. 6, No.3 and cited by Penny Ur in *Teaching Listening Comprehension*, Cambridge University Press).

Illustrations:

4.2.2 (a) questioning
4.2.2 (b) recognising
4.2.2 (c) matching
4.2.2 (d) following instructions
4.2.2 (e) note-taking
4.2.2 (f) using a transcript
4.2.2 (g) interpreting
4.2.2 (h) completing

4.2.2 (a) questioning

Multiple-choice, true/false/don't know and various other types of questions, (e.g. who, what, why, how, where, etc.) are among the most popular types of activities found in many coursebooks. Accordingly it seems unnecessary to illustrate their use in this section. Their rationale is outlined in some detail in 5.2.2 (b) in relation to reading activities and in general the same principles can be applied to their use in listening activities.

The following unusual technique for using wh- questions is included because of the surprise and amusement it created for a group of elementary level learners. It is basically a once only technique.

The teacher and language assistant had recorded a text to play in class. The questions to be asked at different stages were also pre-recorded at the appropriate places on the tape. Each question was followed by the name of the learner who was nominated to answer that question. Learners listened with some amusement as they waited to see who the tape would nominate each time. The names could be erased and new ones recorded for use with another class.

(Source: Siobhán Supple, I.T.E. who observed this procedure in a class taught by a teacher on pre-service training).

4.2.2 (b) recognising

(i)

- *recognising speech intentions:*

- learners trace the different conversations on the dialogue chart using a different coloured pen or pencil for each one
- the drawing activity focuses learners' attention on the structure of the discourse
- as a follow-up they could conduct similar interviews with one another, e.g. a group survey on jobs and reasons for wanting or not wanting to do them. The interview can then be written as a short report and the details fed into a class survey on career hopes.

5. DEVELOPING READING SKILLS

Summary:

5.1 Approach

The aim of reading instruction is ultimately, as Kohonen states: "to enable learners to read unfamiliar, authentic texts, without help, at appropriate speed, with adequate understanding, for a variety of purposes" [1].

The autonomous reader is a flexible reader who applies a variety of reading strategies depending on the reading purpose and who knows when his/her comprehension is adequate for that purpose, whether skimming to get a general idea of the text, scanning for specific points or reading for detailed comprehension.

The promotion of efficient reading can be assisted by suitable tasks which reflect the interactive nature of reading and help learners to develop good reading strategies. They should be made aware of those strategies which will help them to read efficiently and to gain confidence in their ability to handle written texts on their own. This means that readers must be willing to form hypotheses, make predictions, guess and keep on reading when faced with uncertainty.

Learners should be made to be aware of how discourse is organised, and encouraged to process the text in meaningful 'chunks' rather than word by word. One way of assisting readers to read in 'chunks' or 'meaningful mouthfuls' may be to play occasional recordings of native speakers reading texts as there is evidence that good internal prosody (stress and intonation) facilitates comprehension [2]. Where learners are not very good readers in the target language, the practice of reading out loud in class may only serve to practise pronunciation and intonation. As Smith points out, reading is less a matter of extracting sound from print than of bringing meaning to print [3]

It is important to provide learners with opportunities to read complete texts rather than only short extracts so that they can develop enough context to facilitate comprehension and to become familiar with a writer's style. Graded readers can be particularly helpful at the elementary/intermediate stages and guidelines for building up a scheme of such readers are to be found in publications by Nutall and Hedge [4]. In order to become efficient readers, learners need to read extensively and to enjoy their reading. Material should obviously be of interest to them and they should have a say in choosing the texts.

As well as being a source of pleasure and information, written texts are also an important means of presenting new vocabulary in context. It is not simply a question of testing learners' receptive knowledge but, as Gairns and Redman stress, of devising activities to activate and reinforce useful lexis from a text [5]. Accordingly, a number of vocabulary building techniques are included in the illustrations below.

5.2 Some reading activities

A number of popular activities are illustrated below:

5.2.1 Pre-reading activities
5.2.2 While-reading activities
5.2.3 Post-reading activities

The full written text is reproduced only where this seems essential.

5.2.1 Pre-reading activities

Learners may be prepared for the text in various ways depending on the type of text and the level of the learners.

Some possibilities:

(i) Learners are encouraged to form certain expectations about the text based on clues from accompanying pictures or photographs, the text type, layout, headings and sub-headings.
(ii) Necessary or helpful background information is provided or recalled, e.g. What do you know about ...? Do you remember ...?
(iii) A shortened and/or simplified version of the text is provided.
(iv) Learners reorder a list of jumbled sentences or join up split sentences which contain the main points from the text.
(v) A broadly-similar type of text which introduces key vocabulary and expressions is studied beforehand.
(vi) A listening text on the same topic is presented, e.g. a news item from the radio or television is played before reading about the same event in a newspaper article.
(vii) Learners first read a similar text in their mother tongue, e.g. a newspaper story about a recent event and then read about the same event in an article from a newspaper in the target language. The two versions are compared: attitude of the journalist, facts, opinions.
(viii) A diagrammatic representation which summarises the text is studied and discussed.
(ix) Learners study a few general questions on the text which activate what they already know about the subject and suggest the kind of new information which might be presented in the text.
(x) Learners are given the theme of the text. In a brainstorming activity, they try to anticipate some of the main points and offer their own ideas in a pre-reading discussion. A few general questions may be supplied to guide the discussion.
(xi) A number of statements are made about the theme. Learners are asked to say whether they agree or disagree with them and to give their reasons. When reading the text, they check to see whether or not the writer shares their views.
(xii) Key words are supplied and learners try to guess what the text might be about. Several themes could be offered in a multiple-choice question. Activities may be introduced which help them remember the words, for example classifying them and justifying their choice of categories. They could use the words to create their own versions of the text or simply try to put them in the order in which they will appear in the text.
(xiii) Learners write a story inspired by a photograph or headline in a newspaper or magazine. They compare their stories with the one in the newspaper or magazine.

6. PROMOTING SPEAKING SKILLS

Summary:

6.1 Approach

While communicative language teaching is concerned with all the skills and their use in a naturally integrated manner, the recent emphasis on communication has focused particular attention on ways of promoting speaking skills. As shown in Chapter 1, this is a question of developing not only linguistic competence but also sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, sociocultural and social competence, all of which combine to constitute the ultimate goal of communicative ability. Speaking activities aim, therefore, to develop the confidence, desire and ability to use the target language not only accurately but also appropriately and effectively for the purposes of communication.

In the light of that which is known about the nature of the language learning process, and given the many demands which speaking activities can make on learners, it is important to set attainable objectives and to have realistic expectations about learners' achievements. This requires a certain attitude on the part of the teacher towards learners' performance, particularly with regard to error and the use of coping or communication strategies to compensate for gaps in their linguistic resources. The development of communicative ability also has implications for the choice and organisation of activities which provide learners with appropriate learning experiences to foster their confidence and speaking skills.

6.1.1 Error tolerance and correction

There are differing viewpoints on error tolerance or correction. Some methodologists recommend teachers to insist on accuracy from the very beginning in order to avoid the risk of fossilisation of errors. Most suggest a reasonable degree of tolerance so that learners are not inhibited or afraid to attempt to communicate even when they are unsure about the correct language forms. For them fossilisation represents a stage in the language learning process and the error(s) will gradually disappear. The process of learning or acquiring a second language is a gradual one and is particularly slow as learners in school have only limited contact with the target language. If it is seen as an organic process where learners must at times be willing to take risks, where learning can occur through positive or negative feedback as they formulate and test their hypotheses about the operations of the language, then it is important to know which kinds of errors to tolerate and when to do so.

Attitudes to correction will undoubtedly be influenced by the purpose of the activity. It seems reasonable that errors should be corrected in controlled practice activities where the emphasis is on accuracy but that in unplanned or spontaneous expression involving pair or groupwork they should simply be noted for later remedial work. In the case of spontaneous teacher-learner interaction the teacher, instead of pointing out errors, might indicate where there is a problem in communication by seeking clarification, requesting confirmation, paraphrasing, etc. The approach adopted will also depend on the type of error. Those which interfere with comprehension will lead to a breakdown in communication or to misunderstanding and should be corrected immediately whereas less serious errors can be dealt with at a later stage.

Other factors to be considered might include the extent to which the error would be likely to annoy a native speaker, the origin of the error (whether it is a "mistake" which is due to a temporary lapse resulting from fatigue, anxiety, etc. or whether it is the consequence of the learner testing a hypothesis), the frequency of a particular error, the ease with which it can be corrected without unduly disrupting the activity and, of course, the affective state of the learner, i.e. how he or she reacts to public correction, however gently administered.

Whatever approach is adopted, it is important that both learners and teacher have a positive and constructive approach to errors. They should expect them to occur in unplanned speaking – particularly in open-ended tasks which stretch learners' linguistic resources - and accept them as a sign that learning is taking place. Learners might be reminded that as children they made mistakes in their mother tongue but that communication was usually successful and that their partners (parents, peers, others) didn't get annoyed. They could also discuss how they react to foreigners who make mistakes in their language and relate this to how they would like to be treated when speaking the target language to native speakers.

The following advice might be offered to learners for their consideration: "It is perfectly natural for you to make mistakes as you learn. Mistakes are usually regarded as bad but a mistake in a language class can have a very positive effect: you can learn from it. Of course you should try to be as accurate as you can when you speak or write, but you will also have to take a few risks if you really want to make progress. Remember that all the learners in your group are in the same position as you: there is no stigma attached to making mistakes.

Your teacher may not correct all your mistakes immediately, or may correct you when you don't expect it, and correction will not only come from your teacher, sometimes you will be helped to spot and correct your own mistakes; sometimes you will have opportunities to correct each other" [1].

A degree of tolerance might also be shown to learners in view of the demands which oral interaction makes on them. Speaking is a reciprocal activity which requires learners to negotiate meaning with their partners and to do so under the constraints imposed by the pressures arising from having to communicate in real time. Negotiation means that rehearsed routines and formulaic expressions, however useful, are not enough. Speakers have to be sensitive, ready to adjust their speech and to adapt to the unpredictability of what their partners say. They must assess the extent of their shared knowledge, check that they have understood and are being understood, seek clarification, compensate in various ways for gaps in their competence and for the fact that there is little or no time to plan what they wish to say. They also need conversation skills, i.e. knowing when to speak, when to stop and let their partners have their turn, how to indicate that they wish to interrupt or to continue speaking, etc.

It is therefore unreasonable always to expect fluent, highly organised and extremely accurate speech, especially in activities where learners' transitory competence is stretched. Short phrases (rather than complete sentences), hesitations, fillers to gain time while searching for what to say or how to express the intended meaning, self-correction, changes of direction, repetition, reformulation, paraphrasing, and slips of the tongue are features of native speech and therefore will inevitably occur in learners' efforts to communicate in the target language. Both teachers and learners must realise that just as a "reasonable interpretation" can be acceptable in listening, so also a reasonable approximation which communicates the intended message without unduly burdening or annoying the receiver, can be acceptable in speaking. The ultimate aim is fluent and accurate speech but in open-ended activities which require free and spontaneous expression the stage of development of the learner's linguistic resources and the demands of the particular task must be taken into account.

6.1.2 Communication strategies

One of the main ways in which learners can compensate for gaps in their linguistic repertoire when faced with a demanding communicative activity is by the use of communication strategies. The use of compensatory strategies in the mother tongue, as outlined above, makes it even more

likely that learners will need to use them to compensate for problems which may arise when communicating in the target language. It is important that they realise there is nothing wrong with using such strategies, particularly in open-ended communicative activities and that they will be valuable when coping with situations both inside and (hopefully) outside the class for which they have not or could not have been prepared.

A number of taxonomies of communication strategies have been developed. The following concise list is from van Ek [2]:

A. Major strategies which most people use in their native language without specific training:

- retracing (when getting stuck in a complex sentence structure: 'Sorry, I'll start again')
- rephrasing ('Let me put it in a different way')
- substitution
  - by a general word (thing, person)
  - by a pronoun (this, it, they, something)
  - by a superordinate (tree for oak-tree, meat for mutton)
  - by a synonym (see for perceive, discussion for debate)
- description by means of
  - general physical properties (colour, size)
  - specific feature ('it has four legs')
  - interactional/functional characteristics ('you can dress a wound with it')
- demonstration ('Here, look at this, this is what I mean')
- gesture, mime, sounds
- appeal for assistance ('What do you call it again?')

B. Further strategies which foreign language users typically use:

- foreignising (*candelle* for candle)
- transliteration (*place de feu* for fireplace)
- word-creation (through the compounding and derivation process of the foreign language)
- mutilation (omitting inflectional suffixes, neglecting gender distinctions, etc.)
- language switch (using native language elements or elements from another foreign language)

The second set of strategies may seem less attractive in that they may lead to errors or do little to facilitate understanding, but, as van Ek points out, some of them, in particular foreignising, transliteration and word-creation can be regarded as the testing of hypotheses about the target language and, through positive or negative feedback, they contribute to learning. Even mutilation, while not to be encouraged, might be tolerated in certain cases if this results in the learner having the confidence to take risks rather than avoiding the topic or abandoning attempts to communicate.

It seems worthwhile, then, to make learners more aware of the strategies they already use in their native language and of how they might employ them in the target language. They will benefit from communicative activities which stretch their linguistic resources and from activities designed to practise specific strategies, in particular paraphrasing, e.g. describing something instead of naming it (see, for example, activity (ii) in 6.3.5 (b) below), rephrasing and substitution. Word creation is another important strategy and although it may often result in words which do not actually exist in the target language it will just as often lead to understanding and help to foster confidence in their ability to communicate even with limited resources.

6.1.3 Choosing and organising communicative activities

The development of communicative ability, of which strategic competence is but one vital component, requires a range of suitable classroom activities. These should provide learners with a degree of communicative urgency so that they have something interesting to say and a reason for communicating with their partners. An activity may be made purposeful by involving learners in an exchange which bridges an information, opinion, affect, 'interest' or 'solidarity' gap. They may be motivated to communicate by the enjoyment of playing a game, the challenge and satisfaction in solving a problem or completing a project, etc.

An approach to the development of a range of situations and activities which promote communication in the classroom has been summarised by Jones and Legutke in the acronym SWAP.

> "A *situation* must exist that allows authentic encounters with uncertain outcomes. The learner must *wish* to engage in communication through emotional involvement or some practical need. The learners must be *able* to engage in communication through having something to say and resources to say it with. The learners must experience some *pay off* benefit in that something worthwhile has been achieved" [3].

Real satisfaction and confidence can only be achieved through successful communication. This means involving learners in tasks which are suited to their interests and stage of conceptual and linguistic development. Success in fluency activities will also be facilitated by proper preparation and implementation. While this is inevitably limited in open-ended tasks a number of general guidelines can be followed to ensure that the interaction does not break down simply because of lack of adequate planning.

The following areas of concern were drawn up in relation to the organisation of a communication game (see 6.4.2 (c) below) but most of them are applicable to a wide range of fluency activities.

A. TEACHING CONTEXT:

Careful preparation of linguistic material (e.g. lexical areas, seeking repetition of information).
Careful clarification of the task before undertaking it.
Planning whether it should fit into the general progression of the syllabus or whether it should be an independent activity.
Finding out whether it fits in with other and parallel teaching situations. (Project work)

B. GROUP ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS:

Relaxed and friendly atmosphere with some sense of competition is useful but this should not detract from the sense of group and class co-operation.
Negotiating a balance between task needs and individual or group needs.
Planning how varied the types of activities should be.
Which activities should be undertaken by everyone, and which by only part of the group?
Players should help each other linguistically but preferably not suggest content.
Competition as a stimulus and not as a hostile activity.
Peer correction as an aid to better language production.
Commenting on each other's performance by taking up what somebody said earlier on and amplifying it.
Sharing the responsibility for the observation of the rules (of the game).

Other areas to be considered include the organisation of the classroom (see Chapter 2), linguistic factors (e.g. intelligibility and level of the task, building up linguistic spin-off in matters of lexis,

structures and fluency, preparing a check-list to help the learner to be aware of his or her progress, etc.) and sensitivity to any emotional or cultural blockages which might interfere with the learner's confidence to use the target language in relation to the particular topic or situation.

(Source: Arnold, J. (ed.), Report on Workshop 7 (d), Eurocentre, Cambridge, U.K., November, 1984: *Fluency and accuracy and error correction criteria and techniques*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1986).

A variety of activities to promote the development of speaking skills is illustrated below: dialogues, role play, simulation and a selection of activities where the learner can speak personally in the here-and-now of the classroom situation, for example as they get to know each other better (exchanging information, expressing feelings and values through interviews, surveys, games), and become involved in discussions, story telling and projects.

The order of presentation does not indicate a progression from practice to communicative activities since the approach to any of the activities can vary depending on the pedagogic purpose. For example, the dialogues generally represent controlled expression but it is possible to revise the conventional order of presentation-practice-free expression and to begin by asking learners to use their own resources to cope in a particular situation (perhaps playing the dialogue only once to provide a framework). They can then be presented with a model and the necessary language exponents. Similarly the degree of linguistic preparation for the role play or other fluency activities can vary. The section on personal expression provides opportunities for both guided and free expression. They allow learners to become personally involved in what they say and those activities which encourage them to express their own views and feelings are representative of the more-communicative end of the practice-communication continuum.

6.2 Dialogues

6.2.1 Introduction

The use of dialogues in language teaching has a very long tradition, particularly as a way of highlighting structures. However, the resulting stereotyped dialogues with cardboard characters and unnatural language use have been replaced in recent textbooks with more-natural examples which illustrate how sentences are combined for the purposes of communication in clearly-defined social contexts. Dialogue activities are concerned not only with accurate expression but also with the appropriate use of forms in a specific social context. Learners should, therefore, be clear about who is speaking to whom, about what, for what purpose, where and when. It is also important to heighten learners' awareness of how dialogue is structured, of ways of opening, maintaining and closing a conversation, and of the strategies used by speakers to negotiate meaning so that their efforts at communication achieve the desired result.

The examples which follow illustrate some possible uses of dialogues. Short contextualised dialogues are useful for presenting and exploiting the relationship between functions/notions and forms as shown in 6.2.2. The value of jumbled dialogues to focus attention on discourse structure and appropriacy is highlighted in 6.2.3. Incomplete dialogues serve a number of purposes as illustrated in 6.2.4. They provide practice in choosing the correct register, maintaining the conversation, coping with difficult situations and can act as a stimulus for free expression. Learners can be guided from controlled to free expression through the use of discourse chain and cues as shown in 6.2.5 and 6.2.6 respectively. Finally, a few techniques for encouraging creative dialogue writing are presented in 6.2.7.

The order of presentation does not indicate a progression as there are varying degrees of control within each type of activity, depending on how much freedom learners have to negotiate meaning. In most of the practice activities the topic is imposed, the order of speakers is pre-determined and participants have choice only in which forms to use to express the intended meanings. In the less-tightly controlled examples of discourse chains and cued dialogues, however, learners have

greater freedom to choose both what to say and how to say it. These lead learners towards the more fluency-oriented activities illustrated in the following sections.

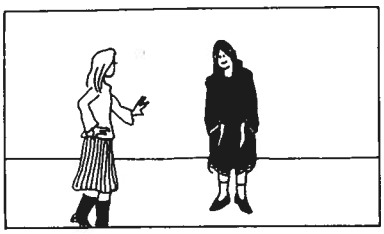
Summary:

6.2.2 Contextualised practice

Learners listen to and study two short model dialogues. Their attention is drawn to ways of expressing the functions or notions (likes/dislikes). These are represented in new contexts (listening text) and learners then make their own dialogues, guided by cues and dialogues to complete.

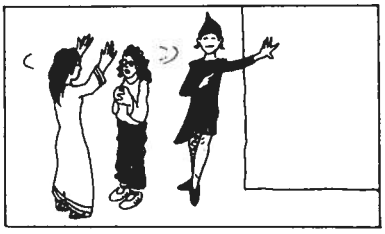
5 Talking about new things:
Jane is visiting Debbie. Debbie has got a new coat and is showing it to Jane.

Debbie: Look, I've got a new coat.
Jane: Mm, it's nice.
Debbie: Do you like it?
Jane: Yes, it's fantastic.
Debbie: I think so, too.
Jane: Can I try it on?
Debbie: Okay.



Susan and Mary are talking about Pam and her dress.

Mary: Look, Pam's got a new dress.
Susan: Oh, yes.
Mary: Do you like it?
Susan: No, it's not very nice.



It's	very nice	++	*So sagst du, wenn dir etwas . . . besonders gut gefällt*
	fantastic		
	beautiful		
	nice	+	*. . . gut gefällt*
	pretty		
	not very nice	–	*. . . nicht gefällt*
	horrible	– –	*. . . gar nicht gefällt*

I think so, too. — *So sagst du, wenn du mit jemandem der gleichen Meinung bist.*

6 Listen and tick the correct box: What do they think?

Example:
- ☐ I think it's nice.
- ☐ No, it's not very nice.
- ☒ Yes, it's very nice.

1
- ☐ No, it's horrible.
- ☐ Yes, it's very nice.
- ☐ No, it's not very nice.

2
- ☐ No, it's horrible.
- ☐ No, it's not very nice.
- ☐ Yes, it's nice.

3
- ☐ No, it's not very nice.
- ☐ Yes, it's nice.
- ☐ Yes, it's fantastic.

4
- ☐ Yes, it's pretty.
- ☐ No, it's horrible.
- ☐ No, it's not very nice.

5
- ☐ Yes, it's fantastic.
- ☐ Yes, it's very nice.
- ☐ No, it's horrible.

7. PROMOTING WRITING SKILLS

Summary:

7.1 Approach

Writing in the foreign language classroom can be an especially enjoyable and meaningful activity for learners, perhaps meeting certain needs more adequately than some more artificial speaking activities. Good writing tasks not only provide useful language practice but also stimulate learners to express themselves in a creative and personal manner as they communicate their own ideas, experience and feelings.

Learners do not simply write texts so that the teacher can correct their mistakes. Writing is a purposeful and meaningful activity where they write in order to communicate with a particular reader or readers, i.e. each other as well as the teacher and, of course, members of the target community (pen pals, youth hostel manager, etc.). Writing to fulfil a communicative purpose and inviting comment or correspondence from others gives learners feedback on the success or otherwise of their attempts at written communication and successful efforts provide the satisfaction which sustains motivation and strengthens the desire to become an even better writer. In the earlier stages it is usually based on oral work (e.g. writing about one's family, pocket money, holidays, likes/dislikes, etc.) but eventually the focus shifts to more complex types of texts as learners are made aware of how ideas are organised and presented in a clear, logical manner (coherence) and of the ways in which sentences are combined to form a meaningful unit through a variety of semantic devices (cohesion). This is particularly important because writing is not simply a transcription of the spoken word and, unlike oral communication, writers have no way of checking how well they are being understood. There are no paralinguistic elements to help as in face-to-face communication and the kinds of digression, rephrasing, repetition, pronunciation or grammar 'mistakes', etc. which are typical of speech are not acceptable in writing. Spelling and grammar mistakes are more obvious and lack of coherence and cohesion can lead to a failure to communicate or make intolerable demands on the reader. Writing has to be better organised and more precise than speech and this is expected of the writer who has time to reflect, restructure and reformulate, unlike the speaker who communicates under the pressure of instant communication in real time.

Good writing is a skill which needs to be developed and supported. Extensive reading (and listening) are an important source of input. It is only through writing, however, that writing skills are developed and regular opportunities for practice and free expression are essential. Activities in course materials generally lead learners gradually from controlled and guided writing practice towards freer, and more creative, production. The difference between these stages depends on the degree of assistance provided in the areas of content, organisation and language material. A typical chain of activities might include:

study of model text – practice – writing task – feedback/evaluation – correction

Practice writing may be controlled or guided, for example by a model text to imitate, a matrix to follow, key points to expand, etc. and useful language material may be supplied. In freer activities, learners have greater responsibility for content and organisation and little or no language assistance is provided.

It is also possible to begin with the free writing stage where learners use whatever resources they have (their linguistic and strategic competence in particular) to produce a text. This exploratory text is then compared with a model text (or other suitable text), evaluated by the writer, other learners and the teacher, and finally edited or 'polished' with the possibility of further circulation and comment. Evaluation and feedback are not concerned exclusively with form but also with content and organisation. The stages of this more 'process-oriented' approach might be implemented as follows:

writing task – comparison with other text(s) – feedback/evaluation – editing/rewriting

Writing is thus viewed as a process where learners experiment as they reflect, plan, discuss, draft, write and edit their own text. Mistakes are an inevitable part of the first stage of this process and an indication that learning is taking place as learners exploit and extend their developing competence.

Whatever approach is preferred at any particular stage, writing can retain an interactive dimension if learners are encouraged to work in small groups where they can first discuss the task, share ideas, formulate sentences and then draft their texts individually and/or collectively (e.g. before replying to a letter they discuss possible content, organisation and expressions).

The examples which follow illustrate a variety of writing activities ranging from controlled or guided to freer and more personal expression. As the degree of control can vary within any one kind of activity, the sequencing of activities does not represent a graduated approach to developing writing skills. Some illustrations may seem unrealistic, (writing advertisements or writing a letter without using the letter 'e', for example), but these are included because the skills they promote can be transferred to other forms of writing and also because they can provide enjoyment. Some practice activities are illustrated in 7.2 and a number of activities which encourage freer writing are presented in 7.3. Finally, an inductive approach which leads learners through a chain of activities in a structured manner is shown in 7.4.

7.2 Some practice activities

8. DEVELOPING LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Summary:

8.1 Approach

8.1.1 Grammar instruction in a communicative approach

There are differing views on the role of explicit grammar instruction in a communicative approach. Some coursewriters and syllabus designers prefer a sound structural base on which to build communication skills. Others stress the importance of fluency activities and assume that grammatical competence will look after itself whether or not there is explicit grammar teaching. Between these two poles there are a variety of approaches which seek to create an appropriate balance between activities focusing on fluency and on accuracy.

Language teaching aims to develop both of these aspects. The balance between activities focusing on one or the other may vary depending on the grammar point in question. The effect of explicit instruction on the spontaneous production of simpler forms will be more obvious than on more complex structures, especially where the form - function relationship is not so clear. In the case of a more 'difficult' form learners can benefit from a range of activities which in the first instance help them to recognise the communicative value of the structure and draw their attention to its formal properties. Other activities would provide meaningful practice and promote its spontaneous use in fluency-oriented tasks. It is of course possible, and often very useful, to begin with a fluency activity which requires learners to exploit their developing linguistic and strategic competence. This can then be followed by activities which raise learners' consciousness of specific aspects of the grammatical system and which help them to analyse routines, 'chunks' or formulae which they may automatically use.

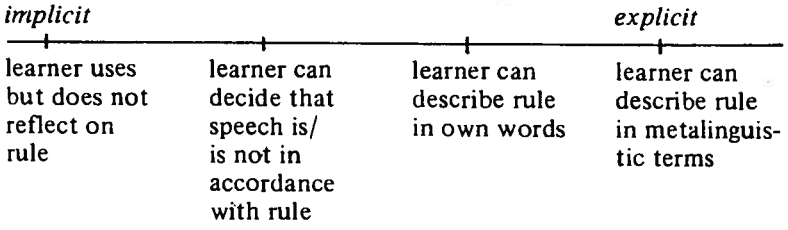
Whatever approach is followed it is important that forms are introduced because they are needed to perform a communicative task and that the relationship between forms and their use in communication is clear to learners. While the meanings to be expressed are determined by the communicative objectives the choice of forms is usually based on "common sense" or some consensus on which forms are the most frequently used and readily transferable to other contexts. The difficulty in selecting and sequencing forms is compounded by the fact that form and meaning are not in a one to one relationship (one form can express many meanings and vice versa).

A further problem is presented by the linear ordering and presentation of grammar, in view of the evidence that language is acquired in an organic non-linear manner. Teaching is linear but learning is not. As learners form, test and obtain feedback on their hypotheses about the operations of the target language, their mastery of the system evolves through a gradual process

where their interlanguage is modified and developed. Errors are therefore inevitable as learners take risks and experiment with the language.

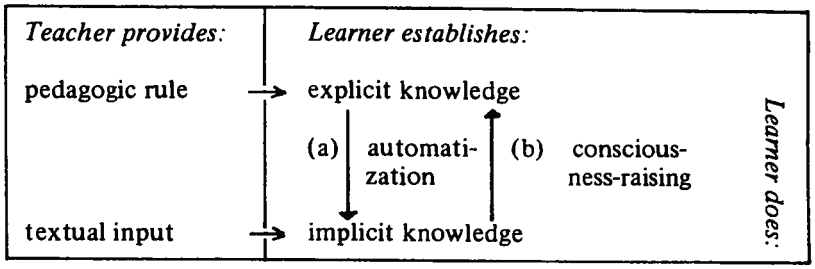
Differing learning rates and styles must also be considered. Some learn better through working it out for themselves in an inductive approach while others may prefer to have rules from the beginning. There is a need for a flexible approach which can be adapted to learners' styles and also to the particular grammar point (e.g. where there are a lot of exceptions to a rule it would obviously be more efficient to give the rule than to risk confusing and frustrating learners by asking them to work out the rule for themselves).

Learners' ability to exploit knowledge of rules is a contentious issue. However, "acquired" as opposed to "learned" knowledge or "implicit" versus "explicit" knowledge need not be viewed as dichotomies but as a continuum. Færch (1986) illustrates types of cognitive representation of rule knowledge:



(Source: Færch, C. (1986), "Rules of thumb and other teacher-formulated rules in the foreign language classroom", in (ed), Kasper, G., *Learning, Teaching and Communication in the Foreign Language Classroom*, Aarhus University Press, p.126).

Classroom activities may focus on both implicit and explicit knowledge. Consciousness-raising activities make learners more explicitly aware of unanalysed language while their explicit knowledge of structures may be automatised through opportunities for use in communicative activities. Færch illustrates the relationship between automatisation and consciousness-raising:



(Source: Færch, C. (1986), "Rules of thumb and other teacher-formulated rules in the foreign language classroom", in (ed), Kasper, G., *Learning, Teaching and Communication in the Foreign Language Classroom*, Aarhus University Press, p.127).

When the primary goal of an activity is accurate expression learners know that errors will be corrected. When the aim is principally to develop fluency they should also know and accept that errors may occur, particularly if the task makes severe demands on their developing linguistic competence. It is important that learners are not afraid to take risks, to form and test their own hypotheses. This requires a warm, supportive classroom atmosphere where all attempts at communication are encouraged and where there is a judicious balance between error tolerance and correction.

The sections which follow illustrate some aspects of a communicative approach to grammar. Ways of relating meaning and form are presented in 8.2. In 8.3 a cyclic approach is outlined as a means of gradually extending the learner's competence by presenting and exploiting a manageable amount of grammar at a time. A practical application illustrating approaches to the passive voice is described in 8.4.

A variety of communicative activities have been illustrated or described elsewhere in this document. Accordingly the examples contained in 8.5 are limited to a few exercises which may help to make routine practice activities more meaningful.

8.1.2 Teaching/learning grammar - some key questions and principles

8.1.2 (a) Some questions:

Are forms presented in a textbook because they are needed for a communicative objective and not simply because all the grammar has to be 'covered"?

Do the illustrations reflect the natural use of language in communication rather than an artificial or unnatural use in contrived situations fabricated to highlight a particular point of grammar?

Are both the formal and semantic aspects clearly highlighted so that learners can work out the relationship between meaning and form in particular contexts?

Do the examples properly illustrate the particular point (e.g. when tenses are introduced, is the aspect of tense stressed at the expense of the notional value?).

Is the grammar presented in manageable proportions, i.e. a little at a time in recurring and in new contexts (cyclic approach)?

Are differing learning styles and abilities allowed for?

Does the approach build on the learner's existing cognitive abilities and relate the unfamiliar to the familiar?

Is the type and amount of cognitive help related to the degree of difficulty of the particular grammar point (e.g. new concepts or different word order in L2 will require more explanation and practice)?

Are explanations or rules brief and simple, focusing on one point at a time?

Are there charts or reviews which clearly summarise the grammar work for learners, focusing on both forms and functions/notions?

Is there an appropriate balance between accuracy -oriented and fluency-oriented activities?

8.1.2 (b) Some principles:

The principles which apply to communicative language teaching in general are no less applicable to teaching grammar as may be seen from the following criteria suggested by teachers in a Council of Europe workshop devoted to approaches to grammar.

What to look for in communicative grammar practice materials	What to beware of in communicative grammar materials
stimulate genuine communication in natural situations; i.e. realistic or transferable situations (transferable to real life of students). ("here and now" check)	**offer no real guidance in exercises and tasks. have no natural contexts.**
invite different kinds and quality of interaction (ruling out competition), e.g. pair work, small groups, larger groups.	**favour single, unconnected sentences as opposed to longer pieces of text and utterances.**
invite collecting and pooling of data (language and rule formation) on the part of the students.	**require unnatural responses and behaviour.**
have skeleton frames that invite genuine information/ opinion plus language on the part of the students rather than gap filling	**focus on error. have misleading illustrations. invite mechanical learner adaptation instead of creative activity.**
are problem-posing and lead towards problem solving.	**assemble grammar points in a random kind of way.**

(Source: Cesaretti, F.P., (ed.), Report on Council of Europe Workshop 13, Frascati (Rome), December, 1985. *How to relate a systematic knowledge of the language system to communicative learning/teaching of English/French: Workshop for Practising Teacher Trainers.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1986).

8.2 Relating meaning and form

Where form is emphasised at the expense of meaning, as often happens in a structural approach, learners may fail to appreciate how the structures relate to communicative behaviour. In a communicative approach forms are presented and practised in context so that learners can see how they are used to convey meaning.

The two examples which follow illustrate both approaches to grammar. In example (i), which is a form-oriented approach, learners are told that they are about to study the "past progressive". The structure is explained, illustrated without a proper context and learners write meaningless sentences to 'automatise' the structure. As a result learners may fail to appreciate the notional value of the tense - because of lack of appropriate sensitising exercises, poor explanation and bad examples. They do not have the opportunity to think about and work out for themselves the way the structure is formed and may be unable to relate it to their existing knowledge about the formal operations of the target language.