

TEACHING STANDARD SIX PUPILS TO USE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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APPROACH

Any successful approach to teaching English as a second language is based on the teacher's assumptions about the value, uses and structure of the language, the learner and the classroom situation.¹ This article considers both learning problems and techniques to overcome them, and sets out systematic lessons for a first term's oral work with a Standard 6 class.

Speech is the primary means of transmitting a second language because of the organic order of learning a language: hearing, speaking, reading and writing, with all activities related to a catalyst — comprehension.² This means teachers who emphasize fluency in reading and writing sacrifice fluency in speech. Speaking is primal, whereas reading and writing are derivative and act to reinforce hearing and speech production activities. Such a scholar syndrome is really a cart before the horse approach to second language learning. What is needed is for instruction to begin with sound reproduction and units of situational dialogues with graded vocabulary which gradually incorporate reading and writing activities.

The black child is not learning a foreign language when he studies English at school; he is learning a language not his native tongue but which will become the medium of higher education and enable him to find productive employment, as well as enhance his integration into society. We must throw away the misconception that he has come to school to learn 'readin', writin' and 'rithmetic' (like his white contemporaries who have already unconsciously acquired the sounds and basic structures of their languages and are able to work towards extending and exploring the possibilities of language). The black child has come to school to learn to use English for the purposes dictated by his age, sex aptitudes and

cultural background. The second language teacher must accept these limitations to her task and willingly direct all classroom activities to the mastery of English for use in appropriate situations. The black school-leaver must be able to communicate with other educated English speakers as fluently as possible. Ideally he becomes an English-using bilingual who uses his second language outside the home as second nature.³

METHOD

An overall systematic plan for presenting English must be integrated and based on didactic principles. The lesson plans, syllabus and materials such as audio-visual aids, readers and projects are all part of the method. Method recognizes that language activity is two-directional: aural in listening — first the pupil hears and then he understands; oral in speaking — he must understand what he wants to say and then use the language. The pupil's objective is to fuse these three separate skills into a totality so that they function simultaneously. Teaching must stress what is different between the target language and the mother tongue and drill it in terms of perception and discrimination. Method recognizes that learning is cumulative — the linguistic core (the sounds, structures and vocabulary), introduced initially in Standard 5, must in successive years be repeated and built upon to raise the level of proficiency and complexity in a spiral fashion. This means materials are sequenced from the simple to the complex. The TED Syllabus for Standards 5, 6 and 7 states that the teacher's scheme of oral work must be planned for a cyclical rather than a linear progression.⁴

The teacher first determines what topics are in her pupils' circle of interest and bases language activities on them. The Soweto riots showed that black children demand the right to learn English. The teacher can manipulate this motivation in the classroom. Using a variety of techniques the teacher is able to guide pupils to correct oral responses (with humour and at a lively pace) thus reinforcing the internal motivation of the class to progress.

To begin with what is known, the teacher must determine which parts of the language core have been learnt; what has gone before is thus the point of departure for more complex activities. She involves the pupils actively by speaking as little as possible herself and providing pupils with the maximum time for oral practice.

TECHNIQUES

From the point of view of language, the possible forms and arrangements of words in phrases and sentences can be referred to as

techniques. Techniques are the available mechanical structures which support the expression of meaning. This is really a broadly based definition of grammar. Verbs of action, common nouns and other basic parts of speech are learned *before* content words, which are chosen to suit the situation presented. Appropriateness to the learner and the context to be mastered are the criteria for selecting vocabulary. Only what is functional, relevant to the situation and appropriate to the tone (register) is presented. Dialogue is the basic form of oral work because this is the way we orient ourselves in real life. Dialogue also illustrates a pattern which can be mimicked and extended from mechanical to meaningful and communicative levels.

Grammar involves the whole network of linguistic associations and rules a child forms and practises in sounds, words, phrases and sentences to get things done, find things out, convey information, get on socially, and to express his individual personality imaginatively. A second language teacher must therefore introduce children to a systematic and coherent series of activities beginning with handling language on the mechanical level of correctness and understanding.

PROBLEMS

Along with the basic difficulty of not being able to use the whole world (home, peers, community) as their language classroom, the main problem pupils face in learning English is interference from their mother tongue which affects all aspects of speech simultaneously. The ideal solution for the teacher is to learn the pupil's mother tongue to diagnose the differences. In the Transvaal this means a choice between the official school languages and Zulu, which like English is the exclusive preferred tongue. Even then the teacher's predictions are complicated by the further interference of a third factor: institutionalized South African black English whose frozen spelling and pronunciation creates more 'probe-blems' for the teacher.

Accurate pronunciation is hampered because African languages have a smaller number of vowel contrasts. English diphthongs are reduced to single vowel sounds, and consonants are not clustered together but have vowels inserted between and following them. I diagnosed this interference while correcting the spelling of 'Flecher', 'homestader' and 'seem' for 'seemed' in essays on *Shane*. The mistakes were caused by transferring a close correspondence between the sound and letter in the home language to irregular English spelling.⁵ Diagnostic pronunciation drills showed that the class could not distinguish the sounds of 'i' and 'iɪ', 'e' and 'æ', 'əɪ', and 'aɪ'. Orally 'ship' was 'sheep', 'man' was 'men'. 'Star'

was 'store' and 'stir' was 'still' until written on the board. Only then was the former grasped as a celestial body silent in the sky. The solution is not to teach pupils phonetic symbols but to encourage oral practice in making the finer English vowel distinctions through a variety of games and stimulus-response drills.

The second aspect of speech which presents pupils with problems is learning to say the content words of a sentence with force (leaving the structural words unstressed). English stresses content and action words over structural words, whereas African languages give near equal value to the pronunciation of each syllable, lengthen the penultimate syllable by an increase in volume, and use word order rather than stress to focus meaning. Single-pattern drills help correct the overstress of weak English syllables (particularly 'ə' or 'i') and heavy endings. Work with phonemes, the smallest intelligible unit of speech, must quickly be extended to longer units so that the total English stress order of precedence is learnt: sentence stress; the function of words; nouns which modify words; and words of two or more syllables.⁶ The value of this work lies as much in the pupils being able to hear stress forms, and thus meaning, as in being able to reproduce a faultless English stress pattern.

Games and dramatic exercises help pupils develop a feeling for the gradation of emphasis in English. The class is divided into four or five groups and told to display particular feelings such as annoyance, politeness, indifference, and anger through the emphasis they give to words in such statements as 'Close that door', 'I'll be there in a minute', 'Give me another helping of vegetables'. This helps pupils form appropriate emotional involvement with English and see meanings other than the plain sense of words.⁷ To demonstrate how the speaker accents words to express his meaning the class analyses the three meanings of 'Everyone likes Philemon'.⁸ Another game is to guess the questions to answers which vary only by the emphasis placed on different words. 'I bought a *red* one' is a response to the question 'which one?', 'I bought the red one' to 'who bought it?', 'I *bought* the red one' to 'what was done?' A limbering-up exercise of great fun is reciting the children's rhyme 'The house that Jack built' which forces the pupils to place stress on nouns and verbs. They practise speaking sentences on the board such as 'That's not the book I gave you, it's this one', guessing the different meanings which the changing stress implies.

Rhythm is another problem area. Normal English speech is stress-timed within a group of syllables, each group taking up the same time within a sentence. In contrast, African languages give a regular beat to each syllable and are not sensitive to regulating

the length of syllables by alternating heavy and light, slow and fast. The link between stress and rhythm is most obvious in poetry. A simple game of setting two verses next to one another and allowing pupils to guess which takes longer to recite, opens eyes and ears to the intricacies of English rhythm. For example, a comparison of the following two lines of verse shows that although the first line is three words shorter it takes a full second longer to recite:

The bare / black / cliffs / clanged / round him /

The Assyrian / came down / like the wolf / on the fold /.⁹

The following exercise is used to demonstrate to pupils how sense governs rhythm. It is written on the board and read aloud to the accompaniment of tapped out beaks.¹⁰

a GREAT	DAY
a GREATer	DAY
the GREATest	of DAYS
in the GREATest	of their DAYS

Singing the rhyme 'Skip to my Lou' trains pupils to pace the speed of delivery with the number of words in the rhyme. Pupils sing the chorus along with the teacher, and as longer verses are called out they are forced to hurry phrases of unstressed syllables to keep up with the tempo of music.

Intonation is another area where English and African languages differ. English speakers vary the familiar patterns of starting a sentence high and coming down low, ending questions with a rising tone and statements with a falling tone, or using a rise-fall-rise intonation on single words to qualify meaning. But with tonal black languages a change in tone usually means a change in meaning and certainly a change in the grammatical function of the word. Pupils first practise the regular patterns of English intonation with statements of fact and questions, and then turn statements into questions with the aid of intonation alone, without inverting words or using question words. Later the teacher tapes situational comedy dialogues where polite and impolite people order a meal at a restaurant, try to sleep in a noisy room or wait in a doctor's crowded surgery. This gives the pupils practice in using intonation patterns to express their feelings and intentions.

Home languages also interfere with pupils using structures and vocabulary correctly. 'One day came a man' can be turned into normal subject-verb-object/complement order not by learning the rule as much as by practising the pattern. Common patterns lifted from class readers are written on the board and, borrowing from the Berlitz method, 'exploded' by tracking them in phrases from

the full stop to capital letter. Pupils become eager volunteers to lead the class in this vocal game of white-washing an otherwise dull linguistic fence.

Vocabulary is more difficult to practise in oral drill even though a misused word instantly opens the speaker to ridicule. Introducing a lesson with several choice *faux-pas* often helps pupils to recall their mistakes. For a pupil to describe his mother as 'a good cooker of crumpets' or speak about 'talking the bad insult to Johannes' is clearly ludicrous. By using humour and being honest about how many English speakers in the cruel world outside judge second language speakers, the teacher gains her pupils' confidence and encourages a more alert, thinking attitude. She points out that mistakes stem not from ignorance or cultural backwardness but from a lack of opportunity to learn English at home and from interference of the mother tongue. She then goes on to familiarize pupils with different meanings of common words by pausing during the reading of set texts and explaining the meanings of a single word in various contexts. The story of the refugee David who 'embroidered' his tale until he thought it genuine is appreciated if the teacher draws attention to this extended meaning of embellishing a story.¹¹

Dramatising situational dialogues which explore the correct register of vocabulary helps pupils learn to match particular words with the contextual situation. When words in the native and target languages do not cover the same range of meaning then the pupils must learn to broaden their view of reality. Second language teachers need not apologize for moulding character. Every teacher presents an outlook on life through her choice of language. When she offers Anglo-Saxon concepts of fair play, a Puritan work ethic and polite understatement as a model, pupils then see what conventions are expected of them in the social world of English speakers.

Often it is the similar patterns of the second language which create areas of difficulty. In this case the teacher must write the similar phrases side by side, state the rules for each and bring out the contrast between the two in drills which move from mechanical to thoughtful levels. To test whether the drill encourages thought I insert a nonsense word which if parroted back indicates the drill isn't understood meaningfully.

Teacher: Where did you go yesterday? (Randburg)

Pupil 1: I went to Randburg.

Teacher: What did she say?

Pupil 2: She said she went to Randburg yesterday.

Teacher: Where did you have supper last night? (London)

Pupil 1: I had supper in London.

Teacher: Did she really say that she had supper in London last night?

Pupil 2: Yes, but she couldn't have.

The diagnosis of learning problems is a continuous process and remedial drills are only one method, however useful in the early secondary phase, of getting pupils to use patterns frequently and automatically. When the verbal context of the situation provides the stimulus for oral work boredom is reduced and skills are practised without having to think of rules.

FIRST TERM STRATEGY

It is possible to make oral work enjoyable and interesting if the pupils feel a need to use language through the setting up of situations which demand an active learning in context. Instead of squeezing out a dull correctness from comprehension passages, this strategy fosters the ability to use appropriate expressions in certain circumstances. Oral work is an area where I am not restricted by the syllabus and have flexibility to mix informal and formal activities. Buried within the format of comprehension passages, questions and vocabulary exercises of most class readers are ideas for listening and speaking activities. It is troublesome to unearth them, time-consuming to schedule them and often disruptive to execute them with large classes. But these are activities which supply plausible reasons for learning, spark interest and therefore should introduce each unit of work or theme.

Standard 6 is a transitional stage between primary and high school where any pupils seeking bursaries for higher education must achieve the ability to speak acceptable English, understand simple conversational English spoken at normal speed, comprehend written English at an appropriate level and write clear English on prescribed topics. This is the last year when a teacher has time to train for proficiency in basic skills before a literature-heavy syllabus takes over.

I plan the first unit of work around the theme of description of physical objects, spatial relationships and people, using the grammar of present tense, past tense 'ed' constructions and prepositions. The first lesson is an ice-breaker where matched coloured papers are given out. Pupils find their mates, and interview one another to obtain enough information to introduce the other to the class. I am quick to nip in the bud conversations in the mother tongue, and encourage a brisk but orderly atmosphere. The situation is not contrived on the first day of term when there are often new pupils, and it establishes the English classroom as a community for personal expression.

The second lesson is a drill where my tape recorder takes the place of laboratory apparatus. The first section consists of voicing yes/no questions for different situations.

Teacher's voice: You want to know if your classmate is interested in science.

Pupil's voice: Are you interested in science?

Pupil: (repeats question)

Pupil & voice: Are you interested in science?

Teacher's voice: You want to know if you can see your teacher after class.

Pupil's voice: Mrs Glazier, may I please see you after class?

Pupil: (repeats question)

Pupil & voice: Mrs Glazier, may I please see you after class?

Teacher's voice: You want to know if your friend is going to play soccer this term.

Pupil's voice: Are you going to play soccer this term?

Pupil: (repeats question)

Pupil & voice: Are you going to play soccer this term?

The second section requires pupils to listen to and comprehend a dialogue: as Lena describes a room to Jacob, pupils try to draw an accurate picture of it.¹² Lena sets furniture in a room of a house and puts two girls into the picture, one sitting on the back of a chair and another on her hands and knees on top of the table. She is interrupted by Jacob's comments such as 'The picture is of one room?', 'Hmm, a picture of a tree on the wall behind the table on the right', 'On the *back* of the chair?' The last thing placed is a small mouse under the table. Jacob's 'Now I understand!!!' provokes laughter and exposes the reason for the strange posture of the girls. Pupils then have a few minutes to finish their stick-figure drawings. A winning sketch is easily found by comparing the drawings for accuracy. Awarding the prize of a paperback reinforces the message that words are clues in assigning place and inferring meaning.

For the third oral lesson pupils are asked to read a sheet describing the layout of a Djagakarsa house.¹² They break into four or five discussion groups to study the text and produce a diagram of the house which is to be out on the board by a draughtsman while a spokesman directs him. Simply reading from the handout is not permitted, but the groups can follow a key to items written on the board. The Sketches, of course, vary in accuracy, but it is the oral exercise of visualizing a structure and putting the rooms into some kind of prepositional order (stimulated by team competition) which matters. The courter's bench provides added interest to the older pupils whose thoughts at seventeen naturally

turn to the opposite sex. I prompt the teller by suggesting such forms as 'there is', 'it has', and question him with 'What is between numbers 1 and 6?', but the need of the draughtsman to know where to put the rooms loosens the teller's tongue. The class then votes for the sketch most clearly representing the Djagakarsa house. I also have the option of assigning short talks on a Soweto council house before and after renovation (plans are available for reference).

The fourth lesson on reading consists of a passage on a traditional Zulu kraal describing its location, beehive huts, cattle and their significance, and the occupation of men and women, with all Zulu words underlined. A second sheet gives a bare sketch of mountainous terrain and the Hluhluwe Valley, items to place in writing and in symbols on the map, and three discussion questions on what the differences are between a Zulu hut and a Djagakarsa house, what a man from the Zulu kraal on a visit to Djagakarsa would find surprising, and how a Djagakarsa woman would like living in a Zulu kraal. This cross-cultural approach stimulates discussion, helps pupils view their cultural position from a new perspective and makes learning-by-doing fun.

The final lesson on writing is motivated by telling the pupils their headmaster wants them to write a description of their campus for a visitor's guide. They are to study a map of their school while listening to a model commentary, but not taking notes:

The school stands in pleasant rural surroundings about four kilometres from ... The campus is built on a piece of land sloping down from the ...

The focal point of the school is the outdoor area where pupils gather for devotions, assemblies and social functions. This amphitheatre is called *Assembly* and is built of brick in the shape of a horseshoe and surrounded by tall fir trees.

The new centre of activity, the library, is being constructed at the foot of the hill, opposite the Principal's house and across from the entrance gates.

I tell the pupils this is not a memory exercise, and we work a paragraph plan out orally which presents the details of the school in logical sequence (the relation of the campus to its surroundings, the important and interesting buildings, other facilities, conclusion). I point out that the present tense is used, and allow 25 minutes for pupils to write an accurate description which is later read and graded.

During the term I follow the prescribed reader's plan for teaching grammatical patterns, vocabulary and idioms. I develop dialogue

situations wherever possible: polite and informal introductions; telephone conversations to arrange school outings; sports reporting, using newspaper clippings and diagrams of exciting matches; reports on the appearance of favourite singing stars; acting as tourist guides in a mealie factory, and reconstructing the processes at the mill with stem plus *-ed* verbs; question and answer sessions on the advantages of city vs. country life; discussions on the differences between the film *Shane* shown at school and the revised, intermediate version the class has read. This discussion leads the pupils into exploring the nature of fiction (are the characters real or imaginary), and the different points of view of an author and a film director (Shaefer presents the human dilemma of a gunslinger who is both safe and dangerous, whereas Stevens trains his camera on the realism of family life in the early West).

The prescribed book *Shane* appeals strongly to pupils growing into manhood and womanhood. It is a good choice even though not set in a familiar locality. I use the plot as a point of departure for newspaper interviews of pupils playing the roles of homesteaders, townspeople and ranchers who discuss whether Shane was a coward for not fighting Chris at their first confrontation. Dramatic scenes are then selected from the second half of the book, such as Stark Wilson Kills Ernie Wright, Fletcher Visits Starret's Farm, Shane Puts on his Gun, and Shane Against Wilson and Fletcher. Pupils are assigned to groups and decide on matters of casting, staging, props, sound effects and display of appropriate emotion. After group rehearsals a reading performance is given. Playback of sections of the tape then inspires essays on respective topics: 'Does Stark Wilson kill Ernie Wright in self-defence or cold-blooded murder?', 'Why does Starret refuse Fletcher's offer?', 'What is the real Shane?' and 'How does Shane teach Bobby to grow up?' Standard 6 pupils lack the skills for making general statements and supporting their arguments with relevant details, but the experience of acting in a scene now enables them to make aesthetic and moral judgments about the action and issues of the book.

Even though many useful language games have cultural bias about which an African in the Transvaal has no terms of reference (such as the game *Lost at Sea* where pupils rank the items they would take from their sailboat for survival in the ocean), there are others which stimulate problem solving and oral activity. The old riddle about the farmer who wants to move a bushel of corn, a fox and a goose to the other side of a river in a small boat without his possessions being eaten, uses known physical objects and stimulates pupils to find an oral solution to the correct order of transport.

Striking pictures clipped from magazines and newspapers are superb graphic aids for the discussion of literature, as well as stimuli for substitution drills and oral descriptions. For example, pictures selected on the broad theme of the diversity of people are examined for insight into character (heroes and villains). The rhythm of Oswald Mtshali's poem *Boy on a Swing* appeals as song and a real life situation. Its subject, a black boy brought up in a township, elicits emotional responses which are therapeutic as well as aesthetic, and answers complaints that the second language syllabus is preoccupied with a 'bushveld-wildebees complex' and not related to life.¹³ Cartoons are roneoed with their bubble captions erased, and pupils are asked to replace the dialogue with experiments of their own in different registers of talk (between peers, with parents, and with professional people).

African folk tales are excellent sources of oral literature which do not sentimentalize nature but emphasize man in all his moods, dealing with the joys of daily life, and loyalties and duties well performed and properly rewarded. The Hottentot tale of how the lion got water for all the animals, and the Ashanti tale of the spider and his plate which explains how children were first whipped, are on a Caedmon tape. They are short and present another model for spoken English (in this case Eartha Kitt's voice). These stories lead into class projects on creative writing where pupils collect pictures and information on favourite animals, and work out fables and stories with moral endings. As an incentive to collect stories and poems, pupils record their favourites on tape. Poems with lyric appeal, such as D.H. Lawrence's *Mountain Lion* for advanced classes and Vachel Lindsay's *Daniel*, are suited for choral recitation by groups the teacher assigns to sections reflecting the natural movement of the poem.

The English teacher is the pupil's most important model, enabling him to remedy his speech problems by imitation and to learn to speak precisely and meaningfully with other educated South Africans. An approach which develops Standard Six pupils into bilingual users of English should ideally include the elements I have outlined in this article: a knowledge of the first languages of the pupils; encouragement of pupils and respect for language; drilling by contrasts, which minimizes the interference between the home and target languages in the areas of pronunciation, stress, rhythm, intonation, structure and vocabulary; lessons which allot maximum time for oral practice and ring the changes with a variety of didactic techniques; the cyclical introduction of grammatical themes in increasing complexity; beginning with the spoken word and not written comprehension exercises; building emotional associations with language into the learning situation; providing real situations designed to make pupils experience a need to use English. Success in these areas will help pupils use their adopted

language as a means of continuing their education, and as a mould for meeting the world outside school as individuals confident of their language skills.

NOTES

1. The author teaches English to 48 black children now in Std 6, and spent five months teaching an intensive course of 'Live-In English' to Chinese national servicemen in Singapore.
2. Leslie Proctor, 'Developing Aural/Oral Skills in Second Language Learning', *Crux*, 37 (Nov. 1968).
3. Brian Tiffen, *A Language in Common* (London: Longman, 1969), p. 15.
4. Transvaal Education Department, *English Second Language Syllabus for Stds 5, 6 and 7* (Pretoria, 1972), p. 6.
5. Tiffen, p. 26.
6. J.A. Bright and G.P. McGregor, *Teaching English as a Second Language* (London: Longman, 1977), p. 190.
7. Bright and McGregor, p. 30.
8. Randolph Duirk, *The Use of English* (London: Longman, 1968), p. 319.
9. Bright and McGregor, p. 187.
10. Bright and McGregor, p. 188.
11. Anne Holm, *I Am David* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 66.
12. Material prepared by the Language Centre of Nanyang University, Singapore.
13. Patricia McMagh, 'What are We Going to Teach? And How?', *Crux*, 47 (Aug. 1967).