An Introduction to English Language Teaching
Second Year 2020-2021
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First Semester
Week 2:
Lecture 4:
Teaching Language as Interaction among People

Introduction

Language learning and teaching can be an exciting and refreshing interval in the day for students and teacher. There are so many possible ways of stimulating communicative interaction, yet, all over the world, one still finds classrooms where language learning is a tedious, dry-as-dust process, devoid of contact with the real world in which language use is as natural as breathing.

Wilga Rivers

How do EFL/ESL teachers provide opportunities for students to interact in English?

William Littlewood suggested a framework for teachers who aim at having an interactive classroom. He suggests that lessons begin with (precommunicative activities). Such activities will help the teachers to isolate specific elements of knowledge or skill that comprise communicative ability, giving students opportunities to practice them without having to fully engage in communicating meaning. Littlewood discusses two types of precommunicative activities: Structural and Quasi-communicative. Structural activities focus on the grammar and vocabulary of English, while quasi-communicative activities focus on how language is used to communicate meaning. Quasi-communicative activities are often introduced in the form of dialogues or simple activities in which students interact under highly controlled conditions.

Precommunicative Activities

Littlewood emphasizes that precommunicative activities often appear in the form of a structural practice and they are designed by the teacher so that the language items students had recently learnt could be practised in a meaningful way. The teacher prompts the students to use these forms according to his instructions and the main aim of using such activities is to equip the students with necessary linguistic forms for later communicative activity.

Structural VS Quasi-communicative Activities

The following is a proposed teaching scenario employing both structural and quasi-communicative activities.

Class: Beginning Level

Goal: How to ask about food likes and dislikes

Structural Activities: 1. the use of (Do) in yes/no questions
2. Vocabulary building

Quasi-communicative activity: Answer yes/no questions

The teacher should first start with structural activities. He should start teaching a grammatical item that is related to the goal of the lesson. In this scenario, the grammatical item is the use of the auxiliary verb (do) in yes/no questions.

Step 1: Give several questions, such as:

- Do you like (to eat) fish?
- Do you like (to eat) apples?
- Do you like (to eat) ice-cream?

Structural VS Quasi-communicative Activities

Step 2: Vocabulary-building activity

   The teacher uses a large picture of food items and a list of the names of these food items. The names are matched to the pictures. The students are given the chance to read the names of food items at loud. The teacher asks the students to copy the names while drawing their pictures of each item.

   Later, the teacher moves to Quasi-communicative activities

- The teacher holds up a picture of each item and asks "Do you like (to eat) cake?"
- The students shout "Yes" or "No"
- The teacher hands the student a dialogue, he reads it and asks the students to repeat after him
- The teacher asks the students to say the dialogue in pairs

What makes a classroom interactive?

There are at least five related factors that contribute to making interactive classrooms interactive:

1. Reducing teacher centerality: students should be given the freedom to initiate interaction among themselves and with the teacher. While observing, the teacher maintains control of what goes on in the classroom.
2. Appreciating the uniqueness of individuals. Teachers should understand and accept each student as he or she is. Teachers should be sensitive to each individual's background and affective state.
3. Providing chances for the students to express themselves in meaningful ways.
4. Providing opportunities for the students to negotiate meanings with each other and with the teacher.
5. Giving the students the choices in relation to what they say and they say it.