

TEACHING A GRAMMAR STRUCTURE BASED ON COMMUNICATIVE PRINCIPLES

(1) LANGUAGE PRESENTATION (can be done in different ways):

Dialog presentation

- interaction between speakers should be realistic
- setting and role relationship between speakers should be indicated
- target structure should occur naturally and represent the one that native speakers would use most frequently in that situation/setting (unmarked form); *the dialog should not be a vehicle for the structure!*
- if possible, have native speakers perform the dialog and tape-record it (use as listening activity before the students see the transcript)

OR

Perceptual Frame

- find authentic material or design material that contains all the information necessary to stimulate short exchanges (between teacher and student/student and student) in which the target structure is used
- a number of structures can be elicited and practiced with authentic or carefully constructed perceptual frames (e.g. a to-do-list can serve to present the present perfect; an office catalog can serve to present count and non-count nouns)
 - use a perceptual frame (either authentic or made-to-look authentic material) that naturally gives rise to the target structure (e.g. a grocery list can be used to present count/non-count nouns, but would be ill placed for presentation of past tense forms)

OR

Elicited/Modeled Response

- engage the students in short responsive conversational exchanges in which they realistically focus on the meaning of what is said, but which also prompt them to use or hear the new structure (e.g. in order to model past tense, the teacher might ask students about what they did yesterday/last weekend/etc.)
- this has to be carefully scripted if you want to target specific words and/or avoid others (e.g. only regular past tense verbs, but not irregular ones)
- a number of structures can be elicited this way, often supplemented by the use of realia (e.g. when presenting mass nouns)

(2) HIGHLIGHTING OF STRUCTURE

If the structure is embedded in a DIALOG:

- exploit the dialog and have the students discover instances of the target structure and underline them - transfer several instances of the target structure out of the dialog to see in isolation (on the blackboard or OHP)

If PERCEPTUAL FRAME or ELICITATION:

- redo the presentation phase in "slow motion" so you can focus the students on the new structure and isolate it on the blackboard or OHP
- have ss infer a rule for the structure themselves in pair or group work (you might have to supply some "clues" that help students infer the rule)
- explain the rule, possibly use blackboard (no matter if the students figured it out or not); then students can take a look at the explanation in the textbook

(3) CONTROLLED PRACTICE: FOCUS ON FORM AND ACCURACY

- provide exercises that limit the ss' attention to the target structure so that it can be accurately produced; ss answers should be predictable
- exercises should be meaningful and realistic
(no isolated, unconnected practice sentences); provide realistic/unifying context
- make sure that the exercise is not simply a mechanical transformation where ss could get the correct form without considering the meaning of the whole sentence !
- provide for pair or group practice wherever possible
- during pair/group work, walk around the classroom and check students' work and help if needed (you might have to go back to the highlighting phase)

Sample Activities for Controlled Language Practice:

- question-answer display* (teacher knows response or has limited set of expectations for appropriate response)
- recognition* (ss identify target structure, but do not produce language)
- identification* (ss identify and produce specific target form/structure)
- language drill* (involving fixed patterns of language focus)
- meaningful drill* (regulated sequence and form of responses, but response choices are meaningful)

(4) SEMI-CONTROLLED PRACTICE: MOVING AWAY FROM FOCUS ON FORM/ACCURACY TO FOCUS ON MEANING/COMMUNICATION

- move toward less controlled exercises and provide stronger focus on meaning component
- give students an element of *choice*
- make sure that exercises model realistic tasks and realistic language use (i.e. is this what native speakers would do and say) and provide unifying context
- if possible, provide for exchange of personal information

Sample Activities for Semi-Controlled Language Practice:

- question-answer, referential* (teacher does not know ss response in advance)
- information transfer* (ss transform information from one mode to another)
- cued narrative/half dialog* (ss produce language following verbal/ written/ pictorial cues provided throughout the activity)
- unscrambling tasks* (ss assemble a dialog/story/etc., by putting the relevant language pieces in order)
- information exchange* (short information gap tasks to practice the target structure)
- preparation* (ss plan, prepare, rehearse for a later activity)

(5) SPEAKING ACTIVITY: FOCUS ON MEANING/ COMMUNICATION

- activity should allow for genuine information exchange in more unrehearsed fashion
- the new structure should be an integral part of the speaking activity, but should not be the main focus, so that attention is shifted away from the target structure onto a genuine exchange of messages among students
- activity needs to be adequately prepared
- explain purpose of the activity (best at end; otherwise ss focus on structure too much)

Sample Activities for Speaking/Communicative Activities:

- a) *information gap tasks* (longer, extended versions of semi-controlled info gaps; ss should focus on social protocol of the entire situation)
- b) *opinion gap tasks* (ss engage in cooperatively solving a problem)
- c) *role-play/dramasimulation* (ss freely act out roles and situations after initial cues, often simulating real-life actions and experiences)
- d) *games* (ss produce and use language in a setting of a language game)
- e) *interviews* (ss obtain information from each other)
- f) *discussion* (ss discuss specified topic; sides may or may not be assigned)

(6) CLOSURE ACTIVITY

(7) HOMEWORK:

Learning tasks that extend beyond the class hour

(8) EVALUATION

How can you determine whether or not your lesson objectives have been accomplished?