# Teaching the Skills and Components of Language

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Listening: Features

- Informal and spontaneous language is present (it is not rehearsed or recited).
- It is broken into short chunks since people take turns to speak.
- Pronunciation is not standard.
- Vocabulary is colloquial.
- Utterances are not grammatical (prescribed).
- There are unintelligible bits.
- It is redundant and it is heard just once.
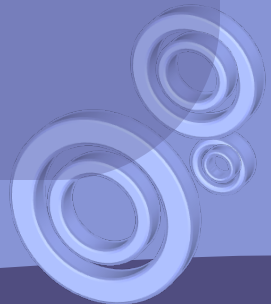
Listening: Problems & Tasks

- Ss want to understand every single word.
- Ss can't understand natural native speech.
- Ss need to hear things more than once
- Ss find it hard to keep up (overload of info).
- Ss get tired (long, uninteresting passages).

Tasks: Ticking off items, T/F, detecting mistakes, cloze, guessing definitions, skimming, scanning, note-taking, summarizing, interpreting.

Listening: Microskills

Used for assessment, but also for teaching

- Discriminate among the sounds of English
- Retain chunks of language in short-term memory
- Distinguish word boundaries
- Recognize parts of speech
- Process speech containing pauses, errors, corrections, and other performance variables
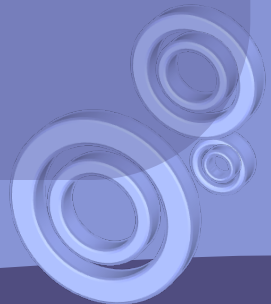
Listening: Macroskills

- Infer situations, participants, goals using real-world knowledge

- From events, ideas, and so on, predict outcomes, infer links and connections between events, detect such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information.

- Use facial, kinesic, body language and other nonverbal cues to decipher meanings

Speaking: Features & problems

- S-S interaction is present.

- Everybody is engaged on the activity.

- People have a reason to speak.

- Language is intelligible and useful.

- The "mediocrity rule" is at work.

- People have nothing to say.

- Ss use the L1.

- Some people take over the discussion.

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Speaking: Possible solutions

- Use group work to increase interaction in a limited amount of time.

- Adapt the activity language to Ls' level.

- Use interesting topics FOR YOUR Ss.

- Provide clear directions repeatedly before the task.

- Keep Ss speaking the target language.

- Have pre and post speaking activities that provide Ss vocabulary and a frame to work.
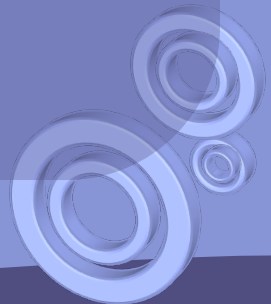
Speaking: Tasks

- Describing pictures

- Find picture differences

- Create a shopping list

- Solving a problem

- Telling jokes, describing, giving a short talk, arguing, role play (cards), jigsaw.

**Whatever you choose to do, INTERACTION is key.**

Speaking: Microskills

- Produce chunks of language

- Produce English stress patterns

- Use an adequate number of lexical units to accomplish pragmatic purposes

- Express a particular meaning in different grammatical forms

Speaking: Macroskills

- Accomplish communicative functions according to situations, participants and goals
- Use appropriate styles, registers, redundancies, pragmatic conversation rules, floor-keeping, interrupting and other sociolinguistic features in face-to-face conversations.
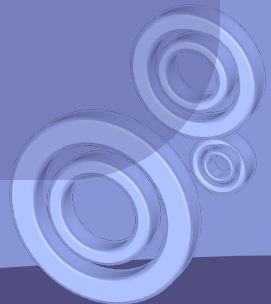
Speaking: Macroskills

- Convey facial features, kinesics, body language and other nonverbal clues along with verbal language

- Develop and use a battery of speaking strategies, such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing, accurately assessing how well your interlocutor is understanding you.
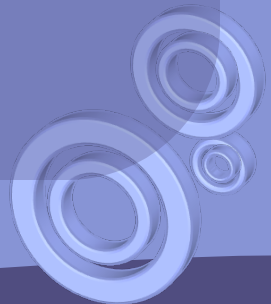
Reading: Features & Tasks

"The palgish flester gollined begrunt the bruck."

- Begin reading <u>AFTER</u> Ls have knowledge of the spoken language.

- Teach common clusters (the, she, this, are)

Tasks: Pre-question Ls have to answer, give a title, summarize, continue the story, gapped text, mistakes in the text, comparison, responding to a provocative text, represent the content (coloring, drawing, map).

Reading: Effective Strategies

- Ss read fairly fast, Ss do not stop to look up every other word in the dictionary.

- Ss pay attention only to important elements like nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

- Ss think ahead, hypothesize, predict.

- Ss are aware of a clear purpose for reading.

- Ss use different strategies for different types of texts (articles, jokes, letter, headings).

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Reading: Microskills

- Discriminate the disctinctive graphemes and orthographic patterns of English

- Process writing at an efficient rate of speed to suit the purpose.

- Recognize a core of words, and interpret order patterns and their significance

- Recognize cohesive devices in written discourse and their role in signaling the relationship between clauses.

Reading: Macroskills

- Recognize the communicative functions of written texts according to form and purpose

- Infer context that is not explicit by using background knowledge

- Distinguish between literal and implied meanings

- Detect culturally specific references and interpret them in a context of the appropriate cultural schemata

Writing: Features

- Writing is permanent, explicit, dense, detached in time and space (Gouin, Savignon)

- It is carefully planned and organized.

- It is slowly produced and standard language is used

- It is a learnt skill (i.e., we need explicit instruction to learn to write)
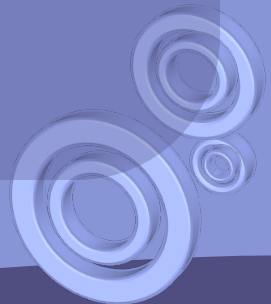
Writing: Tasks

- Write a report on a book you just read.
- Write a review of a book you enjoyed.
- Write an instruction sheet for something you know how to do well
- Describe a situation when you were disappointed/afraid/surprised/relieved…
- Write an answer to or a letter of complaint.
- Read a newspaper piece and write a similar one.
- Listen to a piece of music and write about it.

Writing: Microskills

- Produce graphemes and orthographic patterns of English

- Produce an acceptable core of words and use appropriate word order patterns

- Use acceptable grammatical systems

- Use cohesive devices in written discourse
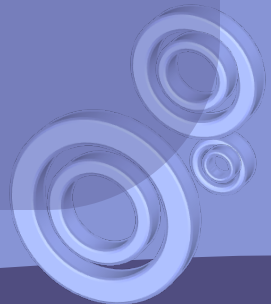
Writing: Macroskills

- Use the rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse

- Appropriately accomplish the communicative functions of written texts according to form and purpose

- Distinguish between literal and implied meanings when writing

- Develop strategies such as assessing the audience's interpretation, writing fluently, using paraphrases, synonyms, asking for and using feedback

Components or sub-skills: Vocabulary

Vocabulary is composed by:

- Pronunciation and spelling

- Grammar

- Collocation

- Denotation, connotation

- Appropriateness and meaning relationships.

All these aspects have to be taught <u>in context</u>. Practicing or teaching decontextualized words is <u>useless</u> in the 21st century approaches.

Vocabulary: presenting new items

Teachers can use one or many of these ways:

- Concise definition

- Example

- Detailed description

- Illustration

- Demonstration (mime, gestures)

- Context

- Opposites or synonyms

- Translation

Grammar Approaches: Focus on FormS

- *Focus on FormS:* traditional. The L2 is divided into segments and presented one item at a time in a sequence ("easy" to "difficult"). Ss are supposed to master each discrete item.

Tasks*:* explicit grammar rules, repetition of models, memorization of dialogs, explicit negative feedback, display questions.

There is no communicative use.
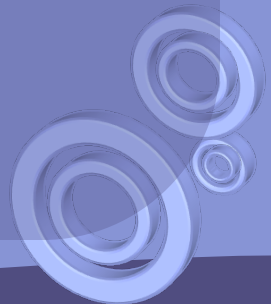
Problems with Focus on FormS

- Teaching too much, little learning, no needs analysis, poor T input, artificial/useless materials.

- It ignores research findings, sees language as accumulative

- Ls are not considered in this view, what you teach = what Ls learn is wrong

- Classes are useless resulting in demotivation, no attendance and boredom

- Most Ts use it because grammar explanations are easy and safe for them

Grammar Approaches: Focus on Meaning

- *Focus on Meaning:* responsive approach. Ls and learning, not the L2 are the starting points of teaching. There is no instruction.

Tasks: comprehensible samples of L2 in the form of CBI lessons since Grammar is considered to be learned best incidentally and implicitly through communication.

Problems with Focus on Meaning

- Simple L2 exposure does not guarantee acquisition of that L2

- Immersion program Ls are "far from native – like, particularly with respect to grammatical competence" (Swain, 1991). Salience and negative feedback seem to be needed to show what is ungrammatical.

- Comprehensible input is necessary, but not sufficient for L2 acquisition.

Grammar Approaches: Focus on Form

Latest approach. It refers to how Ls' attention is drawn to linguistic elements in contexts they arise incidentally in lessons focused on communication. Noticing is introduced and elements are made salient.

Tasks: induction of rules, giving meaningful, authentic material, task-based discovery of rules and posterior conclusions by T, negotiation of meaning, consciousness-raising tasks.

Grammar Practice

Ts can move from controlled to free practice:

- Awareness (find a structure in discourse)
- Controlled drills (follow a model and copy it)
- Meaningful drills (find info following a model)
- Free sentence composition (cues)
- Discourse composition (oral task)
- Free discourse (show and tell, presentations, demonstrations, discussions)

References

Taken and adapted from:

Brown, H.D. (2008). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. White Plains: Prentice Hall Regents.

Ur, P. (2012). *A Course in language teaching: theory and practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.