

## From Module 1 Unit 1

### The Communicative Approach

Many teachers of English around the world today would claim that they use the Communicative Approach in their teaching, and this also forms the basis for most of the course books now available on the market. For this reason, this approach will be continually returned to in the course, supported whenever necessary by techniques and ideas from the other approaches discussed above. Teaching in the modern TESOL classroom tends these days to be eclectic, selecting whatever is effective while rejecting slavish adherence to a single approach or methodology – this is the approach that we would encourage you to adopt.

Essentially, communicative teaching attempts to provide the learner with a solid purpose for using particular language and to this end the idea of a **task** has been introduced as a teaching strategy. We could define a *task* as a piece of classroom work in which the learners are required to communicate by understanding, manipulating and producing *meanings* in the target language rather than simply practising the *form* alone. A *communicative task* should consist of:

1. a **goal**; that is, what the teacher expects the learners to be able to do after completing the task - this might be, for example, being able to use a particular verb tense correctly, making an arrangement or appointment with someone, filling out an official form or writing an invitation
2. some sort of **input**; this could be in the form of a specific reading text like a questionnaire, a newspaper article or the operating instructions for a TV; similarly, it could be a piece of listening, such as a radio discussion on a contentious issue, one side of a telephone conversation or a dialogue
3. an interesting and motivating **activity** (or **activities**); this will be directly related to the goal and the input – so from the input we might obtain the following activities in the classroom:

- using a questionnaire to ask a partner about habits or preferences
- extracting the main details from an article to recreate the journalist's original interview questions
- explaining to a partner how to set up a TV
- listening to a discussion as a model for a similar role play
- completing the other side of a 'one-sided' telephone conversation
- talking about your attitudes/beliefs.

In the teacher's lesson plan, the goal, input and student activities will be clearly stated. Here is an example:

Goal	Input	Activity
To ask for and give directions around a town	a. A map showing the streets of a town b. A taped example of native speakers giving and receiving some directions	a. Reading a map b. Asking for and giving directions

Before the activity begins, the teacher will perhaps pre-teach (i.e. explicitly teach before the task itself) useful new vocabulary to assist with the understanding of the taped material. Since the activity (in the real world) is likely to take place between two people, and we are trying to make the task as realistic and motivating as possible, the learners' roles will be as conversational partners; the interaction is therefore **pair work**. During the task, the teacher will be listening in or 'monitoring' the activity to listen out for repeated errors, and ensuring that the task is being carried out in an acceptable way. You will notice that such classroom work needs the teacher to step back to some degree from the learners to give them the space to practise.

The table above is just one example of a range of information gap activities that characterise the communicative approach and have proved to be very useful as a teaching/learning tool. They are also popular with students who often feel that they are starting to use the language as a native speaker would. An information gap activity describes any activity where students do not have all the information they need to

complete a task or solve a problem, and the task can only be completed by communicating with each other. For example, students might need to decide how to travel to a destination but one student has a rail timetable and the other has a bus timetable. Neither can see the other's timetable but they must try to arrange a time/manner of travel that is convenient for them both. Another example would be one student describing a picture or abstract pattern to a second student, who then has to try to draw the same pattern on their own sheet of paper. Their success is reflected in the degree of similarity between the two drawings at the end of the activity.

<b>Task 4 *</b>		
<b>Look at this table and complete the activity section.</b>		
<b>Goal</b>	<b>Input</b>	<b>Activity</b>
Giving instructions	a list of instructions (not in the correct order) for operating a telephone call box	
Refusing politely	a series of small illustrations plus a number of examples of how to refuse politely	
Making comparisons	two pictures (one for each student) with six or more differences	

Very broadly, there are five task types, all designed to generate a lot of learner talk which the teacher can exploit in the classroom; these are:

### **Making lists**

This often involves drawing on the learners' own knowledge and experiences through *brainstorming*. The learners, in pairs, groups or as a class, pool the information that they have on a topic to create a list, or lists, which might then form the basis for the second activity.

### **Ordering items**

Learners either sequence or categorise items according to a guiding principle e.g. time sequence, personal values, headings etc.

### **Comparing**

The learners try to find similarities or differences between versions of data or pictures supplied by the teacher.

### **Solving problems**

These cover logic puzzles and real-life problems; they are highly motivating and tend to generate a good deal of conversation and/or controversy.

## **From Module 1 Unit 2**

### **'Good' teachers**

We all have memories of the good teachers we met at school, and of course the less competent teachers. There is an old adage about teachers being born not made, but it is not true of teachers any more than it is of computer programmers or accountants. Of course people have a particular interest in a particular job, but that is only the start of the process. Teaching, just like programming, is a highly professional job and all good teachers go on learning and developing their professional skills throughout their professional lives. However, there do seem to be certain personality qualities which many people would agree are fundamental to producing a 'good' teacher. Try the following two tasks.

#### **Task 1 \***

**Make a list of the qualities that you think a teacher should have. When you've finished, ask yourself how many of the qualities the teacher was born with and how many skills the teacher had to learn.**

When you have finished Task 1 have a look at the notes in the feedback section at the end of this unit. Then try Task 2.

### **Task 2 \***

**We can all recognise good teachers, even when we're young students. Make two lists:**

- **If you're a student, how can you spot a good teacher?**
- **If you're a teacher, how can you spot a good teacher in your school?**

**When you've finished, compare the two lists.**

Having done these two exercises, look at the feedback at the end of this unit and compare your list with the ideas that you find there. Perhaps your lists contain excellent ideas that were not found in the feedback notes. Can you think of a teacher in your past who has managed to fulfil all the qualities/skills that you listed? It would be surprising if you could! The best that most teachers can do is to try to achieve as many 'good' teaching characteristics as possible and then continue working on the others as part of a self-development program. However, there are possibly two basic qualities in a teacher that help to create a positive learning environment:

1. a teacher should respect the learners at all times.
2. a teacher should try to empathise with the learners' position and look at the situation from their point of view.

### **The students' and teacher's expectations**

Classes of students vary from region to region and country to country. This might seem rather a mundane thing to say, but it is very important in terms of both the students' and the teacher's *expectations* of what will happen in the classroom. You cannot assume that your expectations of the classroom will be the same as the learners' expectations.

What does this mean in practice? In some cultures, students are expected to be vocal and pro-active in the learning process; in other cultures, such as Japan and Korea, learners are expected to be silent, passive recipients of knowledge. A class in Brazil or Norway or Spain, by contrast, is likely to be far more noisy and active, and the students are far more likely to ask questions; whether that means they will learn more is another question. In some cultures, silence is taken as a sign of respect and a willingness to

learn; in other cultures it is seen as boredom and a refusal to participate. In some cultures, asking a question is seen as disrespectful, challenging and inappropriate; in others asking a question is seen as an important sign of students taking responsibility for their own learning, and something to be welcomed. It is important that you are aware of the environment in which you are working and don't judge the students on the basis of your own cultural background.

The social foundations on which the school operates may also be very different from your own experiences. Some may be based on authority and punishment while others may be based on rewards. A third type of institution may base itself on motivating individuals, often with reference to the all-important needs of the group/community. Of course, you may well find that your institution cannot be placed precisely in any one of these categories, and it may even exhibit all three in different ways. Nevertheless, the social structure of your institution will pre-determine the learners' expectations of you and the way they expect you to behave. In some situations this may be a problem; for example, where punishment is an integral part of the educational process, and where you may find yourself unwilling to accept the local norms. In other situations, you may find the students far livelier than you are used to, and your teaching style may have to be modified to respond to this. Complete Task 3 and then check the feedback notes at the end of the unit, and remember to check it after you have completed each new task

**Task 3 \***

**Think about how your teaching style might differ when you are teaching a) a class of 10 Japanese students and b) a lively class of 40 Spanish students. Average age of both sets of students is about 15 years old.**

It may take some time to balance your teaching style and your view of the learning process, with the expectations of the students, and there may have to be adjustments on both sides.

What about your expectations of your *own* role in the classroom? Teachers, in general, tend to fall into two main categories. Firstly, those who see the learner as the recipient of information that the teacher, as the *knower*, has to provide; they see the learner's role as

relatively passive. They tend to accept the need for minor punishments as an incentive to learning. On the other hand, there are the teachers who see learning as a process that requires the active commitment of the students. They try to avoid punishment, relying on the students' interest in the work to keep them out of trouble. These teachers see themselves more as guides than controllers, and so they seek to maintain discipline through persuasion and by tapping into the students' basic good nature. Whatever your basic approach to teaching, your style of teaching will, of course, vary to some degree depending on whether you are teaching eight adult learners in a language school or 50 boisterous teenagers in a secondary school.

## From Module 1 Unit 3

### Learning the grammar of our native language

Young children learn a language in a very different way from adults. There are many reasons for this. When they are born, their brains are not patterned for any particular language so that any child is able to learn any language in whichever language community they happen to be brought up. This ability to learn a language *quickly* and without a noticeable accent remains with all children until perhaps the age of eleven, after which it becomes more difficult and there is more likelihood of the child having an accent. There are many examples of children living in one country to the age of about four and then moving to a new country where they very quickly forget their mother tongue and learn a second language to native speaker competence level.

Young children are surrounded by language from the moment they are born. Even as tiny babies, their parents continually talk to them when they are not sleeping, often repeating the same words and phrases over and over again. *Who's a good boy? Yes, you are! Yes, you are! You're a lovely boy! Yes, you are!* This helps the young child to learn patterns of language as well as accent and intonation.

The speech of a young child is rarely corrected even if it is full of errors. The parents are constantly supportive and encouraging and communication is all important. A two year old child who says *Daddy drived car in road* won't have their grammar corrected because the parents will be very happy to hear the child's language developing and will

be praised and encouraged to say more. In fact, children will be constantly encouraged to communicate in every way and it is the *communication* which will be the important element, not the accuracy. This encouragement of young children can be contrasted with the constant *correction* that adults or older children at secondary school are subjected to when they try to learn a language.

Without being taught, children are able to learn the rules of the language. When it comes to language their brains are able to spot patterns and rules and apply these rules to new words when they hear them for the first time. The little girl above said *Daddy driv* because her brain had sorted out that the regular ending for past tense verbs was *-ed* so she naturally applied the same rule to a new verb. She knew that we say *walk-walked* and *jump-jumped* and *like-liked* so when she heard the word *drive* she naturally assumed that it would follow the same pattern. In this case, *drive* is irregular and she got it wrong. However, as far as her parents were concerned, they were simply very pleased that she was saying something new and her speech was developing. They understood exactly what she wanted to say; they didn't care at all about an incorrectly formed past tense!

Children are constantly faced with situations where they need, and want, to communicate. In fact, they are *desperate* to communicate, and this is a significant spur to the development of language.

Young children learn most of their language through play. They never have to sit down and *learn* an aspect of the language. The language comes to them as they explore the world around them (mainly through play) and the need to communicate becomes more urgent.

Young children can easily learn three or more languages at the same time if they are in the right circumstances. A child with a French mother and a German father, living in England, can learn all three languages at the same time if the parents use their own first language with the child, and English is used with friends outside the house. There is some evidence that the child will be slightly slower to develop in some skills at an early stage, but this will soon be overcome, and in the right circumstances, the child will be fluent in all three languages and know when, and with whom, to use them too.

**Task 4 \***

**Think about how adults learn a language. How does this differ from how a young child learns a language? In what ways is it more difficult for adults?**

**Thinking about grammar**

You probably have memories of being confronted by grammar lessons at school; the memorising of irregular verbs and different endings, confusing grammatical terminology and so on. You probably met this kind of situation while you were learning a foreign language, perhaps French, possibly German. There is, however, a good chance that you never looked at the grammar of English in any depth. So although you may have some idea of how to make the 'past tense' or what a 'plural noun' looks like, you will perhaps be unable to explain in a precise way how they are formed and precisely when and how they are used. In a *formal* sense, then, you may not perhaps understand English grammar. But you would certainly have no problem in recognising \* 'old a cat house our by goed' (the asterisk denotes an ungrammatical sentence) as being grammatically unacceptable and 'it would've been easier to telephone' as acceptable English despite its grammatical complexity.

A learner of English, on the other hand, may have a much better grasp of the grammatical rules and may even be able to articulate them quite precisely, because they have been repeatedly exposed to the language of grammatical terms and overt explanations of the rules by teachers and course books. But, unlike you, they are likely to have difficulty continually producing grammatically error-free language. Our task here is to bring your level of grammatical knowledge up to that of your learners to enable you to handle the presentation of new structures and the explanations that you may be faced with.

**Task 5**

**It might be useful to stop at this point and think about your own previous experiences of learning a language. Consider any language that you were exposed to at school/university and note down some of the problems you faced**

**in learning it, the ways in which the teacher presented it and the terminology that was used. You may want to think about learning new words, the script, the pronunciation, the concept of gender and particularly tricky grammatical points, among other things.**

There are of course no right or wrong answers to this task. Its purpose is to help you realise the complexities and potential problems facing people learning the grammar of English by examining your own past experiences of other languages. Some of the more general difficulties that you listed for your learning experiences are very likely the same as those for people learning English. However, there are likely to be more specific 'English-related' problems which will differ depending on the mother tongue of the learner.

For example, one frequently occurring problem for learners of English is how to use the **articles** – *the, a/an* – accurately. Articles in many European languages, e.g. French and German, are used in situations where they would not be required in English and so learners may tend to **overgeneralise** the use of English articles giving sentences like: *\*the rain is necessary for all the living things*. In contrast to this, there are many languages (Japanese and Russian for example) that do not have articles at all, so this will be a new concept for learners of English coming from those countries. As you might expect these learners tend to take some time before they are comfortable with such a new concept.