

TAILORING FOR THE NEEDS OF GRADUATE STUDENTS IN KUWAIT

Ms. Amnah Y. Al-Yaman, Dr. Hussein A. Aldaihani & Mohammad A. Alsharrah

The Language Center. The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, Kuwait

ABSTRACT: *Drawing on their long experience of teaching English as a foreign language in Kuwait, the researchers propose a course designed to meet the needs of Kuwaiti students seeking to pursue their higher studies in a university in one of the English speaking countries, particularly the UK or the USA. The need for this course stems from the fact that students who go abroad to pursue their higher studies struggle a lot, not only with the authentic language that they encounter for the first time, but also with the culture. So the content of the course is based on teaching the language within its cultural context. This paper gives details of this course in terms of goals, objectives, content, the stages of the learning experience and ways of implementation.*

KEYWORDS: English as a foreign language, training course, language skills, syllabus design

INTRODUCTION

Background

The English language holds an eminent place in most of the Arab countries owing to the traditional relationship maintained with the English-speaking world mainly the United Kingdom and the USA. There are extensive commercial, cultural and other inter-dependent activities. This situation results in a favorable attitude towards the language and consequently a strong drive to learn it. This status has recently been enhanced by the rapid growth of science and technology. English constitutes the main instrument of communication in data processing, computer applications and the telecommunications. Furthermore, the English language is widely employed in banking and at technical institutions, such as faculties of medicine, engineering and science.

This paper proposes a course that is tailored to meet the needs of Kuwaiti seeking to pursue their higher studies in one of the English-speaking countries, mainly the UK, the USA, Canada or Australia. Therefore, the syllabus designed in this paper is intended for advanced learners of English, in particular for graduate students who hold a bachelor degree in various majors. They all have a good theoretical background in the English language (by theoretical background we mean that they have studied the English grammar alongside very special subjects but have had a little opportunity to practice the language in everyday situations), having studied the English language in school as a compulsory subject for about twelve years. Children generally start learning the English language at the age of six and at the rate of six or seven forty five- minute lessons a week. Learning English continues up to the end of the secondary stage of education. Upon entering university students also study the English language either for general or specific purposes. The age of our students (the target sample) is between 22 and 24 since they have all just graduated from college and wish to continue with their studies in an English-speaking country like the USA or the UK. They constitute monolingual group of Kuwaiti students, all of whom live in Kuwait and come from upper middle-class families. It is possible to say that all the students are highly motivated and anxious

to pass the course in order to come to England to continue their studies which may give them the opportunity to hold a good position in Kuwait at a later date. Therefore, nearly all students have the same interests. The implementation of the course takes place at the Language Centre of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), which, along with Kuwait University, constitute the only two state universities in Kuwait.

Nature of the Course and the Target Audience

In general the group for whom the course syllabus is designed consists of 12 students. They all study this course to enhance their abilities in the four English skills. The course is an intensive one and our syllabus is designed to be completed in one month at 20 hours a week. Once in the USA or the UK, they will attend lectures and seminars with native speakers which undoubtedly will tremendously help them develop their language skills. They will have to speak in as much as they are expected to participate in seminars, listen to native speakers using different accents at various speeds, write in as much as they will be expected to take notes from lectures and seminars and also read the many English books that cover their chosen field of study. So this syllabus is designed to teach four skills: reading, writing and listening as well as speaking. However, special focus will also be placed on the oral skills (listening and speaking) since as we mentioned earlier these are the skills that the students do not usually develop in their own country, like their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Coping with the language is quite another matter in the extremely rich linguistic environment of native speakers. Thus students might face the problem of anxiety "...the anxiety that international students experiences is related to actual communication with native speakers." (Teropi, S. 2012) which could hinder the target language learning. Therefore, more than often we have we seen people who, after having spent many years learning a foreign language wonder whether they have learned anything at all once they find themselves in the real world of native speakers. Such a phenomenon is a topic in itself which demands detailed consideration (but it is beyond the scope of this paper).

From the above the needs or rather the need of our students may now be broadly defined in communicative terms: to be able to cope with ease within the world of native speakers both inside and outside the classroom. Those needs, we may say, are both vocational and integrative. They are vocational in the sense that the students want to be good at English for the sake of their future careers, who need to master the English language very well in order to understand what is going on in the world around them. They are integrative in the sense that they enable the students to mingle with the native speakers and accordingly learn much more about the culture. (Without being assimilated).

Objectives of the Course

Having established their needs, we can now define/ specify our objectives which are:

1. To assist the students in acquiring the ability to speak and understand English dealing with everyday subjects at normal speed.
2. To develop their oral abilities that can be achieved through communication with native speakers. Noonan suggested that; "you will acquire language best when you study in such a way that you a) listen to large amounts of comprehensible input, and b) have opportunities to use the target language to communicate with others." (pp.13). Emerging from the needs and objectives is the emphasis that the syllabus would place

on the listening and speaking skills, simply because these two skills will be the most needed wherever our students find themselves in Britain. Consideration will also be given to writing skills, since the students need to take notes and write assignments or reports, as well as reading, since they are required to read materials pertinent to their majors. It is, therefore, apparent that the syllabus will be based on communicative approach which can help to achieve our objectives.

Content of the Course

Based on the discussion above the content of the course can be formulated as follows:

Unit	Function	Structure
One	To introduce oneself; give personal information (to the customs in the airport); to ask for information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please could you tell me when the next train is due? • Excuse me, can you tell me how to use this telephone?
Two	Asking for directions or information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excuse me, could you please tell me where Kent University is? • Excuse me, which bus goes to the university? • I wonder if you can show me where the registry is.
Three	Question query, request.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you mind shutting the window? • Sir, please could you repeat that point? • Excuse me sir, could you please explain what you mean by [LAD] ?
Four	Talk about abilities, intentions (free conversation).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can't solve this problem. • I may help you with your math class. • I would like to see the manager. • I am Mr. Al-kaled. I wonder if I could see Mrs. Smith.
Five	Narrate, talk about past experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have been studying in the USA for three years. • I was a good student at PAAET. • I used to teach political science.
Six	Express oneself in agreement or disagreement about different subjects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would disagree with you. • I see things rather differently. • I agree with you on this point.

Seven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make predictions about the future. • React to statements referring to future events and functions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I expect that people will use solar energy more widely in the year 2020. • I think that there will be another world war within the next five years.
Eight	Demanding dues, taking decisions, apologizing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They must pay up by the end of the week. • Excuse me, I have to go now. • I apologize for coming late.
Nine	listening to native speakers, connected speech, identifying peoples and personalities, making judgments and suggestions based on comparisons, playing roles, taking notes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think (A) family is hypocritical. • I believe the wife is exaggerating things. • It seems that Rutherford College's food is much better than Eliot's.
Ten	Reading the newspapers and summarizing what is read, discussing points and writing/rewriting certain passages, changing the style and using different words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think? • What's your point of view in this situation? • Tell me your counter-argument. • How can you rewrite the same passage?

The grading of functions in this syllabus corresponds more or less to the order in which of these functions and situations will face the student from the day of his / her arrival at airport until the time that he/she is integrated in the culture of the country he/she has chosen to continue education in, is able to take notes at lectures and participate in a free discussion expressing opinions and making comments and suggestions. During the teaching of the course, students are made aware of the different culture that they are going to face and the necessity to respond in different ways (formally or informally) as the situation demands. The various structures should be of great help to them since they are all in a standard form and in the order in which they are likely to be encountered.

The Role of the Teacher

After designing a suitable syllabus which fulfils our students' needs and interests, we have to take into consideration the role of the teacher. This is very important and crucial since he is the one who oversees the implementation of the course. Even if we have the best syllabus in the world, if the teacher does not implement it correctly and fails to use audio-visual aids or authentic materials, our course will not yield the desired fruits. So the teacher must prepare his material in advance for the lesson he is planning to give and be careful to select the material that can ensure that his goal is achieved. Moreover, for the lesson to be more effective, a foreign language teacher must provide the students with extracurricular activities (Simon Borg, p. 5). Because language is both a system and a means of communication, the syllabus and the course units should be organized in terms of its structure as well as its function (Finegan, pp.22).

The criteria used in determining the choice and ordering of structures are similar to those of traditional structural syllabus. However, there is a conscious effort for communicative methodology, especially at the final stages, so that language functions are not overshadowed by structures. As Leoutier (1981) points out:

One can't perform in a speech activity in a foreign language without having the linguistic material for the construction of utterances without some knowledge of vocabulary, grammar or phonetics. At this stage, however, one only needs to know them to the extent to which they are really indispensable for the speech activity.

Hence the particular goal here is to teach particular structures of the language used to perform particular speech acts in realistic contexts.

Stages of learning Experience.

The first stage of learning is to make the student familiar with what they are going to know or see, so a wall-chart which is related to the topic can help in setting the scene, in addition to the motives which can stimulate the learners' interests and help them to participate actively. As Kensella & Feldman assert: "one concrete way to narrow the verbal gap in mixed-ability classrooms is to create meaningful daily contexts for interactive learning and devote generous class time to preparing students for the communicative demands of a specific task".

The second stage to be followed is that of presentation. As every course unit extends over four or five hours, presentation and exploitation occurs more than once. Our goal in this case is to move from the controlled practice to a freer guided production, where at the controlled practice stage linguistic accuracy is expected and error correction is more frequent than at the stage of free communication. To achieve this goal, student must interact with each other in predefined social roles. They are forced to use their communicative skills and activate their prior knowledge of the language.

By way of demonstrating the implementation of this course, we will discuss in details unit nine. The duration for this unit is five hours with a half-hour break in the middle. We will start with listening comprehension whose goal is to enable the student understand the native speech in unstructured situations.

The difficulties that students face when met with authentic speech are well known. It is obvious that when confronted with the unfamiliar the learner tends to panic because he/she cannot concentrate on every constituent in one utterance with the same intensity. The result is usually a failure to apprehend the gist of the communication, a task which in all probability was within the learner's comprehension. Therefore, in order to avoid this state of affairs, the learner needs controlled and guided experience of authentic language together with training in selective listening so that he/she learns to reject the irrelevant and focus on the key idioms of communication.

For the listening comprehension, we use the tape, explaining to the students in advance that this will give them the opportunity to listen to a dialogue between native speakers. After they have listened once, we will supply each one of them with a transcript of the dialogue informing them that they will be asked questions about the dialog they have heard.

The function of the transcript is to provide the students with a reminder of what they have been listening to in an immediately readable form. The students have to be warned that the transcript

does not follow all the rules of written English and that they will find that it contains some features of spoken English such as "ums" and "ers" or incomplete or ungrammatical sentences. The transcript must have marked stresses, pauses, hesitations .etc. So that the students can note what is going on in the tape while listening to it and following it with the provided transcript.

After that the teacher can ask questions about the dialog.

For example:

- 1- How many families are there in the dialog?
- 2- What was the dialog about?
- 3- Did one of the families have children?
- 4- Did one of the families cross the channel with their car?
- 5- What was the name of the channel that they crossed?

These questions will test the students' comprehension and from the answers the teacher will know whether or not they have understood the conversation. After that the students can take part by playing different roles. Role-playing is a good technique for encouraging students to imitate the different pronunciation of native speakers .An open conversation may be held among the students giving them the chance to express opinions about the situations in the dialogue, to criticize the personalities and to make judgments about individual characters.

The teacher can ask questions to direct the conversation like "What do you think about the cross channel trip? Is it a good idea and an interesting experience or a waste of time? Can you suggest an alternative holiday? How do you like to spend your holidays? The students should answer the questions individually and the others can give their points of view. As we have already said, it is a good idea to encourage the students to converse and discuss matters freely.

It is very important to use your authentic material in the process of learning a foreign language. The realization that the learner is actively involved has important methodological implications. Postovsky (1979, 24) remarks that: "Language can be acquired by active listening (listening and doing) even better than by listening and repeating." Therefore when students listen and watch a foreign video tape (for example) taking notes at the same time. It can help their receptive competence in learning the foreign language.

The purpose for using the video tape is to give the students a real situation showing a classroom with a lecturer in the process of delivering a lecture, so that they can see him, listen to him and take notes. This will expose the students to the type of teaching they will receive at the university. They should be asked to write a report or comment on the video tape or the subject discussed in the video.

A good technique for teaching strategies in note taking is to provide the students with a worksheet (see the sample below) and tell them in advance, what the video tape is about. For example,

"Our tape is about Kent University which you wish to join. Therefore, I want you to watch this video tape carefully and try to answer these questions on the worksheet while you are watching.

You can answer the relevant questions after the speaker has finished talking about a particular subject."

In order to complete the worksheet as he/ she listens, the student will find it easier to take notes and then fill in the worksheet after each subject. The video tape can help since the student can always make it pauses if he misses information he needs for his answer and then restarts it again. This is a good exercise in taking notes either during lectures or a documentary film.

<u>Kent University</u>			Work Sheet
1- Please describe the university			
Age	Size	Location and Type	
2- How many colleges are there?			
3- What are the names of the colleges?			
4- List special features of the University.			
5- Describe the Library in detail			

A sample of the worksheet to be provided during the note-taking activity

Students should read these questions and answer them while they are listening to and watching the film. The teacher should pause after the answer to each question to allow the students' time to fill in the worksheet. Taking notes in this way can help students to be more precise when taking notes in lectures, able to distinguish the main ideas and not try to record every word. This should teach students to take good notes and enable them to follow the lecturer.

After the worksheets are completed, the teacher should check the notes as well and make corrections using a board so that the students can learn from each other's mistakes. The teacher can also ask questions to open a discussion such as "what do you like most about the University of Kent? Do you prefer the kind of food that is served in the colleges?" A good topic for conversation might be the differences in kinds of food and eating habits between Kuwait and England.

The teacher might also provide assignments asking for an essay about different eating habits in the world. Another homework project might be for the students to work in pairs, each pair having a blank tape on which to record a dialog. This would enable the students to practice role-playing outside the classroom and give them the opportunity to work in pairs.

Of course, the situation in actual lectures is very different for the foreign student trying to take notes. If he/she cannot follow the lecture, he/she will have to ask polite questions for example, "Excuse me, sir, can you repeat that point? Or, "I am sorry, sir, I cannot follow you. Can you repeat you're the last point?" He/she should, of course, only try to record the most important points and be aware that he cannot write down every word. Having noted the most important points, at home afterwards he should be able to rewrite the lecture by joining these points together. It is, nonetheless, the teacher's job to explain his arguments to his students.

This course would be costly to the university since it requires a lot of authentic material which would have to be imported from the U.K. It would also be preferable to have an English native speaker to teach this type of course side by side with a local Arab teacher.

REFERENCES

- Borg, Simon (2006). "The Distinctive Characteristics of Foreign Language Teachers." *Language Teaching Research* 10, 1: pp. 3-31.
- Broughton, G, (1978). *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London) pp. 73 – 83.
- Crystal, D. (1975). *Advanced Conversational English* (Longman, London).
- Finegan, Edward (2004). *Language, Its Structure and Use*. Michael Rosenberg.
- Kinsella, K. & Feldman, K. (2003). *Active Learning: Structures to Engage All Students*. High School Teaching Guide book for Universal Access. Prentice Hall/ Pearson Education, Inc.
- Loutier, A. (1981) *Psychology and Learning Process*. Oxford, Pergamon Press
- Marion, G .and White. R.(1973) *The use of semi-scripted authentic speech and listening comprehension* Avla Journal, Vol. XVI,3, pp. 137-140.
- Munby ,J.(1978). *Communicative Syllabus Design*. London, Cambridge University Press.
- Noonan, F. J.(2012). *How to Improve Your Spoken English: Advice for Struggling Students*. Cambridge UP.
- Terui, S. (2012). Second Language Learner's Coping Strategy in Conversations with Native Speakers. *Journal of International Students*, 2 (2), pp. 168-183.