

NEWS PRESENTATION IN CLASS AS AN ACTIVITY TO TEACH INTEGRATED SKILLS IN EFL IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT: *To make their learners achieve good competency in second or foreign language, teachers need to be careful in the choice of techniques, approaches and activities they use. Unfortunately, many teachers and course books separate the four macro skills in their teaching approach. The language which should be seen as a whole is taught in a segregated way, i. e. with whole lessons / sessions on listening, speaking, reading or writing skills. Language, whose prime objective is communication, is thus compartmentalised and leads to poor users. A good reader, listener or writer of a language is not necessarily a competent user of it in real communication situations. This paper proposes the presentation of news in class as an activity to integrate the four macro skills in teaching English as a Foreign Language. It is an exercise which involves the active participation of the whole class, considerably reduces the teacher talking time while increasing that of the learners.*

KEYWORDS: Integrated Skills, News, Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Participation

INTRODUCTION

In the history of English language teaching, many methods have been experimented, e.g. Grammar Translation Method, Audio Visual Method, Silent Way, Communicative Approach, Competency Based Approach, etc. They all aim to make the learner a competent user of the language, though most of the time failing to do so. Many types of syllabuses have also been proposed by researchers (Ellis 1993, Willis 1990; Willis 1996; Lewis 1997; Ur 1999, etc.), but it is difficult to find a totally satisfactory syllabus. For example, the structural syllabus simply lists the grammatical items to be taught (Yalden 1983; Breen 1987). The task-based syllabus (Skehan 1996) is based on the beliefs that, as learners take part in activities devised to promote efficient language use, internalisation of the target language takes place. Syllabuses generally give the lists of items to be taught, possibly with the approach (es) to be used. But since language is a whole, and cannot successfully be acquired / learnt in a sketchy way, it is the teachers' responsibility to make sure that all lessons integrate as much as possible the four macro skills. This paper aims to suggest the presentation of news in class as an activity to foster integrated skills, i.e. the four macro skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

REVIEW OF SOME LITERATURE ON INTERGRATED SKILLS

A number of studies have pointed out the lack or poor use of integrated activities in the ESL / EFL classroom (Oxford 2001; Jing 2006; Akram & Malik 2010, etc.), and have suggested some. Oxford (2001) notes that skill segregation is reflected in traditional ESL / EFL programs that offer classes focusing on segregated language skills. Jing (2006) remarks that for various reasons, traditional English language teachers tend to teach the language skills

separately, and materials and activities designed for teaching usually focus on specific skills. Akram & Malik (2010) point out that many language teachers have been concentrating on just one language skill. Yet, to produce proficient users of any language, they argue that the four macro skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) should be introduced in various classroom activities. Oxford argues that the segregated skill approach, i.e. the teaching of discrete skills such as reading or speaking is contrary to the integrated way that people use language skills in normal communication. She maintains that the integrated-skill approach, as contrasted with the purely segregated approach, exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language. Learners rapidly gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language as employed for communication (Oxford 2001).

The Activity

The activity proposed here has been experimented by many classroom teachers in Cameroon. As a teacher and teacher trainer, I first tried it several times in my own classes before proposing it to my trainees. It is intended for advanced learners, since it is a bit demanding as to language use. In Cameroonian Francophone secondary schools, advanced learners are those who have been learning English in secondary school for six to seven years, i.e. the *Première* (equivalent of Lower Sixth) and *Terminale* (equivalent of Upper Sixth) students. The activity is meant to take place once a week. The main exercise takes just about ten minutes, but necessitates a careful preparation for its success. Following are its various steps.

Step 1: Selection of speakers

As the activity has to take place once a week, the presenters should be selected a week before to enable them to have enough time to gather as much information as possible to better prepare their paper. Two to three learners can be chosen each time. Clear guidelines should be given to them on the type of information to be collected, i.e. local, national, and international news. They should also be instructed to rehearse when their paper is ready. This will allow them to respect the **five minutes** allotted to presentation by discarding some unnecessary pieces of information.

Step 2: News gathering

To better gather the news items to be presented to their classmates, the presenters are encouraged to observe the events in their local community, to listen to the radio, watch TV news, and to read newspapers. In the era of new technologies, they should also be encouraged to use all digital assets including mobile phones, social networking platforms and online sources (Alejandro 2010; Umair 2016). In this step, the teacher acts as a counsellor, and should remain open to the presenters' difficulties. For example, when they come back to him for some particular difficulties that they are having in preparing their news cast, he should draw their attention on how the news headlines are presented and how the presenters draw the listeners' attention. He should also encourage them to check the pronunciation of the difficult items of their paper in a good dictionary to ease comprehension to their classmates. It is at this step that the teacher approves the questions to be answered during the activity and the vocabulary items that will be explained before reading starts.

Step 3: News presentation

The presentation of the news can serve as a kind of listening comprehension exercise, but with the teacher having very little to say. Before news reading starts, in collaboration with the presenters, he should explain a few difficult vocabulary items on the board, then quickly put the while reading exercises on the board. The exercises should be progressive, following the ordering of the news cast, to avoid forward and backward gymnastics to listeners. The presenters should adopt a reasonable pace and allow enough pauses to enable their classmates to get the maximum of news items. This is because like on the radio or television, in a newscast items are not repeated. The teacher should thus draw the attention of the listeners on this. One day, an anecdotic incident happened in one of my classes during this activity. Indeed, an inattentive learner asked one of the speakers to repeat a news item he had not heard well. Still concentrating on her paper, and before continuing with the other news items, her mocking answer was: "The radio does repeat". That answer made the whole class laugh. The while- listening exercises should mainly consist of filling gap activities, sentence completion, multiple choice, true or false, matching, ticking or circling item. After the news presentation are the follow-up activities.

Step 4: Follow-up activities

The first activity of this step is feed back from the listeners. Here, the teacher takes the lead and quickly asks questions to the class to complete the in-listening exercises. Next is the correction of a few pronunciation problems. The teacher should draw the attention of the whole class on them. The focus should only be on the items whose wrong pronunciation affected intelligibility during the while-listening phase. Other activities of this step may include debates on some news items involving the whole class, skimming or scanning passages related to some news items, writing on items of interest from the news cast. All those activities can very well take place in one lesson of one to two hours. So, for a lesson of one hour, time can be distributed as follows: explanation of difficult vocabulary items and putting of in-reading questions on the board (05 minutes); news presentation proper (05 minutes); feed-back on while-listening activities and correction of pronunciation problems (05 minutes); a short debate on particular news items (10 minutes); scanning or skimming of a short passage related to a news item and feed-back (15 minutes), and writing on a news item and feed- back (20 minutes). The teacher may also decide to give more time to the reading activity. In that case, he / she will ask his / her learners to read the selected passage intensively by giving them more questions. If this option is taken, the learner should complete their writing exercise at home, and the feed-back will take place during the following lesson.

CONCLUSION

Every conscious teacher knows how boring it is to spend lengthy session doing listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary or grammar. The activity described in this paper makes the class alert, livelier and reduces the teacher talking time to its bare minimum while concentrating on the four macro skills and even vocabulary. During the presentation phase, only the speakers **talk**, but this is completed by the **debates** where the whole class is invited to participate. **Listening** to the news involves all the learners, who have to pay attention to be able to answer the questions. The **skimming**, **scanning**, or **reading** activities as well as **writing**, which come as follow up to the news presentation, also concern the whole class.

The teacher here is more a counsellor, an adviser, a helper, an organiser or a prompter rather than a giver of knowledge. During the preparatory phase of the news, he advises the presenters on what to do. Before the presentation, he helps the speakers explain a few difficult items and puts the questions on the board to avoid waste of time. During the debate, he prompts answers to participants. During the writing process, while moving round the class and checking a few drafts he suggests some vocabulary items and corrects some grammar problems. So, to avoid boredom many English language teachers experience in their classes, the activity proposed here is worth trying from time to time. Some learners may even discover their talent / vocation of journalist through it.

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