Teaching Secondary English

**A guide to the teaching of English
as a second language**

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Preface

The aim of this book is to provide practical guidance for teachers of English as a non-native language. It is primarily concerned with explaining those aspects of English and teaching methodology appropriate for the teaching of English as a second language, but many of the suggestions are equally useful for teaching English as a foreign language. The main concern has been to outline some possible solutions to the practical problems faced by teachers and there are therefore many examples of suitable teaching material and techniques of teaching. A theoretical basis of language teaching has been provided wherever it has been felt this will help the teacher.

The book is designed to be used by both practising teachers and by trainee teachers. It has been specifically written to be used by those teachers of English for whom English is not a mother tongue. The language level has been carefully controlled and the aspirations of developing countries with regard to the role of English in society carefully considered. An attempt has been made to cover comprehensively all aspects of English teaching and therefore the book includes topics not normally dealt with, such as remedial teaching and marking.

The experience of the authors in helping to train teachers of English has shown that it is helpful if each teaching topic is followed by a number of questions and other activities. Therefore questions have been integrated into the text of this book in order to provide the readers with a means of checking their understanding and also to apply the principles which have been explained. Trainee teachers may like to go through these questions under the direction of their tutors or lecturers; practising teachers may find that some time spent on them will help them to evaluate what they have read and incorporate appropriate suggestions into their teaching.

R.J.E.
B.J.T.

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English as a second language

It is useful in a book about English teaching first of all to differentiate between English as a native language, English as a foreign language and English as a second language.

A speaker of English as a native language acquires English naturally as a young child. He does so usually because his parents use English as their normal means of communication with him and with each other and because English is the language used by the community in which he is growing up.

English is spoken as a native language in such countries as Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA.

A speaker of English as a foreign language is usually taught English as a subject at a school or college and lives in a country where English is not normally used. He does not usually learn English from his parents and does not use it as a means of communication with his parents or in the community in which he lives.

English is learned as a foreign language in such countries as Norway, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Brazil, Zaire and Senegal.

A speaker of English as a second language usually lives in a country where English is not the native language of the indigenous inhabitants. However, in his country, English is frequently used as a means of communication between speakers of different native languages and as the language of particular activities such as education, commerce, and politics. In such countries English is often used by the mass media and thus young children are often exposed to English before they learn it and use it at school and (unlike learners of English as a foreign language) they will not only be taught English in the classroom but will also 'pick it up' when they are not at school.

English is learned as a second language in such countries as Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, Nigeria, Malaŵi, Hong Kong, Singapore and Fiji.

Note: English as a second language is frequently abbreviated to ESL and English as a foreign language to EFL. A native language is often referred to as a first language and abbreviated to L1. A second language is often referred to as an L2.

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Exactly the same methods cannot be used to teach ESL, EFL and English as an L1. The native speaking pupil will already have achieved a high level of competence in English when he first goes to school, whereas the learner of EFL will probably know hardly any English at all before he receives his first English lesson; on the other hand the learner of ESL will have picked up some English before he has his first English lesson but in most cases he will have attained only a low level of competence.

Most of the methods of teaching English as an L1 are inappropriate for teaching EFL (i.e. TEFL) or ESL (i.e. TESL). Some of the methods of TEFL are useful in TESL but in general the teacher of ESL should adopt and work out methods of teaching suitable for the language background and level of competence in English of his own particular pupils.

Exercises

1 What is an L1?
2 What is an L2?
3 What is TESL?
4 What is TEFL?
5 Give further examples of countries in which English is learned as:
   a) an L1
   b) an L2
   c) a foreign language.
6 What is your own L1?
7 How did you learn your L1?
8 Do you speak any foreign languages? If so how did you learn them?
9 How did you learn English?
10 Would it be useful to ask a twelve-year-old learner of English in your country to do the following? Give reasons for your answers.
   a) Write an essay entitled 'My pet'.
   b) Write a précis of a long passage about mountain climbing in Scotland in a hundred of his own words.
   c) Read the first three chapters of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* for homework.
   d) Learn to distinguish between ship/sheep, lip/leap, sit/seat, etc.
   e) Learn and practise the use of the Present Perfect Tense in English.
   f) Learn how to write simple letters.

Learning ESL

As we have already seen, the learner of ESL is taught English at school and unconsciously 'picks it up' out of school from his family and friends, from the radio, from newspapers, from films, from public

speeches, etc. Much of the English he is exposed to out of school will be incorrect English because it will be spoken by people whose L1 is not English. In addition he will face problems in learning English as a result of interference from his L1. For example, if his L1 does not contain an /r/ sound he will probably pronounce 'river' as 'liver' and if it does not contain an /i/ sound he will pronounce 'ship' as 'sheep'. If his L1 has a fixed question tag roughly corresponding to the English 'isn't it?' (e.g. *tefyo* in the Bantu language Bemba) then it is likely that he will not only say, 'It's wrong, isn't it?' but also, 'She's beautiful, isn't it?' If his language does not have an equivalent of the English system of articles (a, an, the), e.g. many Indian languages, then he is likely to say, 'I bought book from shop'. Also, in many cases, the learner's problems will be made worse at primary school because he lives in a developing nation which does not yet have enough trained and qualified teachers and might be taught English by a teacher who has himself not attained a very high level of competence in the language.

Conclusions for the teacher

1 In both the primary school and the secondary school the teacher will have two related but separate tasks.
a) Initial teaching (i.e. teaching items that are new to the learner).
b) Remedial teaching (i.e. teaching items that the learner already uses but uses wrongly).

2 ESL learners will never achieve complete native speaker competence. Even those who achieve a high level of competence will inevitably make 'errors' and many ESL learners will never succeed in correcting the many faulty habits which they developed when they were young as a result of L1 interference and exposure to incorrect English. The ESL teacher should therefore be prepared to be tolerant of some errors (especially those that are extremely common and which do not impede communication) and should not become too frustrated if he fails to correct completely all the faulty habits of his pupils.

3 Ideally the ESL teacher should have knowledge of his pupils' native language(s) and should make use of this knowledge to help him understand why they are making certain errors and to help him to prepare material which will facilitate the correction of these errors.

Exercises

1 What three factors can make the learning of ESL much more difficult than the learning of English as an L1?
2 What can the teacher do to help overcome some of the problems of his ESL learners?

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3 Try to examine your own English or that of a colleague. Can you detect any errors? What do you think are the causes of these errors?

The role of ESL

In most countries where English is learned as a second language it is used for some of the following purposes:

1 as a lingua franca (i.e. a means of communication between speakers of different L1s);

2 as a medium of instruction (i.e. the language used in teaching and training);

3 as a means of international communication (e.g. used by the representatives of that country at the United Nations or OAU and at other international institutions and meetings);

4 as the language of:

a) government

b) commerce

c) industry

d) the mass media.

Conclusions for the teacher

1 Competence in English is an essential prerequisite for educational and career success. Without it a pupil will be handicapped when learning his other subjects and later on when learning and performing a job. The ESL teacher therefore has a crucial part to play both in the development of his nation and of the lives of the pupils he teaches. He must take his job seriously and should endeavour to:

a) improve his own English;

b) keep up with developments in methods of teaching;

c) get hold of any new and relevant text books;

d) be conscientious at all times in his preparation and his teaching.

2 The teacher of ESL should find out from teachers of other subjects what items of English they require the pupils to be able to understand and use when learning their subjects and also what language skills they need their pupils to acquire.

3 The teacher of ESL should think of situations in which his pupils are likely to need English outside school and when they leave it and should relate wherever possible his teaching of English to these situations.

4 The teacher should consider what particular skills of English his pupils are likely to need when they leave school and should give

priority in his teaching to these skills (e.g. writing letters of application; listening to instructions; reading official notices; filling in forms; making reports, etc.).

Exercises

1 Describe situations in which English would be used as a lingua franca in your country.
2 Examine the role of English in the educational system of your country. Try to think of reasons why it plays this particular role. Say whether you think it should continue to play this particular role.
3 Compile a list of situations in which English would normally be used in your country.
4 Compile a list of situations in which English would not normally be used in your country.
5 Compile a list of skills in English which would be particularly useful to your pupils when they leave school.
6 Compile a list of skills and items in English which would be useful to your pupils when learning their other subjects.

The model

All over the world different types of English are spoken and even in England itself there are many varieties of English used in different areas. These varieties are called dialects and can differ from each other in pronunciation (i.e. different accents), in spelling, in grammar and in vocabulary. For example there are very different dialects in the North East, the North West and the South West of England, there are many differences between American English and British English (e.g. elevator/lift; gas/petrol; color/colour; program/programme), and in every different part of the world where English is spoken, a distinctive dialect has developed as a result of the influence of the linguistic and cultural background of the inhabitants and of the way of life prevalent in the area (e.g. Australian English, Nigerian English, Zambian English, Malaysian English, etc.). None of these varieties of English is inherently superior to any other; they are all equally valid provided they achieve efficient communication within the country and are internationally intelligible (i.e. they can be understood by speakers of English from other countries).

The problem facing the administrators and teachers of ESL is which variety of English to use as a model for teaching in their country. Until recently the answer to this question was inevitably Standard English as the model for grammar, vocabulary and spelling, and RP (Received

Pronunciation) as the model for pronunciation. Standard English is that type of English written by educated Englishmen and RP is that type of pronunciation used by educated Englishmen whose accent is not influenced by any regional variety. Standard English and RP were the models introduced by the early missionaries, administrators and teachers in what are now ESL speaking countries and most of the grammar books and textbooks used in these countries conform to these models. However the situation in many of these countries now is that expatriate teachers of English are rapidly being replaced by indigenous teachers who are often capable of fluent communication in English but are incapable of consistently and completely modelling Standard English and RP. Many of these countries are beginning to see the futility of aspiring towards unattainable goals (i.e. Standard English and RP) and are also beginning to question the desirability of attaining them. Consequently some of these countries are considering replacing the existing models with a standardised local model (e.g. the English Curriculum Committee in Zambia has initiated a nationwide debate as to whether to change the model to Standard Zambian English – i.e. that type of English used by well-educated Zambians). In fact, in West Africa such a change has already been initiated (e.g. the WAEC English Language (Ordinary Level) Syllabus states, ' . . . the examiners will be assessing the candidates' mastery of Standard English, as currently used by educated African writers and speakers of English in West Africa').

The teacher should be tolerant of errors in informal speech which do not impede communication and the teacher and the examiner should be tolerant of written 'trivial' errors (i.e. errors which do not impede communication, which do not break general 'rules', and which are extremely common in the written English of the country). However, the teacher should continue to teach Standard English and RP whilst accepting that they are goals which are not entirely attainable.

In any consideration of models, attention should be paid to the following points:
1 Standard English is not 'superior' to any other variety of English.
2 Spoken English and written English should not be expected to conform to the same model. Spoken English will inevitably deviate more from the norms of Standard English grammar and vocabulary than written English will. In the first place spoken English is more automatic and habit-following than written English (which usually affords opportunities for consideration and correction) and secondly

even native speakers frequently deviate from the standard norms in speech (e.g. 'Possibly.' 'Finished yet?' 'Want a fag?').

3 Whatever models are used they should be capable of consistently achieving effective communication between speakers of English anywhere in the country.

4 The models should be internationally intelligible (i.e. a person using them should be easily understood by an educated English speaker from another country).

5 The models should only include those locally common deviations from the norms of Standard English and RP which cannot hinder communication (e.g. 'We have discussed *about* it'; 'I can't cope *up* with it') and should not permit deviations capable of confusing communications locally or internationally.

6 Any new models should be described in detail before they are accorded official status. They should then be given prestige by being made the 'standard' of public examinations in the country.

Conclusions for the teacher

1 The new English teacher should seek advice from his Head of Department and from Inspectors of English as to what models to attempt to teach. He should also read the relevant sections of the English syllabus and the exam syllabus to discover what goals should be aimed at.

2 If the teacher is incapable of consistently and accurately exemplifying the official models, he should make efforts to improve his own English (e.g. by enrolling for courses) and should use audio aids to help him (e.g. the radio, tape recordings, records).

Exercises

1 Find out what the official models are in your country.
2 What do you think are some of the problems a new teacher would face in exemplifying these models?
3 What problems are involved in changing the models?
4 Suggest solutions for some of these problems.
5 What aspects of your own English do you think differ from the official models? What do you think you can do to help you to exemplify the models in those areas of English where you are weak?

Structure

The role of structure in language teaching

We often talk about 'knowing' the structure of a language. This can mean one of two things. First it can refer to the unconscious ability to use the structure of a language to convey meaning. This ability will not require deliberate effort – the user of the language does not first call to mind the structural rules and use these to string together the words of his message to create sentences. Whatever mental processes he uses to produce correct sentences are hidden. Secondly 'knowing' the structure of a language may refer to the information that has been deliberately acquired through studying structural descriptions. We will call these two types of knowledge 'unconscious knowledge' and 'acquired knowledge'.

This distinction is important because it is relevant to what the pupil needs to know and what the teacher needs to know.

The pupil needs to be able to produce correct sentences automatically. Teachers cannot presume to have taught pupils a particular structure by getting them to memorise the rules. For instance a pupil might be able to give the rule for the use of 'some' and 'any', '*Some* is used in positive sentences and *any* is used in negative sentences', but still produce faulty sentences like: X 'We don't have some sugar in the house.' When we learn our mother tongue we make no use of 'acquired knowledge' whatsoever. However when teaching a second language it is often useful to refer the pupils to *simple grammatical descriptions* as a learning aid, i.e. as a means of developing 'unconscious knowledge'. For a number of reasons, however, the teacher requires a *thorough grammatical knowledge of the language* he intends to teach:

1 The teacher needs to understand the nature of the language course he is to teach. Course writers make use of 'acquired knowledge' to help them divide up the whole structure of the language into small units which can be conveniently taught in individual lessons. The teacher must be able to follow the teaching programme: he must be

able to see what aspect of structure each unit of the programme covers. Often textbook writers include brief descriptions of different structures before the practice exercises. These descriptions are designed to indicate to the teacher exactly what is going to be practised. The teacher must therefore be capable of understanding these descriptions.

2 An 'acquired knowledge' of structure will be of great value to the teacher when indicating and correcting pupils' errors. If a teacher finds this sentence in a pupil's composition: 'I bought a nice trouser last Saturday', he could simply say that 'a nice trouser' is wrong and that the correct form is 'a nice pair of trousers'. This is a correct observation but it is also inadequate because no effort has been made to identify the error in general terms. Here is a more adequate error description because it is more general:

'trousers' is a noun which only has a plural form. It can be used with the phrase 'a pair of' to refer to one item and is then followed by a singular verb. Otherwise it is followed by a plural verb.

Note: This description is for the teacher; it should not be given to the pupils.

The advantage of describing the error in such terms is that the teacher can use this general description to identify other similar errors in nouns that belong to the same class as 'trousers', for example:

X He asked for a scissor to cut out his model.
X A police called to see you.
X Every girl must wear a knicker.

The teacher is then in a position to construct exercises which will help the pupils to overcome this *type* of error. This is what is meant by 'remedial exercises'.

3 A knowledge of structural terminology enables a rapid reference to some structural aspect of the language which has been previously taught. For instance when we come to teach conditional clause patterns it is easier if we can use terms like 'Present Simple Tense', 'Future Tense', 'subject', etc. Without these terms it would be a long and tedious process to get the pupils to learn the pattern: If + subject + verb (Present Simple Tense) . . ., + subject + verb (Future Tense). Such terminology often serves as a short cut to learning a structure and is therefore a justification for teaching the pupils a limited amount of terminology. The learning of terminology must always serve as a means to an end; there is no place for lecturing on the

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structure of a language in the classroom.

Some teachers do not understand the role that structural description should play in teaching. Here are some misconceptions:

1 They think that they are teaching the pupils structure if they lecture on structure and provide lengthy descriptions of usage. Pupils need to be able to *use* the structures correctly and this cannot be achieved by giving them complicated rules.

2 It is wrong to think that a structural description 'explains' language. If a pupil asks 'Why do we say it like that?' when faced with an unusual pattern as in: 'He was so big a fool that nobody respected him' the teacher is not giving an explanation by describing the pattern: . . . so + adjective + a + noun + that . . . . Grammatical description does not explain language but only describes it. There is no answer to the question 'Why?', except to say that that is how people say or write it.

3 To exemplify a particular structure, the teacher should be careful to avoid artificial and unlikely sentences, for example:

Did the priestess kneel down?
There will be a big crowd absent.

Instead, he should show the pupils sentences which are natural and truly meaningful for them.

Structural descriptions which are complete and accurate are often very complex and therefore not very useful for teaching purposes. It is often necessary to simplify a structural description even at the expense of completeness and accuracy. Here is an example of a simplified rule for the use of 'some' and 'any':

'Some' and 'any' refer to an unspecified number or a certain quantity of things. They are used with uncountable nouns and before plurals. The general rule is that 'some' is used in affirmative statements and that 'any' is used in negative statements.

This rule does not account for the following correct statements:

Some man came to see you while you were out. ('Some' does not refer to an unspecified number or a certain quantity.)
I did not buy some of the things you asked for. ('Some' is here used in a negative sentence.)
I will answer any question. ('Any' is used in a positive sentence.)

This rule is, however, a useful aid for teaching 'some' and 'any' to first or second year pupils in secondary school.

Structural description for teaching purposes should be as complete and precise as is suitable for the level being aimed at. Thus at an intermediate teaching level (e.g. third year at secondary school) it would be necessary to provide a more complete description of 'some' and 'any'. Such a description might, in addition to the above, indicate that 'some' is also used to refer to an indefinite or unknown person or thing. At an advanced level (e.g. fourth or fifth year at secondary school) the description would also need to account for the occurrence of 'some' in negative sentences and 'any' in positive sentences.

Exercises

A Practice

1 What is meant by 'unconscious knowledge' and 'acquired knowledge' of a language?
2 To what extent is 'acquired knowledge' useful to the pupil?
3 Why does a teacher need 'acquired knowledge' of a language?

B Think

1 Look carefully at the following incorrect sentence and try to formulate a general description of the error which would be of use in the construction of remedial teaching exercises:

X She went at the market to buy vegetables.

2 Read the following grammatical description of the Future Tense:
In positive and negative statements, the first person singular and plural of the Future Tense consists of: shall or will + verb. With other persons the form is: will + verb (i.e. 'shall' is not possible).
In questions, 'shall' is used with first person pronouns to enquire about a person's opinions or wishes, for example:

Shall I wash the baby for you?

'Will' is used with first person pronouns when the answer expected is a definite 'yes' or 'no' based on facts or definite information, for example:

Will we be in time for the meeting?

With other persons, questions are formed using 'will'.
Now answer the following:
a) Is this rule suitable as an aid for teaching the Future Tense to first year pupils in secondary schools in your country?
b) If you have answered 'No' to a), write out a simpler version of the rule which would be suitable.
c) At what level would you consider the above rule to be suitable as an aid for teaching?

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